

## **Vod Cast – Teaching Seminar Groups in a different way.**

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Hello, my name is Dr. Julianne Law, Teaching Associate in Health and Social Care, in the School of Social Sciences at Bangor University, Bangor, Gwynedd, North Wales.

I have taught at Bangor University for the past 10 years, and have always taught my seminar groups in the traditional way. I was introduced to this method by lecturers whose modules I taught when I first arrived at the university. They informed me that I should select a relevant article from the research literature and assign the students to read it before the seminar group. Then during the seminar group the students would discuss what they had learned from the article.

To my dismay I found that most students never read the article before the seminar group took place, and then they would either not attend the seminar (because they were embarrassed that they hadn't read the article and had nothing to contribute during the seminar group), or those with better verbal skills and more confidence would attend the seminar group and use their general knowledge of the subject area to try to convince me that they had indeed read the article!

Because it was clear that most if not all of the students had not read the article before the seminar group, I felt like I had to make up for this deficit, and help the students understand the most important parts of the article. The result of this situation was that I ended up giving a lecture on the article to compensate for the fact that the students had not read the article themselves. The articles were difficult to understand (especially for undergraduate students), and the level of enthusiasm and participation for seminar groups was very low.

During the last decade Dr. Jesse Martin has tried to convince me to teach my seminar groups in a different way, but I was not convinced that this would work and kept resisting his suggestions! One day out of sheer frustration, I decided that I needed to teach seminar groups differently and I came up with a new plan. I asked the students if every lecturer taught their seminar groups like I did, and they said "yes", and I asked the students if they were okay with the current format, and they said "yes". I suggested that we try a new format, and explained it as follows;

I suggested that we sit down together and decided on 5 seminar topics that we would all like to study throughout the semester. Then I suggested that every time we meet the students would find 4 sources related to the topic we had decided on, and they would bring those articles, books, news articles or videos to the seminar group. We would then discuss and share these sources with each other. I also asked them to type up on a piece of paper a summary of those 4 sources that they could share with the other students in the seminar group. I also told them that at least two of the five topics would be used in their final exam at the end of the school year. The students were immediately more motivated to participate in the seminar groups because it meant that the work that they were doing to prepare for the seminar groups was also work that would help them to prepare for their final exam.

I was not prepared for the incredible change that happened to my students when I asked them to find resources to read, rather than me finding the resources for them. They came to the seminar groups excited to discuss the material that they had found, and excited to learn from their fellow students. I also found that my role changed from being the person who provided all of the material, (the source of all knowledge) to being the person who facilitated a discussion between a group of students who were excited to learn and share what they had learned with each other. I could not believe the change in the students. I could not believe how much they enjoyed coming to the seminar groups now, and how much everyone was learning.

This new method of running seminar groups has completely changed how I feel about seminar groups. The students are so much more interested in the topic, and they come to the seminar groups ready to learn, and ready to share information with their fellow students. I am now a facilitator instead of a lecturer, and the students are learning so much more as a result of this change. I am so glad that I made this change, and I only wish that I had listened to Dr. Martin, and made this change years ago!

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