Educator Story

Reinforcing the importance of reading for academic success using Revel

Nottingham Business School

Key Findings

In this diverse cohort of postgraduate marketing students, introducing Revel in 2018 supported a positive teaching and learning experience by:

- **Flexible access** - providing students with a seamless, engaging learning resource that they could access at any time, place and on any device.
- **Application of theory** - offering students an easy, structured way of developing their understanding of key skills and knowledge to make effective decisions in marketing
- **Preparedness and knowledge acquisition** - delivering relevant bite sized learning outside of class to reinforce concepts covered in workshops in an intensively taught course.

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Summary

Principles of Marketing is a postgraduate module taught to MSc Marketing students, many of whom have little or no experience of studying marketing. Taught intensively over four weeks it sets the context for other areas of marketing studied on the programme.

In addition, students without a marketing background are expected to enrol in a **pre-learning course**, which offers a concise introduction to marketing before they embark on their full programme. In light of this, the university wanted a resource that would bring those students up to speed, to reduce the barriers to learning on the module and the programme as a whole.

Through adopting Revel, they have been able to easily assign reading in line with learning outcomes, monitor student engagement and identify students who need support, on what is an intensively taught course. This has resulted in observed improvements in student preparedness and contribution in class.

"It got them to engage with the theory over and above the lectures. Whether it was before or after, I think it supported the lectures and it helped them to remember. I think overall, they've used theory more effectively"

Melanie Weaver, Senior Lecturer, Nottingham Busines School

Description of course

There were approximately 140 full-time students enrolled onto the MSc Marketing programme, of which a large sub-group undertook the pre-learning course prior to the start of the programme. Approximately 60% of students were international, 20% European and the remainder, domestic.

Following the pre-learning course, is the Principles of Marketing module, led by Melanie Weaver (Senior Lecturer in Marketing). This is an intensive 6 week course with only 4 weeks of teaching. Twice weekly, students attend two lectures (morning and afternoon), each followed by 2 hour workshop where they revisit and embed the theory learnt in the lectures. In these workshops, students use Pearson MyMarketingExperience - an engaging marketing simulation. The simulation gives students the opportunity to put theory into practice through strategic and tactical decision-making activities that promote growth in market share.

The module is assessed with a group presentation (40%) and a reflective essay (60%) centred on their performance and nature of decisions made in the simulation.

Challenges

Prior experience of Marketing

A large proportion of students are recruited on to the MSc Marketing programme with very little or no exposure to marketing theory. Therefore, the university wanted to implement a resource that could bring students up to speed and level the playing field among the group.

Lack of engagement with reading and application of theory

Essentials of Marketing (Brassington and Pettit) is recommended as the core reading for the module. Previously students were expected to acquire their own copies or borrow/access from library resources. Lecturers on the module were unable to measure how well students were engaging with independent study but was still clear that not all students were demonstrating sufficient application of theory to decisions they made in the simulation or in their assessed work.

Intensive curriculum

Due to the intensive nature of the module, there is a lot of ground to cover in a short space of time. For a large majority of students English is not their native language. This means that for some trying to read and digest the recommended texts at pace can be a challenge. For this reason, the lecturing team believed that students were mainly just reviewing the lecture material and not doing the recommended reading.

Meeting digital expectations

Senior Lecturer, Melanie Weaver, acknowledged that digital content is ubiquitous and necessary for providing more a more personalised and engaging learning experience:

"My experience and feedback in sessions indicated that students weren't engaging with the textbooks that we had given them as a core reading for the module. So, they were only just using lecture material, and nothing else. And so I thought it would be a way to get them into the habit of reading, following or prior to their lectures."

She wanted to use a solution that was intuitive and accessible for all that they could easily use on their own devices.

Implementation

Planning

The intention for Revel was to provide students with concise, relevant reading for the module that students can complete before and after lectures. This was with the view that they are better prepared to contribute in workshops where they would be working in groups with Pearson MyMarketingExperience simulation.

To achieve best results, Melanie worked with Pearson's Digital Solutions Consultant to **identify the appropriate content to assign within Revel in line with the scheme of work**. Importantly, they looked at how they could relate the content of the lectures to activities in the simulation. Students could then use their learning from lectures to make better 'real life' decisions and evaluate the reasons why they made them.

MyMarketingExperience encourages students to think strategically about developing a brand in the jeanswear industry and make tactical decisions in different areas of the marketing mix. Revel with Essentials of Marketing teaches the foundations of the marketing mix in a clear, structured manner which made designing learning activities in line with the simulation very straightforward.

To monitor student engagement and understanding of the material, Melanie planned to use the performance dashboard on a regular basis, using point scoring activities such as end of chapter MCQs and writing tasks in Revel. Furthermore, students would be expected to evidence understanding of theory in the 'Explain and justify your decisions' free text field in the simulation. This would then provide Melanie with insight on to how well students are engaging with the theory and their ability to relate to practice.
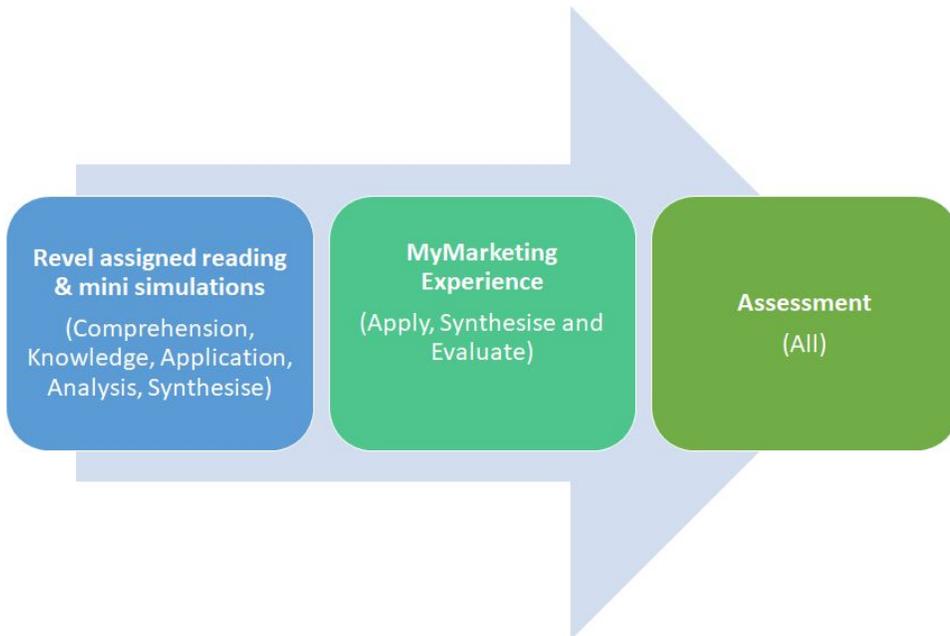
Fig 1. Using Revel to reinforce Bloom's Taxonomy and Higher Order Thinking Skills

Through making justified decisions in the simulation, students are then provided with evidence that they can defend in their group presentations and reflective reports. Moreover, they will also develop the skills and knowledge required to be successful in other areas of their degree programme.

Setting up for success

Melanie assigned weekly reading that comprised MCQ questions and writing tasks for each topic. In addition, mini-simulations within Revel were also assigned to provide students with another activity to consolidate their understanding of theory.

Fostering Higher Order Thinking Skills with Revel

Knowledge

Content presented in an engaging continuous experience. Bite-sized reading reduces cognitive load and ability to retain information

Comprehension
Students can test their understanding of knowledge acquired through end of chapter MCQs. Results can be tracked in performance dashboard

Application
Case study questions and mini simulations encourage students to apply their knowledge to real word scenarios

Analysis
Case studies and mini simulations encourage students to analyse information and make inferences based on theoretical understanding

Synthesis
Writing tasks in Revel promote higher order thinking, particularly devising alternative approaches and arguments underpinned by theory.

Upon setting up Revel for the module, Pearson representatives supported Melanie through delivering a first day of class presentation along with detailed, personalised instructional guides for students to ensure they can successfully register and understand what reading they need to complete.

During the module, Melanie regularly monitored the performance dashboard to measure engagement and performance in the reading assigned. She was able to easily identify who wasn't engaging and used as a tool to prompt students directly who weren't engaged and provide personalised support where required.

Melanie also regularly engaged with student responses to writing tasks set. The benefits of doing so have been twofold. Firstly she has been able to see how well students have been able to relate theory to examples and secondly provide timely feedback shows engagement and advocacy on her part, which helps students recognise and relate the importance of reading to achieving learning outcomes on the module.

| Oct 15 8:01 pm | Hide

As a marketing manager I will be sticking with the same strategy of the company. However, there is competitor but we have good brand and loyal customer who knows that we provide good quality products, we can work on continuous innovation within our products and that will keep us in our position.

▼ 2 COMMENTS | ADD COMMENT

Melanie Weaver | Oct 17 11:23 am | Show
Good to stick with same strategy but does that mean the company does nothing? You would allow your competitor to steal your customers if they can persuade them to switch?

Melanie Weaver | Oct 17 11:25 am | Hide
Good to stick with same strategy but does that mean the company does nothing? You would allow your competitor to steal your customers if they can persuade them to switch with a strong message and positioning statement?

| Oct 15 8:00 pm | Hide

In my view, for respond with this threat in my market to use demographics and selecting targets market in high income that they can afford my product and state position of branding to create image of brand and create advertising to make more value to the product.

▼ 1 COMMENT | ADD COMMENT

Melanie Weaver | Oct 17 11:27 am | Hide
you already have your customers (your target market), and they don't necessarily have to have 'high income' - what would your message be to persuade your current customers that you still offer value?

One student reported:

"it is good because explains to us the theory and the concepts before the classes. It is very well aligned with the contents developed in mmx and in the classes"

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Instructor and student experience

Engagement and setting expectations

Engaging students with core reading on the module was considered a challenge previous to using Revel. Melanie felt that Revel had been a great tool in clearly outline how much reading is required by students at this level. Revel provided a structured approach to reading with deadlines that help students keep on track and become familiar with the amount they are expected to do.

Melanie found it particularly encouraging that she could see students engaging with Revel throughout the module, explaining that the MCQs and mini-simulations were key motivational drivers:

"I really thought that the activities worked well, particularly the Mini-sims. But all the quizzes and things along the way really engage the students. I don't know why students want to win points, even though they're not getting anything for it seems to motivate them. "

She also added:

"The students were really engaged with the deadlines, they were really trying hard to meet them, doing the reading before their lectures, or certainly around that time"

Evidencing theory

Melanie reported students were able to relate reading in Revel to content and activities covered in workshops, in particular MyMarketingExperience.

"It got them to engage with the theory over and above the lectures. Whether it was before or after, I think it supported the lectures and it helped them to remember, I think overall, they used theory more effectively in sessions"

Some students also reinforced this perception in a group feedback session:

"We used a number of the models (in Revel) in our decision making and the book gave us a deeper understanding of each model."

Student, Nottingham Business School

> *"It helped changed my behaviour in terms of reading. I have more comprehensive marketing knowledge and practices from simulation.'*
>
> Student, Nottingham Business School

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Some students also highlighted the benefit of using the mini-simulations in Revel to help them make better decisions in MMX:

"I found it very useful. The mini sims in revel were excellent practice in how to use theory and apply it. I was then able to put the theory into practice with the mmx. "

Student, Nottingham Business School

Most importantly, those without a marketing background also felt that Revel was helpful in helping them get up to speed and their ability to contribute in sessions:

"For some of the decisions it was useful since it explained the key concepts and for someone who doesn't have previous knowledge was really helpful," and,

"It was actually very helpful for freshers like me, who is from non marketing or business background"

Support

Beyond their objectives for using Revel, Melanie also emphasised the importance of support provided by Pearson for ensuring that students had the best user experience. She added:

"The support was actually, absolutely perfect because I could contact you anytime. And you'd come back to me. And sometimes that's what you need as well. You (I) just don't have time and to get your head around it. But yeah, that was absolutely crucial. I wouldn't have been able to do it. Honestly, I wouldn't have been able to do it if I hadn't got your support."

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Conclusion

Revel addressed many of the challenges identified by the lecturer in teaching the module. Above all, what was clear in both Melanie's and the students' feedback is that Revel offered a well structured, engaging and accessible learning experience that has helped them develop the knowledge required to contribute effectively in class. Engagement with Revel throughout the module was high. This is largely attributed to Melanie's advocacy of the platform, communicating its benefits to students and engaging with Revel herself to monitor engagement, provide feedback to students and to identify and support those who weren't engaging.

Furthermore, it is clear that students engage with reading when it is instructor-led and clearly aligned to the outcomes of the course. The tools in Revel enabled the lecturer to be more selective in the content that was assigned to students and make stronger links between the learning in Revel to activities in class.

Next Steps

Despite resounding positive feedback, there are aspects of their implementation of Revel that they would like to improve to further enrich the learning experience for students. They include:

- **Integrate with VLE**
  Due to time constraints, students accessed Revel directly through the website and via the Revel mobile app rather than through the VLE. To embed Revel more deeply, Melanie felt it would offer a more seamless experience if Revel was implemented through their VLE in the future.

-**Workload**
  Some students felt that they had a lot of reading to get through in a short space of time. The teaching team plan to review the amount and cadence of content set in Revel to help reduce workload and ensure that learning outcomes are still met. This, in part, may involve providing more reading in the pre-learning phase of the programme.

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