

## Collapsing the curriculum: Enhancing students' engagement and attainment via professional learning opportunities

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### Abstract

This case study provides an overview of the 'collapsed week' that was organised as part of the 'Fundamentals of Teaching Physical Education' (PSA742) module on the 'Sport Science, Coaching and Physical Education' programme during Semester 2 of the 2020-2021 academic year. It outlines the key features of the collapsed week and discusses both the benefits and limitations associated with it. The case study evidences that the collapsed week format has much potential for enhancing students' engagement and attainment and details how this flexible approach might be taken up and applied across the University.

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### 1. Background

Collapsed weeks currently form a part of the practice-oriented modules in teaching and coaching which are part of the 'Sport Science, Coaching and Physical Education' programme within the School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences. These have previously served to provide students with opportunities to engage in continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities and to gain teaching- and coaching-related accreditations. Whilst these were relatively successful in the first year of the programme (2019-2020), discussions were already underway as to how these might be developed to further enhance students' experiences and ensure maximum impact. Discussions around what the collapsed weeks might 'look like' also had to take into account the current context of the pandemic which meant that – at the time of the collapsed week – no in-person teaching was permitted. This complicated matters, given that these weeks had previously been delivered in a face-to-face format – something that suited the practice-oriented nature of the subject matter being covered. As such, a wholly online collapsed week was trialled as part of the 'Fundamentals of Teaching Physical Education' (PSA742) module during Semester 2 of the 2020-2021 academic year.

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### 2. Methodology

The collapsed week for PSA742 was organised by myself – as the Module Leader – with support from the Programme Leader, Dr. Rachel Sandford. It was delivered during Week 3 of Semester 2, with sessions taking place via Microsoft Teams. The collapsed week was organised around several themes which provided a daily focus for the students taking part. Themes included: 'Understanding Primary PE', 'Developing Teaching Knowledge and Skills' and 'Considering Careers within and beyond PE Teaching'. The schedule for the collapsed week incorporated both timetabled sessions as well as self-directed activities for students to engage in throughout the day, with each day commencing with a briefing session that enabled students to be provided with an overview of the day as well as a recap on what had been covered the preceding day. Timetabled sessions comprised a range of formats, including presentations, panel discussions and webinars, and enabled students to hear from staff based at the University as well as external colleagues based internationally. It also afforded opportunities for current students to hear from many University alumni who have pursued careers in PE teaching or allied fields. The self-directed activities were divided into core and optional – enabling students to have some choice in relation to their engagement – and included activities such as engaging with podcasts and blogs through to completing online CPD courses. These online courses – which formed part of Wednesday's theme of 'Developing Teaching Knowledge and Skills' – were particularly useful as they allowed students to gain practical knowledge and skills in relevant sports and activities, despite not being able to have any in-person teaching. It also enabled them to gain relevant teaching-related accreditations, such as a teaching certification from Rounders England.

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### 3. Issues

There were some challenges with organising the collapsed week. A particular concern was whether the collapsed week would be able to provide students with 'meaningful' CPD opportunities that would develop their practical teaching knowledge and skills, given the restrictions around in-person teaching. However, the ability to access various online CPD courses provided by National Governing Bodies of Sport – such as England Hockey and England Rugby, as well as the Institute of Swimming – meant that students were able to gain much relevant knowledge and skills as well as teaching-related accreditations. Indeed, the provision of online CPD opportunities meant that students were able to gain experience in a wider range of sports and activities than would have been possible had this been delivered in-person and they were able to select opportunities that interested them (given that there was a selection to choose from and they were not necessarily obligated to complete specific courses). A further challenge was the potential disruption that the collapsed week might cause for colleagues leading other

modules for which PSA742 students were registered. However, colleagues were forewarned that students would be 'taken off timetable' during this week, allowing them to effectively plan their modules with minimal disruption. Further, in an effort to make the collapsed week more holistic, and to demonstrate links between modules across the programme, colleagues involved with other modules were invited to contribute to various sessions. For example, staff responsible for the modules related to physical activity and health and the sociology of sport took part in a discussion forum on the topic of whether PE is a 'healthy subject', in order to provide students with a range of critical perspectives. It was also challenging to ensure that the collapsed week was accessible for students, given that many were continuing to study remotely at the time – with some based internationally – and that joint honours students continued to have timetabled sessions within their own Departments/Schools. However, the impact of this was largely mitigated with the collapsed week being delivered in an online format, as sessions were recorded and subsequently uploaded to Learn for students to watch back via ReVIEW at a time convenient for them. Additionally, self-directed activities could be engaged with at any time and the combination of core and optional activities meant that students could 'pick and choose' to suit their availability and interests.

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#### 4. Benefits

There were numerous benefits to organising the PSA742 collapsed week. A notable benefit was that the online format afforded much flexibility in what sessions and activities could be included, and, moreover, which speakers could be involved (discussed further below). Despite this flexibility, however, the collapsed week retained a clear structure, and this was another evident benefit. The structured nature of the week - with timetabled sessions to accompany self-directed activities, as well as briefings on the morning of each day to provide students with a 'check in' opportunity - helped to facilitate students' engagement. Indeed, a number of students suggested that the structured nature of the collapsed week helped to ensure that it was not viewed as a 'week off', something which had been a concern for staff in the previous year. A further benefit – with the collapsed week being delivered wholly online – was that it provided students with a broad range of learning and development opportunities that would simply not have been possible otherwise. For example, as part of Thursday's theme of 'Exploring Primary PE in an International Context', students were able to hear from world-leading international experts in PE from countries such as Wales, Scotland, the US and New Zealand. As noted above, the online offer also enabled students to access various CPD courses provided by National Governing Bodies of Sport, meaning that students were able to gain relevant knowledge and skills as well as teaching-related accreditations in a wider range of sports and activities than would have been possible had this been delivered in-person. Importantly, students particularly liked that they had some autonomy over their learning during the collapsed week and this seemed to facilitate tailored engagement, with students often completing optional self-directed activities aligned with their interests. The recording of all collapsed week sessions – as well as students being able to complete many of the activities in their own time – also ensured accessibility of the content, meaning that no students were disadvantaged by circumstance or other commitments. The collapsed week not only supported students' academic development but also contributed to their graduate employability with Friday's theme of 'Considering Careers within and beyond PE Teaching' exposing them to a range of career-related presentations and encouraging them to consider what steps they might take to work towards their chosen career route. Relatedly, this also enabled students to be introduced to several University alumni who – as part of the collapsed week – delivered presentations about their careers and experiences, something which was inspiring for students. A particularly noteworthy benefit of the collapsed week was the community of practice that this seemingly served to develop amongst students. Students on the module expressed how – given the restrictions that have been in place over the course of much of their studies to date – they had had somewhat limited opportunities to meet and interact with their peers. However, given the nature of many of the sessions which involved discussion, debate and question and answer, students were able to get to know one another, with one student likening it to 'being at a conference'. It also enabled me, as Module Leader, to get to know students better through more sustained and collaborative interactions – something which fostered a positive relationship between myself and the students which has continued throughout the remainder of the Semester, positively impacting on the module as a whole.

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#### 5. Evidence of Success (if available)

*Please see supporting document 'Evidence of Success'.*

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#### 6. How Can Other Academics Reproduce This?

Collapsed weeks have much potential to be taken up and applied within different programmes as well as across different Departments/Schools. There is certainly flexibility to adapt these to suit particular purposes, especially if being delivered online. There is also potential to integrate this online delivery with in-person elements, something which will be trialled next academic year as discussed below. Collapsed weeks may be better suited to those subject areas where more practical application is required – such as was the case with PSA742 – but there are arguably elements of this approach that could be taken up and applied within any discipline, such as an

'employability day' bringing students together with alumni from the University. Indeed, there could be some valuable connections made with the University's Personal Best development programme. While valuable, collapsed weeks do require buy-in from Programme Leaders, as well as from other Module Leaders, as the format – if similar to that adopted – can result in these colleagues effectively 'losing' a teaching week with from their respective modules. However, I believe that the benefits of the collapsed week outweigh this potential limitation and there is scope to make collapsed weeks more holistic by making links between modules across programmes.

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## 7. Reflections

There are several factors that contributed to the success of the collapsed week. It is important to acknowledge, for example, that I drew upon the support of various colleagues (both professional services and academic staff) internally within the School, as well as external colleagues based internationally and alumni of the University with whom I have maintained contact in order to facilitate the various timetabled sessions. Therefore, having a network to draw upon was important and undoubtedly contributed to the success of the collapsed week. Allied to this, I had much support from the Programme Leader, Dr. Rachel Sandford, and this was important in ensuring that senior colleagues approved and supported the venture. I do also consider myself very fortunate to have worked with such a fantastic cohort of students, who so readily engaged with me and the various learning and teaching activities as part of the module. Despite the challenges that this academic year has brought, they have been enthusiastic about the opportunities that I have presented to them and embraced them wholeheartedly. Evidently, this too contributed to the success of the collapsed week.

It is worth noting that there are several ways in which the collapsed week might be developed, and these will be explored in subsequent academic years. It is intended that, for the 2021-2022 academic year, there will be some in-person delivery as part of collapsed week - likely related to CPD opportunities and teaching-related accreditations. It will be interesting to explore what additional benefits this blended approach might have for students. Additionally, there are intentions to strengthen the links already made with other modules as part of collapsed week (including a more direct link to Personal Best through the Academic and Professional Skills module), to further support students' learning and development and to facilitate a more holistic and impactful experience. Finally, I would also be interested in exploring opportunities for students to collaborate across different parts of the programme. At present, the collapsed weeks takes place independently for each programme part (Parts A and B), but it could be beneficial for students and staff to facilitate collaboration across the years, potentially enabling Part B students to mentor Part A students in relation to their teaching practice, for example.