

# Co-creating student- centered learning journeys for academic and professional skills

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**What motivated the initiation of this co-creation project, and what specific challenges in healthcare education were you aiming to address?**

"Well, the motivation really came from a couple of questions I asked myself: What are the essential academic and professional skills students need to truly make a difference in healthcare? And how can we embed these skills into our curriculum in a meaningful way? Initially, we tackled this from a faculty perspective. We held workshops for teachers, encouraged them to reflect critically on our programme learning objectives, and re-evaluate how we approach teaching. That was valuable, but it also got me thinking—what do the students themselves say about this? What's their perspective?

That's when it clicked for me. If we really want to make an impact, we need to have the students join us in this process. That's why I decided to focus on co-creating these learning journeys with students, for students. In this approach, they're not just passive recipients; they're defining their own learning objectives, helping design the teaching and learning activities, and figuring out how to demonstrate that those objectives have been met. It's about putting them in the driver's seat and making sure that the skills they develop are relevant to their needs and future roles in healthcare."

**From your perspective, how do students themselves define or interpret co-creation, and how does that align with your original vision for the project?**

"What I found really interesting throughout this project is how students themselves define co-creation. For them, it's about being involved early—before the education even takes place—so they can have a say in shaping it. They see it as an iterative process where everyone is equally involved, without any hierarchy between faculty and students. That really resonated with me because it aligns with the idea of co-creation being a true partnership, where their voices are heard, taken seriously, and they feel like equal contributors.

What I didn't expect, though, was how clear students were about what co-creation is not to them. For example, they don't see what happens during lectures or working groups as co-creation, nor do they consider simply giving feedback after the fact as genuine involvement—especially

if they're left in the dark about what happens with that feedback. For them, co-creation is much more proactive and collaborative.

The impact of this had been really positive. It fostered a sense of mutual understanding, created an environment where both students and faculty could observe and learn from each other, and encouraged students to take real responsibility for their learning process. Ultimately, it strengthened that feeling of being heard and valued as equal partners in the educational experience."

**How did you ensure that the diverse voices within the student population were adequately represented in the co-creation process, especially given the different backgrounds, levels of experience, and engagement among the students?**

"This was definitely one of the more challenging aspects of the project. It's important to realize that student engagement doesn't just vary between students, but even within the same student depending on the circumstances. People often have fixed ideas about what an engaged student looks like—someone who's prepared, actively participates in class, asks questions, contributes to discussions, keeps up with the material, and thinks about the course content outside of class. But engagement can be hampered by several factors. Maybe the topic doesn't seem interesting or relevant, or the student is juggling other commitments alongside their studies. Some students might not feel safe enough to participate or speak up, and there's even a stigma sometimes attached to being an 'active' student.

This results in situational engagement or disengagement. It's not as simple as categorizing students into 'engaged' and 'disengaged.' So, I realized that using student engagement as a selection criterion for participation in this co-creation project wouldn't have worked—it wouldn't have been fair, and it wouldn't have led to a balanced group. Instead, I wanted the project to be open and inviting to all students. I didn't set formal requirements for participation, so that anyone from the programme who was interested could join. All I really wanted to know was their motivation for getting involved and how they planned to make time for this trajectory. I also gave them the freedom to apply in any format they felt comfortable with, whether that was in writing or through a short video recording."

**What were some of the key challenges or tensions you faced during the co-creation process, especially when trying to balance diverse student needs and ensure equitable participation?**

"Co-creation really is a balancing act, and we faced a few key tensions along the way. One of the biggest tensions was around voluntary participation. On the one hand, having intrinsically motivated students sign up made the process really enjoyable because they were genuinely invested in co-creating the learning journeys. These students felt that co-creation came with a lot of responsibility, so they appreciated being involved because it was something they truly wanted to do. But the flip side was that this resulted in an unrepresentative group—those who participated tended to be more intrinsically motivated by nature, which limited the diversity of perspectives we initially hoped to capture. Another tension was between the freedom we gave students and the discipline required to manage that freedom. Students appreciated the autonomy to shape the content of the learning journeys, but they struggled more with the process. While they liked having control over their own timelines, some found it difficult to take ownership without clear deadlines or guidance. It was a real challenge to balance how much structure we provided, ensuring students had enough freedom to be creative but also enough support to stay on track.

There were also practical challenges in keeping students engaged throughout the process. It wasn't just about finding students willing to participate—it was about sustaining their involvement. One student mentioned, 'It needs some discipline to do this program. The openness can be nice, but it can also be a drawback for students who have time constraints.' This highlighted the importance of balancing openness with enough structure to keep students engaged and accountable."

**Were there any unexpected or unintended outcomes from the co-creation process, either positive or negative, that you hadn't anticipated when the project began?**

"One of the really unexpected but great outcomes of the project was the chance to collaborate with Erasmus Centrum voor Zorgbestuur. This connection opened the door to their network of senior healthcare managers with years of strategic leadership experience. We were able to link our student group with participants from the Master of Health Business Administration (MHBA) program, which turned out to be a win-win for both groups.

The MHBA participants, who are often in key leadership roles, shared their practical insights, while our HCM students brought in fresh theoretical and methodological perspectives. The discussions were really engaging, especially around the different needs and challenges of generations in healthcare, and giving feedback on research ideas. One of our former students summed it up perfectly, saying, 'It's a really nice way to get more in touch with the working field and to speak to people already in the field with a lot of experience. To learn from their experience, read their thesis, and talk about their subjects and work—when do you ever get the opportunity to speak with so many people with so much experience at once?'

The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. The MHBA participants found the students' input on their thesis proposals really valuable, and our students got a glimpse into potential career paths and enjoyed interacting with professionals in the field. This whole experience really showed us how academic and post-academic education can be bridged in an effective way, which wasn't something we had originally planned for, but it's been a fantastic outcome."

**From the perspective of the faculty, how did you experienced the co-creation process, and what does co-creation require from a faculty member?**

"From the faculty's point of view, the co-creation process has been both really rewarding and a bit challenging. It's amazing to work alongside students, watching them take ownership of their learning and bring fresh, creative ideas to the table. But at the same time, it means teachers have to shift gears—it's no longer just about teaching, it's about becoming a facilitator and working as equals with the students. To do that, you need quite a lot of flexibility and some good coaching skills. You also have to be willing to be a bit vulnerable—open and honest about what's working and what's not, and comfortable with discussing tough situations. It's not always easy to step back and let the students take the lead.

One big thing I've learned is that co-creation requires you to let go of control and get comfortable with ambiguity. You have to be open to new approaches that might shake up the traditional way of doing things. That's not always easy, but it's necessary for the process to work. In the end, co-creation demands more from faculty than a regular course. It's not just about guiding students—it's about learning from

them too and being willing to rethink how we approach education. But honestly, the rewards—both for the students and for us—make it all worth it."

**Looking ahead, how do you see this co-creation initiative evolving, and what lasting impact do you hope it will have?**

"One of the most positive outcomes is that the pilot has now become a regular part of the HCM program, with its own budget, which is a great result. What started as a trial has evolved into an extracurricular course, and that's something we're really proud of. We're hopeful that this will continue to have a positive impact on our education, both in the way we engage students and in the skills they develop.

Looking ahead, one of the things we're really focused on is creating tangible, impactful improvements in education. We've learned that co-creation works best when there's something concrete to work on, with clear deliverables. Right now, one of the discussions we're having is about how to involve students in co-creating a socially safe learning environment. This is an area we're excited to explore, as it goes beyond academic skills and looks at creating a supportive space for learning."

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