

CRITICAL REFLECTION AND THE MARKETING CURRICULUM: TRANSITIONING STUDENTS TO HIGHER LEVEL THINKING

James W. Peltier and Will Drago, University of Wisconsin Whitewater, Whitewater, WI 53190;
(608) 220-0619, (262) 472-3994

Lucille Pointer, University of Houston, Downtown Campus, Houston, TX 77002; (713) 222-5382

ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

Many of today's marketing students enter the business world with inadequate exposure to decision integration and reflective thinking skills necessary for discovering insights through experience, necessary requisites to becoming life-long learners (Catterall et al. 2002). In response, there is growing interest in developing curricular and educational practices that motivate, develop, and nurture reflective thinking in students (Hay et al. 2004).

Reflection was originally conceptualized as "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends" (p. 9). This conceptualization is built on two associated ideas: "(1) a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty, in which thinking originates, and (2) an act of searching, hunting, inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity" (p. 12). More recently, Peltier et al. (2006) conceptualized a reflective learning continuum, one that has a range of lower and higher order learning processes that encompasses habitual action, basic understanding, deep processing, deep understanding, reflection, and intensive reflection.

Underdeveloped in the marketing and business education literature, reflection is seen as a critical requirement to effective decision making, particularly in decision environments characterized as having ambiguous problems, unique requirements, and that lack clear resolution scenarios (Peltier et al. 2005).

Despite the paucity of conceptual and empirical research in the marketing and management education literature, developing reflective thinking skills in graduates should be a high priority for both the academic and business community. Without question, graduates who acknowledge that life-long learning is a journey of self-discovery, one that requires the testing of personal assumptions, beliefs, and actions, will be best prepared for leadership and leading by example.

Although reflection as a theoretical construct in the marketing education literature is in its infancy, the recent works published in the *Journal of Marketing Education* by Catterall et al. (2002), Peltier et al. (2005, 2006), and Roy and Macchiette (2006) underscore its importance. Clearly, marketing educators need to find ways to incorporate reflective learning into their curriculum (Lincoln 2005, 2006).

SESSION OBJECTIVES

Reflective learning skills can be learned and assessed in a variety of ways. Our special session focuses on three specific avenues: (1) the role of student groups in developing critical reflection opportunities, (2) how US and European universities differ in their approach to reflective education, and (3) the importance of transitioning students across the reflective learning continuum as they move through their college careers.

1. *The Role of Student Groups in Developing Critical Reflection Opportunities.* We first examine how student organizations can enhance reflective learning through the professional development programs that they offer students. We report the findings from a large scale study of Collegiate American Marketing Association Chapters from across the U.S. and the region. We highlight those professional development activities that are deemed most important to students and how they impact organization satisfaction.
2. *How US and European Universities Differ in Their Approach to Reflective Education.* Findings are reported that compare three universities, one each from the U.S., the United Kingdom and Germany. There is clear evidence of the importance of reflective learning and that cross-global educational differences do exist.
3. *Importance of Transitioning Students Across the Reflective Learning Continuum as They Move Through Their College Careers.* We conclude the special session with findings from a three-

level study measuring reflective learning characteristics of pre-business students (students during their first two years in their undergraduate programs), graduating undergraduate business majors, and MBA students. The findings suggest that students do in fact change their desired learning and evaluation needs as they become more experienced learners.

REFERENCES

- Catterall, M., P. Maclaran, and L. Stevens. 2002. Critical reflection in the marketing curriculum. *Journal of Marketing Education* 24(3): 184-92
- Hay, Amanda, James W. Peltier, and Will Drago. 2004. Reflective learning and on-line management education: A comparison of traditional and on-line MBA students. *Strategic Change* 13(4): 169-82.
- Lincoln, Douglas. 2006. The editor's corner. *Journal of Marketing Education* 28(1): 3.
- Lincoln, Douglas. 2005. The editor's corner. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 27(3): 211.
- Peltier, James W., Amanda Hay, and Will Drago. 2006. Reflecting on reflection: Scale extension and a comparison of undergraduate business students in the United States and the United Kingdom. *Journal of Marketing Education* 28(1): 5-16.
- Peltier, James W., Amanda Hay, and Will Drago. 2005. The reflective learning continuum: Reflecting on reflection. *Journal of Marketing Education* 27(3): 250-63.
- Roy, Abhit, and Bart Macchiette. 2005. Debating the issues: A tool for augmenting critical thinking skills of marketing students. *Journal of Marketing Education* 27(3): 264-76.