

THEORY APPLIED: EXPERIENTIAL TEACHING INTEGRATES
STUDENT LEARNING WITH COMMUNITY NEEDS

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We have all heard of the attacks on the B-schools. The press expounds them; the business people in our local environs decry us. Are we indeed guilty of putting beloved students into "windowless amphitheaters," cramming them with theoretical turpitudes, in justification of granting them passports to the world of real workdom?

Perhaps, just perhaps, there are possibly other, better, more significant, maybe incredibly more realistic ways of inspiring learning. This paper suggests that perhaps one way might be to increase the learning of our beloved, young, knowledge seekers by facilitating their application of theory to real business situations.

This paper does, accordingly discuss a possible method of developing students who "can do something, more than . . . those who know something" (Done, 1979). It involves an integrated approach through which student teams in the very basic Principles of Advertising course interact with local businesses. But too, this integration is topped off with what might be called a within-house (Marketing Department) actual business type structure and functioning.

The basic emphasis of the student teams is directed toward: 1) business market analysis, which defines target markets and team plans relative to their use, 2) consumer analysis, which describes the consumer in relevant time frames, as well as pertinent segmentation frames, 3) environmental analysis, which exposes students to realistic concerns involving the economy, demographics, technology, regulations, and culture, 4) industry analysis, involving trends, strengths, and weaknesses, and 5) competitive analysis, which considers those numerous aspects of those other's strengths and weaknesses.

Student teams develop initial data in these regards. They function as they would in the "real world." Their composition is determined from an analysis (personnel department criteria) of their backgrounds. Account Executives (the more qualified students) are placed in leadership positions and given responsibilities relative to planning, organizing, directing, and controlling; the traditional theoretical functions.

This actualizing of real business practices (within the school department) does encompass giving Account Executives rights of firing laggards. The Executives do, in fact, fire approximately five laggards each semester. It should be mentioned that the lecturer retains the right to fire Account Executives. During four semesters only one Executive has been fired and the several fired subordinates have returned the next semester to repeat the class.

In order to facilitate the theoretical learning with the practical application of the course, the text, classroom lectures, guest speakers, and case analyses are integrated throughout each semester. This building-block approach allows students to "take things one step at a time." This learning "experience" is actually divided into six sections:

1. Advertising as a marketing management tool,
2. Research methodology,
3. Basic media strategy,
4. The creative program,
5. Evaluating advertising effectiveness, and
6. Meeting advertising's legal and social responsibilities.

All of this involves the integration of theory and organizational application. The result is simply: synergistic learning--theory applied.

The integration goes further however, it turns into a "happening." That happening comes in the form of an end-of-course "experience." The ultimate advertising campaign, which students develop, is presented by each team at the end-of-semester advertising seminar. These are "Saturday Happenings," magical Saturdays, during which students come dressed in their suits and costumes, and peoples from community organizations (come dressed in their usual conformity regalia), and all conspire, in support of the best student team. For example, last semester, all the personnel in an entire local organization danced across the stage at the beginning of their team's presentation. The local business organization was "with" its team and displayed its full support. Tiny tears might flow from an instructor's eyes when such occurrences happen--of this, other instructors should be warned. It is a most inspiring experience:

1. "This class has been very beneficial to my education.
2. It was well worth the effort.
3. Being able to show the proposal during the interview helped me considerably."

are but three of the inspiring student comments.

Too long, too very, very long, have we in academia forgotten, perhaps failed to realize how very, very close we and our students are to the real organizations of this, the greatest nation. Perhaps it is well worth a moment of our time to consider that we, the academicians have a mandate to fit the new young minds to America, not only through theory but also through application--through "Theory Applied."

REFERENCES

Arthur A. Done, "Matching the Marketing Curriculum Market Needs," Journal of Marketing Education, (April, 1979), 4-7.