

CHANGING STUDENTS' LIVES: FACILITATING LEARNING THROUGH THE INCORPORATION OF SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKS

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the findings of a study that investigated the usefulness of assigning supplementary books in an undergraduate business class. For this paper, supplementary books are defined as those books for sale at mainstream bookstores (e.g., Barnes and Noble, Borders) whose primary purpose is to recount a business story targeted at the general public interested in business reading (as opposed to a text book whose primary focus is to posit theoretical frameworks through definition of terms and concepts, targeted at college students enrolled in a for-credit course). Examples include: *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (Friedman 2000), *Fast Food Nation* (Schlosser 2001), and *Ben & Jerry's: The Inside Scoop* (Lager and Greenfield 1995).

Over the course of two semesters, one academic year, two practitioner books were incorporated into a core business course, "Nuts! Southwest Airline's Crazy Recipe for Business and Personal Success" (Friedberg and Friedberg 1996) and "Who Moved My Cheese?" (Johnson 1998). The books were listed on the course syllabus as required books, in addition to a standard textbook. Several assignments pertaining to the supplemental books were given during the course of the semester. At the end of the semester, students were required to turn in a written critique of the supplemental readings. So that students were assured that their evaluations would not influence their grade, they were instructed that they would receive full points for the critiques as long as they turned one in.

The written book critiques were then analyzed for common themes related to marketing education. The researcher looked for all instances where students referred to, or discussed, the supplementary books in relation to their learning processes and outcomes, positive or negative. The open-ended qualitative responses were analyzed according to methods described by Denzin and Lincoln (1994).

Six themes emerged from the students' critiques of the supplemental books. The themes revealed that the supplemental readings and exercises engaged students in learning, helped students to appreciate the cross-functional nature of business, motivated students to share the lessons and course material with others, touched students' lives in personal ways, illustrated the linkage between theory and practice, made the text material more easily understandable, and changed students lives by changing the way they viewed business, potential employers, themselves, and their situations.

The findings suggest that incorporating supplemental business books in a course can help to develop many elements of education that marketing academics and business people have been calling for.

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