

## REPORT OF AN EXPERIMENT IN REFLECTIVE TEACHING THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CONSTRUCTIVIST CURRICULUM IN ENVIRONMENTAL MARKETING

Brian McKenzie, Department of Marketing and Entrepreneurship, California State University, East Bay, 25800 Carlos Bee Blvd., Hayward, CA 94542; (510) 885-2858

### ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the author's experience in reflective teaching practice. A literature review suggested an alternative to the controlled teaching classroom setting is the model of cooperative investigation. This approach embodies the principles of constructivist education. In 2004 and 2005, the author assisted undergraduate students in their development and application of a curriculum in environmental marketing. Students developed their own curriculum and unique outcomes assessment. This constructivist curriculum design encouraged reflection on the fundamental elements of teaching and provided a strong learning platform both for the students and for the instructor. Implications for students and for faculty are discussed.

### INTRODUCTION

The 1997 Boyer Report suggested the need for overlap in "the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application and the scholarship of teaching" (Glassick *et al.*, 1997, p.9). However, most professors find practical application of this suggestion difficult. Too often, research constrains the time available for development of course syllabi and professors build their course structures around the outline of the prescribed textbook. In contrast, Schèon described the kind of thinking that characterized many successful professionals as "reflective practice" (Schèon, 1983). Reflective practice in the classroom can be seen as looking at our teaching from the students' point of view (McEntee, 2003, p.xiii). Good reflective practice should mirror overlap of the four types of scholarship referred to in the 1997 Boyer Report.

This paper outlines the author's experience in an interesting experiment in reflective practice. In both 2004 and 2005, the author assisted undergraduate students in their development and application of a curriculum in environmental marketing. The paper proceeds as follows. First, pedagogical theory surrounding the development of student-centered learning is discussed. Then, the field experience is

reported. Conclusions are made from the experiment and the implications of this exercise are considered.

### PEDAGOGICAL THEORY

Active learning has generally been accepted as learning which includes hands-on activity. Bruner, Dewey, Kolb, Piaget, Montessorie and Vygotsky posit that activities lead to concepts. In this view of learning, students engage in classroom activities which lead them to acquire new conceptual knowledge and develop new skills.

The challenge for educators is the need to learn to teach in ways that are different from the way they were taught as students (Hargreaves, 2003, p.24). Smith and Van Doren outline six reasons that tend to keep professors using lecture the traditional format: familiarity with the method; lack of collegiate rewards for innovative teaching; lack of a customer focus in collegiate institutions; lack of support by colleagues, resistance to change and fear of failure (Smith & Doren, 2004, p.69). However, Boice reports evidence from faculty development studies that tenure track faculty who perform at high levels in their early years have developed a practice of reflective preparation (Boice, 2000, p.20) and delegation of responsibility (Boice, 2000, p.76). Reid has argued that the development of rigid curriculum was a part of the institutionalization of learning inherent in a literate society (Reid, 2004, p.91). Joseph has shown that the many variations in curricula occurring in today's society reflect the many differing forms of inquiry inherent in postmodern culture (Joseph, 2000, p.25).

Curriculum can be seen to express the planning of the learning process (Reid, 2004, p.1). Buckley *et al* note that course syllabus is the document which outlines or summarizes the course curriculum and acts as the course management system most frequently utilized by instructors (Buckley *et al.*, 2004, p.139). Poerksen tells us:

The first and perhaps most important reorientation of a constructivist university teacher is to replace the teaching paradigm by the learning paradigm. (Poerksen, 2005, p.472)

Inherent in this advice is the relinquishing of control over the course management system. Poerksen suggests that an alternative to the controlled teaching classroom setting is a model of cooperative investigation in which the professor acts as the expedition leader for the learning experience of both students and the professor (Poerksen, 2005, p.479).

### FIELD EXPERIENCE

In 2004, the author was asked to teach an undergraduate course in environmental marketing. It appears that the notion central to most environmental marketing texts was either that of apology or perception change. The underlying question that remained after much research into the topic was "what is environmental marketing?" The author chose to pose this question to his students in the form of a constructivist approach to curriculum creation.

Constructivist education was introduced to the students in the first class of each course through a brief history of the development of universities in the twelfth century. The opposing models of University of Bologna in Italy and the University of Paris in France were described. The author then suggested to the students that most or all of their previous courses followed the Parisian model. However, this course was going to follow the Bolognese model. Students were to develop their own curriculum and could decide whether or not to keep the author as their professor.

An unexpected difficulty was encountered in overcoming the student's apparent lack of belief in their own empowerment. Students reacted with demands like: "we don't want any exams" "we don't want to have to buy a textbook". The author's reaction to these demands was "sure if you don't want exams (textbooks) then we won't use exams (textbooks)". However, the author countered with the challenge of forcing the students to state what they did want. The answer to this question was surprising: the students wanted discussion, field trips and guest speakers. After three class sessions, the syllabus was drawn up, voted on and accepted by all students.

In both years the author has taught this course, the student syllabus consisted of discussion and weekly research for discussion, weekly learning journals, participation in a class leadership exercise and participation in a presentation describing fieldwork. Discussion was focused around weekly topics, such as, what is environmental marketing; the history of environmental marketing; current business

environment; core values of environmental marketing; creating environmentally friendly products; strategic environmental marketing; societal marketing; and applying environmental marketing. Each student agreed to post information that he or she had researched to a discussion board on the Blackboard course management site. Students also agreed to post weekly learning journal entries to their professor. This use of Blackboard democratized the traditional autocratic use of course management software, reflecting the students feeling of empowerment. The author was surprised to discover that students assigned themselves writing and research load equivalent to 40 pages of text in a ten week term. Each week, a group of students took on leadership of classroom discussion. The format of classroom discussions ranged from traditional lectures to open ended discussions. Students used a Blackboard forum to organize field trips. These field trips ranged from a visit to the district Environmental Protection Agency branch to a tour of a local automaker.

Students developed a unique outcomes assessment. For example, in the second years of the author's facilitation of this course, assignments were classified into two groups: core assignments and scholarly assignments in recognition that there were two types of students in the class: those who just wanted to pass and those who wanted to get "A" grades. The core requirements were made up of attending all Monday and Wednesday sessions, completing all discussion submissions, completing weekly learning journals, participation in a class leadership exercise and participation in a presentation describing fieldwork. The scholarly requirements were made up of attending Friday sessions and the development of four research briefs. The grading scheme is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1 GRADING SCHEME

Grade	Requirements
A	Student meets core and scholarly requirements to an excellent level.
A-	Student meets core requirements to an excellent level and meets scholarly requirements to a satisfactory level
B+	Student meets core requirements to an excellent level or meets scholarly requirements to a satisfactory level
B	Student meets core requirement to a level above satisfactory but below excellent
B-	Student meets core requirements to a satisfactory level.
C+, C or C-	Student fails to meet core requirements.
F	Who was that student?

Student assignments were graded on a scale of (E) excellent, (S) satisfactory and (U) unsatisfactory.

In both years, the students performed at a better than satisfactory level, both in terms of the grading scheme they developed and in comparison to comparable Marketing classes taught by the author. Class averages stood at the C+ to B- range found throughout the College. Student evaluations for the quality of instruction in course were 1.23 and 1.03 on a scale where 1 is the highest evaluation possible and 5 is the lowest evaluation possible.

The author found the teaching of this course to involve a great deal of work. The grading of the student-designed curriculum involved more written work than this professor would usually assign. Preparation time for the course and for each class was equal to or greater than a traditional course. However, the author would caution others who attempt this experiment that it requires a great deal of courage to enter a classroom without any formal preparation. In this situation, the professor must rely on the goodwill of his or her students.

### CONCLUSIONS

The author's experience in this experiment in reflective practice shows that important new insights can be gained from questioning the fundamental precepts of teaching. Moreover, the author's experience shows that a constructivist approach to curriculum design works...not just once, but as an ongoing method of teaching. Change of any kind is difficult. Constructivist curriculum design is inherently risky, since the outcome of a group decision is unpredictable. In addition, the risk brings with it the promise of great reward. The constructivist curriculum has proven to provide a strong learning platform both for the students and for the instructor.

### IMPLICATIONS

The experiment reported in this article has implications for students and for professors in Marketing and in other disciplines. The primary implication for students is that a constructivist approach to curriculum design can be an effective learning aid in a course that involves conceptualization and skill building. Today's students have access to a great deal of information and are extremely adept at the acquisition of this information. However, it would appear that today's students feel a need to discuss and filter the information that they find so readily available. A secondary implication for students is that advances in technology, such as Blackboard, appear to be very effective in

democratizing the classroom. As the dissemination of information becomes more freely available, students can play an increasingly important role in finding and sharing the information contained within a curriculum of studies.

The primary implication for instructors is confirmation of Boice's advice to new faculty members. Reflective preparation and reflective teaching appear to give faculty members valuable new insights both for teaching and for research.

### REFERENCES

- Boice, R. (2000). *Advice for new faculty members: Nihil nimis*. Boston; London: Allyn and Bacon.
- Buckley, M. R., Novicevic, M. M., Halbesleben, J. R. B., & Harvey, M. (2004). Course management and students' expectations: Theory-based considerations. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 18(2), 138 - 144.
- Glassick, C. E., Huber, M. T., & Maeroff, G. I. (1997). *Scholarship assessed evaluation of the professoriate* (Special Report). San Francisco, CA: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Hargreaves, A. (2003). *Teaching in the knowledge society: Education in the age of insecurity*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Joseph, P. B. (2000). Understanding curriculum as culture. In P. B. Joseph, S. L. Bravmann, M. A. Windschitl, E. R. Mikel & N. S. Green (Eds.), *Cultures of curriculum* (pp. xiii, 194 p.). Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- McEntee, G. H. (2003). *At the heart of teaching: A guide to reflective practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Poerksen, B. (2005). Learning how to learn. *Kybernetes*, 34(3/4), 471 - 484.
- Reid, W. A. (2004). Curriculum as institution. In J. Terwel & D. F. Walker (Eds.), *Curriculum as a shaping force: Toward a principled approach in curriculum theory and practice* (pp. xiii, 115 p.). New York: Nova Science Publishers.
- Schëon, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.
- Smith, L. W., & Doren, D. C. V. (2004). The reality-based learning method: A simple method for keeping teaching activities relevant and effective. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 26(1), 66-74.