



OBTC 2017 at Providence College June 14th – 17th, 2017

1) Title, Abstract & Keywords

In your abstract, please include a brief session description (not to exceed 100 words), and three to four keywords. If your proposal is accepted, this description will be printed in the conference program.

Title: The student learning contract: a grounded approach

Abstract:

The session steps participants through the process of developing a student learning contract using a “grounded” approach. This identifies the desired behaviors of individual students, their allocated team members, and the educator using students’ own words. This process is described for classes with and without the use of student teams. When teams are used, the process identifies desired behaviors of team members as well as those of individual students and the educator in a unique study of this three-way relationship. Results indicate that this helps to create a positive, productive and collaborative learning culture.

Key Words: Contract; Collaboration; Learning culture

2) Teaching Implications:

What is the contribution of your session to management pedagogy/andragogy? Specifically, please include your learning objectives, and describe what management and/or teaching topics are relevant to your session, and why. Also, include theoretical, disciplinary, or theoretical foundations that will help reviewers understand how your ideas fit within the broader field of management.

The new teaching and learning environment is characterized by a strengthening of a student-based learning approach (rather than a traditional lecturing approach). Students are expected to take increased responsibility for their learning, by engaging in pre-learning before interactive classroom sessions where the educator engages students in facilitated discussions to develop their understanding of course materials. Examples include Flipped Learning, and Team-Based Learning (Balan, Clark, and Restall, 2015).

This widespread change imposes new sets of responsibilities on students as well as on educators to a large extent because these teaching methods rely very much on group or team-based activities during classroom sessions, possibly team meetings outside of the classroom, and on online learning communities (Bishop and Verleger, 2013; Michaelsen and Sweet, 2008). A team-centric teaching style is widely supported in the literature with the view that students are better able to relate to class material if presented from a student-relevant perspective (Biggs and Tang, 2007; Hill and McGinnis, 2007; Ramsden, 2003).

It is therefore necessary to consider the role that teams play in the learning process, and in particular the responsibilities attached to the behavior of students in teams. This is important, as it has been recognized that it is often necessary for the educator to apply early intervention to counter some previous negative experiences students might have had learning in groups. Some educators recommend that students be given a written learning contract as a “set of

principles for how to work in teams” (Mahler 2012, p.118) as an approach for clarifying and codifying individual and team-learning and working commitments.

Method

In the first session of an OB course, students were asked to reflect on what was required for them to be successful in terms of the course assessments (Selim 2007; Sun et. al. 2008). Using a “minute paper” evaluation (Stead, 2005), each student was asked to provide responses to the following open-ended questions:

- “Write two or three things you need to do to be successful in the course”;
 - “Write two or three things the educator needs to do for you to be successful in the course”.
- Each of the sets of qualitative data were analyzed separately using the concept mapping method (Balan, Balan-Vnuk, Metcalfe, and Lindsay, 2015) to identify key themes for each set.

Results

Analysis revealed between six and eight major themes for each of the three stakeholders. For example:

- For students, major themes included “communicate well”, “good time management” and “work hard”.
- For teams, major themes included “communicate effectively”, “work hard together”, and “be team players”.
- For the educator, major themes included “give information and support”, “communicate and engage”, and “make everything clear”.

Results were presented to students as a two-page summary showing the concept maps and PowerPoint presentation in a manner that highlighted the mutual obligations in the class.

Conclusions

This process allowed a comprehensive learning contract to emerge using students’ own words, thus making student learning commitments clear and unambiguous. This can be compared with the more traditional approach of imposing student contracts and team responsibility documents that students must agree to conform to and sign (Mahler, 2012).

The results help students identify learning behaviors that develop the capacity for self-direction (Dunlap and Grabinger, 2003). In addition, results can be seen to support findings by Mashaw (2010) and Eom *et al.* (2006) that key factors influencing student satisfaction are self-motivation and interaction, and educator knowledge and facilitation. This activity also helps students to understand a co-constructivist approach to learning in these classes where teachers and learners share responsibility for teaching and learning as a community of learners (Carnell, 2007; Hill and McGinnis, 2007), as well as expectations for student learning (Devlin and Samarawickrema, 2010).

Student evaluation of this process provided comments such as: “*reflect on ourselves and what we need to do to learn*”, “*let other people know what is expected of them*” and “*know the (expected) standards*”. These comments illustrate that students understood that this exercise

forms the basis of a transactional learning contract of personal student commitment, the responsibility of peers to the collective learning process, and the expert input of the educator as required (Burton and Dowling, 2005).

Student evaluation comments also illustrate that discussion of the results of this exercise solidifies team commitment, responsibility and social cohesion and identifies each team in a collective class endeavor. This activity is not only an awareness raising exercise but also a debated, negotiated and rationalized exercise in understanding how learning should occur and the associated responsibilities for individual, team and collective learning (Yuksel, 2010). This has important practical applications in helping to create a positive, productive and collaborative learning culture.

3) Session Description and Plan:

What will you actually do in this session? If appropriate, please include a timeline estimating the activities will you facilitate: how long will they take, and how will participants be involved? Please remember that reviewers will be evaluating how well the time request matches the activities you'd like to do, and the extent you can reasonably accomplish the session's goals. Reviewers will also be looking for how you are engaging the participants in the session.

Participants will be stepped through the process that is implemented in the classroom and will carry out the same exercises as students who have been engaged in this process.

Timeline	Activity
5	Overview of the project and the literature
15	Participants formed into teams and carry out a first team-building exercise (choose a team name)
20	Participants carry out the classroom "minute paper" exercise to identify individual, team and educator responsibilities that will lead to success in a course
25	"Minute paper" responses are randomized across the teams
30	Teams analyze the results of the random selection of responses collected by the team
35	Team representatives report the results of their team analysis to the whole group
40	Facilitator explains how the data is analyzed for a particular class and discusses the findings in relation to the literature
50	Participants carry out a reflection exercise using the same approach implemented in the classroom
55	Facilitator summarizes the session and its outcomes

4) Application to Conference theme:

How does your session fit with the overall OBTC theme of *Navigating the Changing Currents*?

Developing effective classroom experiences for our students in the changing academic environment.

5) Unique Contribution to OBTC:

Have you presented the work in this proposal before? If so, how will it be different? Is this proposal under current review somewhere else? If so, please explain. How will your proposal be different for the OBTC conference?

This work has not been presented before. It is based on research carried out in March to June 2016 with classes in OB and marketing.

Similar work has been presented as a poster at the Australia New Zealand Marketing Academy (ANZMAC) Conference, 5 to 7 December 2016, Christchurch, New Zealand. That presentation drew on results for a marketing class using teamwork. Results from that research will be used to illustrate the use of this process for students working in teams.

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