# MOBTS International Conference

## Sharing Best Teaching Practice, Building International Networks

## June 28-30, 2018

Title: Baiting the hook for learning: When learning for learning's sake is not enough. A

novice lecturer's experiences of managing experiential learning in large groups

Theme: Large Group Teaching

Format: Round Table Discussion

Title:

Baiting the hook for learning: When learning for learning's sake is not enough. A novice lecturer's experiences of managing experiential learning in large groups

Abstract:

This paper discusses my experiences of implementing a flipped classroom approach to lecturing Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) to a large class, over 420 students. I had planned to utilise an experiential learning style to engage the students by enabling them to construct a wide-ranging understanding of both the theoretical and real world aspects of managing people. However, under expectancy theory, the students perceived the lack of grades for adopting a more 'hands on' approach to the experiential learning plan as pointless and unbalanced. Comparisons to outcomes from other modules entrenched this view.

Keywords: Motivation, Large Group Teaching,

Introduction

Ever increasing class sizes, reduced resources (Moore-Cherry & Gilmartin, 2010) and the different learning expectations of the "millennial" generation (Mohanna, 2007) have transformed the context in which we, as university lecturers, must deliver our modules and classes. This new context would suggest a student demand for new forms of delivery of our course material, such as through a combination of traditional and electronic media, and a flipped and blended learning approach (Moore-Cherry & Gilmartin, 2010).

As a novice Human Resource Management (HRM) lecturer, I intended to use my own professional and academic experience to share theoretical and real life knowledge and experiences of management, and in particular HRM, with my students. As they are final year students, I had hoped they would have the experience and maturity to allow a 'flipped' classroom approach to my HRM classes. This should lead to a "more active student experience" (Butt, 2014, p.33) within the class and "engage the students in an experiential learning style" (Butt, 2014, p.33). The 'flipped classroom' model, first introduced by Baker (2000), transfers "the delivery of material outside of formal class time (through the use of extensive notes, video recorded lectures and other appropriate means) and using formal class time for students to undertake collaborative and interactive activities relevant to that material". Experiential learning is a form of learning that assists students in applying their knowledge and conceptual understanding to real-world events and situations, with the lecturer acting as a facilitator for the students' learning (Wurdinger & Carlson, 2010). During the actual 'face-to-face' time in the lecture hall I planned on focusing the emphasis of the class on case studies and problem based learning, designed to simulate real-world situations (Ginns & Ellis, 2007). I believed that this would allow students to construct a wide-ranging understanding of both management and HR theories, as well as starting to develop some understanding of the real world experiences of working with and managing people. This was,

and is important to me because I believe that knowledge and learning are NOT 'things' I can give to students, but that students must construct their own knowledge and learning. This does not mean that the lecturer has no role in the individual's learning, but it is the individual student that 'does' the learning. In other words, I subscribe to the view that each person must play an active role in creating his/her own learning process. It was this view that influenced how I tried to manage my early HRM lectures.

However, in practice the format I had devised for the HRM module did not run as I planned. I had believed providing elements of autonomy and experiential learning would be the 'hook' I needed to engage the students. The importance I placed on students wanting to learn, for learning sake, was misplaced, with many of the students' need to maximize their exam results superseding this. The students tended to adopt an instrumental attitude to the module and the work it entailed. Many students were in a quantitative race to access places on corporate graduate programmes, and learning for its own sake did not play a role in their needs or wants. These students considered elements of the 'flipped' classroom as superfluous work. The students formed this view because I had not incorporated in-class participation into the final grading system for the module. In other words, only learning that contributed to the final grade was considered important and deemed worthy of effort. It seems the hook for learning needed the bait of a grade to be enticing to the student.

For many students assessment is the main driver of their education. At this stage it is worth noting that without assessment much of our planned learning would not take place (Race, 2006). It is also 'critical to the learning process' (Edutopia, 2008) that students are assessed and receive feedback on their performance, development and learning. However, the level of the final grade has become for many students the 'be all and end all' of their third level education. In the first lectures of the SHRM module, I lost count of how many times I

was asked 'how exactly is the module to be assessed?', or 'will this be in the exam?' Unfortunately, due to my inexperience these warning signs went unheeded.

I have found that the form of assessment used in each module will, for the student, define and prioritise what is important to engage with and learn, and therefore may dictate how much time they spend on learning in each module (O'Farrell, 2005). Assessment can be viewed in two forms, one as a form of threat, where the fear of failing an exam, or not 'making the grade' 'coerces' the student into learning, or two, as a form of motivation, where the desire to succeed and do well in whatever form of assessment used, motivates the student to learn. As a social constructivist, I believe the second option is how education should take place. However, my early experiences implied that for this to work there has to be an extrinsic motivation in the form of a contribution to the final grade. I still believe, when implemented in a formative and effective manner, assessment and feedback can motivate students to learn, and that the student will see the assessment and feedback as an effective part of their own learning process (Race, 2006).

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications

Developing an "understanding of student motivation is crucial in developing methods of enhancing student engagement" (Moore-Cherry & Gilmartin, 2010, p.337). What motivates students to engage and learn? Is it the race for grades to obtain that position on some graduate development programme? Or is it more intrinsic for some? There is an abundance of scholarly work and theories on motivation, and its influence on individuals' behaviours, such as Maslow (1954), Herzberg et al. (1959), Vroom (1964), Alderfer (1972), McClelland (1961) and Adams (1965). This paper utilises Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory to unpack the effects of planned educational practices on student motivations to learn. Expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) has had a large influence in the study of work motivation (Van Eerde

& Thierry, 1996) and consists of three concepts: Valence - Instrumentality – Expectancy. Expectancy is defined as the subjective probability of increased effort leading to increased performance (Vroom,1964). Vroom (1964) defined instrumentality as the confidence an individual has in that their improved efforts or performance will be rewarded. Finally, Vroom (1964) defined valence as the value, importance, desirability etc. an individual attaches to the reward or outcome. Expectancy theory explains how the level of a student's motivation towards learning depends on "the strength of the student's expectation that learning is accomplishable and that learning will result in a valued outcome" (Hancock, 1995, p.174), In the HRM module the valued outcome was the final grades for the module. Expectancy theory demonstrates the strong connection between grades achievable and the amount of work needed to achieve those grades. According to Vroom's (1964) theory, a student will apply more exertion when they believe that their increased effort will result in a higher grade. However, if the student does not expect to receive an increased grade for their efforts, they will become demotivated and withdraw some or all of their effort to study or learn. Vroom's (1964) theory would seem to suggest difficulty with motivating most undergrad students to learn for learning's sake.

Session Description.

I would like to open the round table discussion on how we can restore some intrinsic motivation for learning, one in which students will find a self-fulfilment value in their learning (Race, 2006). How can we motivate large classes, beyond dangling grades or the fear of failure in front of the class? How have other academics dealt with this issue? Are we now just part of the race to provide better organisational employees? How, in classes containing 400-600 students, can we provide a form of assessment that truly assesses the students' learning? These are the main questions that I would like to discuss with my peers at

the round table. Among this group I would suggest including a number of new lecturers (like myself), as well as a number of our more experienced peers.

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