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Innovative Methods of Teaching Business Responsibility: Examples from European Business Schools. (0036)

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Under the restraints of capitalism the responsibility of business towards its consumers and society is not always guaranteed, which has led to a wide discussion on the need for teaching ethics in business curriculum. This paper is based on a review done for an EABIS funded project on the use of innovative pedagogies in teaching Corporate Social Responsibility in European business schools. The review identified a range of pedagogies and material being used to teach CSR and analysed these educational strategies within the broader academic literature on learning and teaching in Higher Education. This paper will share some of the outcomes of this investigation exploring two key questions: What innovative educational strategies are being employed in the teaching of business ethics? What are the key issues that need consideration so as to determine whether innovative pedagogies have a positive impact on student learning?

'Innovative Methods of Teaching Business Responsibility: Examples from European business schools',

Introduction

In recent decades there has been a drive to place corporate social responsibility (CSR) at the heart of business strategy. Although the definition of the term varies within Europe: CSR has been referred to as 'a sound business practice', 'a framework of regulation', and has even been looked at as a provider for 'ethical guidelines for developed countries to work in the developing world'. In education efforts have been made to 'mainstream' CSR teaching in Europe (see Matten and Moon 2004, (Aspen/WRI: 2003). This paper is based on an evaluation done in 2008-2009 at the University of Nottingham for an EABIS funded project on the use of innovative pedagogies in teaching Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in European business schools. The evaluation identified a range of pedagogies and material being used to teach CSR and analysed these educational strategies within the broader academic literature on learning and teaching in Higher Education. This paper will share some of the outcomes of this investigation, exploring in particular two key questions: What innovative educational strategies are being employed in the teaching of business ethics? What are the key issues that need consideration so as to determine whether innovative pedagogies have a positive impact on student learning?

Innovative Methods of Teaching CSR

The following cases were selected as examples of emerging models of pedagogical innovation in teaching business ethics by our project partners in the Copenhagen Business School and DIOS Consulting:

- The Value Exercise, ESADE, Barcelona.
- The Innovation Jam, IBM, London.
- The Theatre Play, Copenhagen Business School, Copenhagen.
- Value Exercise in a Multicultural Class/Group Context- Using Cases, Movies, or Theatre Plays, INSEAD, Fontainebleau.
- Paradise Island Role Play, Nottingham University Business School, UK.

From these case studies our evaluation team in Nottingham identified a range of pedagogical approaches and learning methods being used to teach CSR which were classified into the following categories:

1. Pedagogy: Deweyan Methods of Experiential Learning. Learning Methods: Theatre/Cinema; and Role Play.
2. Pedagogy: Reflective Thinking Through the Use of Socratic Dialogue and Discussion. Learning Methods: Case study, Reflective practice, Role Play, Theatre/Cinema, On-Line Learning.
3. Pedagogy: Education Through Art. Learning Method: Theatre/Cinema, Role Play.
4. Pedagogy: Didactic Learning. Learning Method: Lectures.

A variety of pedagogical approaches and learning styles have been adopted in these business school courses. These methods include not only traditional, didactic approaches like face-to-face lectures, but also stimulation exercises aimed to facilitate thinking and reflection through the use of role play, group discussions, and practical exercises. Also, there are combinations of factors that determine variances in student learning depending on the choices made between:

1. The use of technology or face-to-face learning.
2. Individual or group work.
3. Academic theory/conceptual learning and/or practical skills based approach.
4. Student experience and background.
5. Teacher's experience, teaching objectives, and personal views.
6. Role of the facilitator in guided learning or individual work.
7. Mixed or single methods of teaching.
8. Degree of focus on inter-cultural issues in teaching social responsibility.

These varieties of learning methods are an outcome of recent researches in teaching business ethics and suggest that there is a wide range of methods that are seen as suitable for teaching CSR. This poses the question of whether subjects like ethics are not amenable to traditional linear teaching processes and can benefit from student learning activities which involve active contextualised settings. This may be seen to fit with the argument that taught programmes in business responsibility should allow students to develop skills for 'practical wisdom' (Leonard and Swap 2005). In the wider literature about teaching at this level Martin in his work *Opposable Mind* argues the need for 'integrative thinking' that comes from providing students with well grounded conceptual and experiential knowledge.¹

There is however, very little published evidence to suggest whether or not any substantial learning takes place in teaching ethics through either innovative methods or the more traditional ones. Where evidence of impact does exist it is often limited to 'student satisfaction' evaluation data, which is not a particularly robust measure of the real success or otherwise of a teaching innovation.

Outcomes and suggestions for future research

Building on the EABIS funded study our evaluation team is presently involved in a more in-depth study of the role play *Paradise Island* in the Masters in Business Administration (MBA) programme at the Nottingham University Business School. The methods used for the evaluation of this role play are: observation and video recording of teaching sessions; pre and post-session questionnaires to match individual responses (of students); and post-session interviews (with staff and students). Some key issues emerging from this ongoing research are differences in cultural views and experiences of students in relation to their engagement with CSR across companies and countries. Also, most students prioritise job security and career progression in spite of their interest in learning CSR. In terms of a teaching tool the role play exercise is useful to gain key business skills like negotiation, leadership, and communication skills.

From these studies we can suggest the following check-points which must be seen as only a guide for those interested in using creative learning strategies in teaching business ethics which may have generalisable use across different disciplines.

- What is the desired outcome to say whether a pedagogy is innovative or not?
- Is there evidence of theoretical knowledge being combined with experiential learning, dialogue and discussion?
- Are the learning tools innovative and is there a constructivist approach to enhance student learning?
- Finally, is there a focus on the student understanding rules, or ethical concepts through critical thinking? Is there deep or surface learning?

References

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