

Psychological Empowerment of Students Using Cross-Pollination Class Projects

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Abstract

Over the course of the past two semesters, experiential cross-pollination projects were incorporated into the classroom in a small (1100 students) private university's Marketing Education program as a means of empowering the learner to develop cross-functional skills. This report highlights the second cycle of cross-pollination projects (Fall 2014), which involved traditional discipline-related classes [Marketing and Advertising]. In this cross-pollination project, seven teams from a Principles of Marketing Class developed and administered an on-campus survey of the Freshmen Class regarding attitudes toward their recent college selection process. Upon completion of the survey, the Marketing Teams compiled the collected data and provided a final summative Marketing Research Report to four teams from the Advertising class. Using the Marketing Research Report, the Advertising Teams developed and formally presented four unique Advertising Campaigns designed to increase the University's appeal to the 2015 class of graduating seniors, to a panel of university administrators. Completing the cross-pollination process, prior to presenting to the administrative panel, the Advertising Class presented their respective plans to the Marketing Class for critique and evaluation.

While the results are of a qualitatively anecdotal nature, this study intuitively concluded that the self-efficacy associated with student psychological empowerment is beneficial to student learning. Further the cross-pollination class approach engaged student team skills and developed communication competencies needed in the contemporary job market.

Keywords: Student Empowerment, Classroom Learning Strategies, Marketing Education

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Introduction

Delivering graduates with “soft skills” who are comfortable working on cross-functional teams and capable delivering a final product appears to be a worthy goal of higher education if the needs of contemporary business are to be met (Wiseman, 2013)(Johnson, 2011). Conger and Kanungo (1988) suggested that empowerment is an intrinsically valued concept, which enables workers to finding meaning in their work. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) further stated that the individual's intrinsic value associated with psychological empowerment consists of the following four scholarly accepted dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. Meaning refers to an individual's perception of the goals, objectives, and values of the work based on the individual's own value systems. Competence or self-efficacy refers to one's perception of his or her ability to complete the work. An individual's ability to control their work is considered Self-Determination and Impact refers to the extent to which an individual can affect the results of an organization's or groups work, all of which have intrinsic value and are satisfying to the constituent.

Intuitively, one would suggest that self-efficacy through psychological empowerment of students through this form of cross pollination experiential learning can only have positive benefice to the student and the system overall. Therefore, the general notion of preparing university marketing students with applicable skills to meet the demands of the marketplace seems ubiquitous in today's tight labor market, and what better way to prepare students to the rigors of the business world than placing them in experiential psychological empowerment scenarios based on their ultimate success through learning processes. Developing a classroom learning environment, which is both useful in developing these adaptive and collaborative skills as well as being pragmatic, would seem to be an ongoing challenge of college educators (White, 2013). Prior to the Spring semester of 2014, the notion was considered that a variation in the traditional team concept in the form of cross-pollination (cross-class) experiential learning might empower students to contribute to the learning process. While an inter-class cooperative project may have been tried before, the literature seems to yet be proffered. This particular project (Fall 2014) is the second such effort in which our Principles of Marketing class and Advertising class have been partnered on a single endeavor.

Project Development:

In an attempt to replicate the business environment which requires creativity, cooperation, time management, and accountability, the following cross-pollination class project was developed. With an end game of developing an Advertising Campaign which would attract graduating Texas high school seniors in the class of 2015 to our university, the first stage of the project was for the Principles of Marketing (POM) class (28 students) to develop a survey which would give insight into the college decision making process. For the purposes of this project, it was quickly determined that the most accessible and logical source of information would be in fact our own freshman class. Upon the suggestion of a POM student, it was decided that the school's required freshman inter-disciplinary classes (IDST 1301) was the best viable method of administering the survey to the majority of freshman on campus. The POM class formed teams (7) which developed questions that were included in the survey. The contributions of the various teams were formed (by the

instructor) into a single page survey which could be administered within the target time of fifteen minutes. Survey in hand, the POM teams were assigned one of 17 classes to contact, schedule and administer the survey. Two weeks later, all but three surveys had been returned and the POM teams sorted and compiled the data. Each team assimilated a portion of the survey and produced a summative of the results. These summative results were combined (by the instructor) into a final Marketing Research Report which was delivered to the anxiously waiting Advertising Class (AD) of 14 students.

Following an in-depth analysis as a class, the AD teams (4) began the process of developing ideas through several idea-storming and sound-boarding sessions (with the instructor). The formative AD team discussions were conducted in isolation as the final product was to be original and unique. After three weeks of preparation, the final AD campaigns were presented to (and evaluated by) an Administrative Panel (which included the Provost, VP of Marketing, VP of Student Enrollment, Dean of Professional Studies and the Assistant Vice President of Student Enrollment). As a rehearsal for the final presentation, each Ad team was required to present their plan to the POM class which had provided the original data. As part of their grade, the POM class was required to evaluate each of the Ad Campaigns. The following comments are provided as supporting evidence of the effectiveness of this Cross-Pollination project.

Supporting Evidence of Teaching Effectiveness

Student Remarks Regarding Cross-Pollination Projects:

Marketing Students:

Cody S. - "The marketing research was very fun to deal with in how we got to survey freshman on why they came to Schreiner in order to [provide a] platform for Advertising."

Lauren P. - "My experiences with the Marketing Research Project were very interesting because being a graphic design major I had never done something like that."

Tawny P. - "I feel the marketing research project was quite demanding for the short amount of time we had to put it together."

Marshall M - "The marketing research project differed in comparison to my other projects in the sense that it directly applied to what I was learning in each class period. I could see the strategies and terms that we are being told to develop in the research that I was doing... You also could not wait till the last minute to do these projects, they took time and preparation and true research to understand the concepts. I liked them because they were things that I might actually use in my adult life. Some class projects and research papers seem not as important to me because I do not see myself applying them to what I am going to do, but these projects allowed me to explore areas I was uneducated in and have a better sense and understanding of how they work."

Hannah M. - "... I thought it was a little more fun than the other LBD [Learning by Doing Projects] projects because we got to be creative with the questions instead of just researching something and talking about it. As opposed to other classes, I liked it because it was different and it is something that we got to see the results of. I feel that many projects that we are required to do in school do not serve any purpose other than to teach us something (which I know is valuable), but I liked that this project allowed us to see actual results of the work that we put in."

Kathryn K. -"I really enjoyed doing the marketing research products, it provided me with an idea of to expect in my upcoming classes and also in my major. Gathering information, finding out what the freshmen thought, and how to give a formal presentation these are all things that I definitely appreciated while taking this class. Each project served as a learning tool for me in on how to become more successful in major. And what's expected from me in class and in a possible career."

Bradley H. -"The marketing research project was the first and only project that I have done here at Schreiner that has the potential to actually effect the university as whole. I find it quite interesting that just helping develop a questionnaire and disbursing the surveys could have a dramatic impact on Schreiner's future admissions. I think this project was much more hands-on than the other LBD projects we did primarily because we actually did something that someone would do in an everyday business environment."

Sofia G. -"When my team chose to come up with questions for the freshman survey, we took into consideration about what we thought as freshman, and what other recent freshman thought. After we came up with the questions we submitted them. When the survey was created we had to go to freshman IDST classes in order to collect the information needed for the results of the survey. This was a very big product because it used so many people to conduct the survey, and to take the survey. This differs from other classes because typically in my past research projects the information is right in front of you, but for this project I had to go out and find it."

Ian B. -"The marketing research project was interesting as it used actual stats to find information and be used for real world purposes. The project using actual data for a(n) easily seen objective was good as it allows the lesson to be seen in a real-world perspective. This creates more interest in the project as the aims and results are tangible. Most projects I have done were hypothetical scenarios that are removed from the student's day to day life. ..., this was also different as we got to see what the data was used for. Most times when I have given data for projects the data goes away and I never hear of it again. Seeing the data being used gave it a weight I have not seen in other projects. The project was a good way to see how marketing influences thoughts in the world, how it is done, and how all these independent ideas are put together to create a plan.

Advertising Students:

Brian A. –“The advertising plan and campaign we had to create this semester was probably one of the most challenging projects I have done since beginning college, but it was also the most fun and rewarding. One of the challenges that we faced as a team was deciding how to best translate the results of the survey conducted by the marketing class into a viable, and realistic advertising campaign that we felt could really work if it was implemented. Another challenge was deciding on a unique theme and slogan for our campaign that reflected some of the best aspects of Schreiner University without sounding cheap or contrived. Our team met several times outside of class and communicated via email and text on a daily basis with new ideas and improvements for our campaign. To prepare for our formal presentation in the marketing class we created a PowerPoint of our presentation and rehearsed in the library the night before. After our first run-through we fixed some of the problems we found and smoothed out our transitions and met one more time the morning of our presentation. All in all this was the best group I have worked with since coming to Schreiner University and I think we all thrived on the competitive aspect of the assignment. It felt like an example of what might be expected of us when we actually get jobs in our field so I enjoyed the opportunity to explore my more creative side as well as improve my presentation skills.

Laurel B. –“My experience during this process was honestly a challenging one like most projects in your class. You want us to think and gain experience which is something that was definitely done. We gathered the survey that the marketing department (class) created for us and summarized that information to fit what our twist on Schreiner would be. We then furthered our research and went to Harper High School in Harper, Texas. We asked a senior class if they had thought about college and of course all of them had but when it came to if the students had thought of Schreiner only 1 student raised his hand because it was close to home. The others students didn't want to come to Schreiner for that reason, it was too close for comfort. We created a Prezi presentation and created a very watered down theme and a very unprofessional promotional video to send to H.S. counselors. With the practice round we found out how much improvement we needed to cover and improve on our video and theme. We then regrouped and improved on our presentation and fixed our video so it was more professional looking. Because I experienced two similar projects with a practice and a final round I was more comfortable going into the presentation but with any presentation still nervous. Over all I think this was a good project so we could get a rough kind of feel for how an advertising company campaign would work.

Christopher B. –“Challenges: The most challenging of this project was just being able to get everyone on the same schedule and making sure that everyone was communicating. Moreover, working within a group that was focused on other projects other than the advertising project. Other challenges working with the group was just trying to get everyone to be business professional with this project, such as dressing out for the presentation. Available time: The time that was given was adequate. However because it was the end of the year it made it harder with all the other projects and issues going on.”

Melanie D. - "When my group first started to develop our advertising campaign, we evaluated what the marketing surveys said about the current freshmen. Our goal was to build an advertising campaign that will expand the enrollment at Schreiner University. We aimed most of our advertising campaign towards the San Antonio area, hill country, because more than half of the freshmen were from those areas. Our main goals were to expand on Schreiner's academic excellence, create SU brand awareness, while expanding enrollment at the same time. We came up with three concepts such as high school night, an Instagram scholarship, and football games. All these ideas are cheap, easy, and can reach a big audience in a short amount of time. My group didn't have many challenges, because we all bring different ideas to the table. During the process of creating our campaign, we had to brainstorm several times, which was the creative and fun part of this project. The practice presentation was very successful for my group. It gave us the option to see what we needed to change for our formal presentation, as well as what we were doing well. Overall, our formal presentation went well. We presented our ideas very professionally and confidently. Our judges ended up rating our campaign the best out of everyone else. I'm really happy that I was assigned this project, because it made me realize that I might want to be in the advertising world."

Cole F. - "...the formal presentation was not as bad as I had expected and although we did change the video and fix the target audience. I don't feel we had a stronger enough plan, like how are we going to get more high school seniors to enroll, then what can we use or do to entice them as well. It was a good group, and the presentations went over well, just didn't perform like we could have. I thought it was a good idea to keep other groups in the dark or not know what our goal was and how we presented to the 4-5 members who are not students. It showed how once can improve on the original goal and continue brainstorming to achieve the specific goal. Laurel, Ashley, and I were able to get the plan together and work together with little to no conflicts."

Tim F. - "The Advertising Plan that we worked on for Schreiner University previously had many challenges and a lot of processes that we had to work and figure out. The challenges were actually the plan that we made itself and having to figure out ways to out beat our competition to have a better plan than them and finding a way that would advertise Schreiner University out to people in the best way possible. The available time that we had was more than enough to develop our plan. When we gave our formal presentation to the marketing class, we were a little shaky and did not perform our best presentation. After doing so we got the necessary tips to do better next time and then when we had to present in front of higher officials for Schreiner University in the main conference room in the Library I was excited because of where we were presenting. It felt a lot more professional and like I was actually in a real life job setting presenting in front of my boss or different executives. We improved substantially in our final presentation where we looked at all the Schreiner University Officials, didn't turn our back once, explained our advertising plan better, and slowed down our speech and learned that if you just take the extra time to sit down, work out all the kinks, and

really pay attention to the work that you are doing and the work that we have to present then we can finally come together to make something extremely creative and worth everyone's time.”

Katherine H. -“I was very proud of my group's performance overall. I felt that the available time given for the project was sufficient because my group was very dedicated to our ideas and the project campaign itself, so we got a start on it as early as possible. I felt that we were able to tie our project into all the correct advertising themes such as promotion, publicity, brand awareness, and sales incentives. We did face challenges during the process such as time for a successful number of group meetings (considering it was due around the same time other final projects were due), but it worked out in the end. Our practice presentation went smoothly, but we were short on time and didn't get to touch on everything as fully as we had hoped or answer any questions from the class. It was also too close to the actual presentation date, so we didn't get the greatest amount of feedback from the marketing class, but were told that it was positive so continued on with no severe changes. The venue of the formal presentation was a great change because it made us feel professional, and we had wonderful high-tech technology at our fingertips. We were able to access all aspects of the smart board technology and I felt it really added to the overall effect. I feel my group did great in our presentation and we displayed this because of the practice we put in. I really appreciated my group's efforts and have never had a group before care as much as I do myself. We were given some feedback on our campaign slogan R15Eabove, in which we should have clarified whether this was planned to be a one year campaign or not, but they really seemed to enjoy our high school night for the Hill Country and that made us proud. This was my favorite project of the year because it really gave us free reign to be creative and feel important. It was like a real-life situation in which we could be professional adults in an advertising agency of our liking and that made it fun.”

Ibhar H. -“The developed advertising plan for this class was quite challenging. It was a major project that required a lot of time and commitment. However, during the same period of time I had to work on big projects for entrepreneurship and internship class. The first stage of development was interpreting the data given by the marketing class. It seemed difficult to put together all the relevant information provided. After this point, my team and I decided to base the campaign on a current one that Schreiner has already. The goal was to improve the current one by adding a few more things. The time to work on the project was fairly good. It was plenty to work on, however due to the projects due in other classes it seemed difficult to manage everything at once. The practice presentation was very helpful because it helped us realize that we needed to take a different direction with our campaign. We started from scratch and after consulting with Dr. Coleman we came out with "just a hop, skip, and jump". This seemed like a catchy phrase that could be used to add different ideas at the end of it. BY doing this, we were representing a major factor that attracts students to Schreiner (distance/location), but at the same time we were adding more ideas to the campaign such as sports, friendly campus, small classes, etc. The formal presentation was very well planned in my opinion. ...Some of the improvements I would recommend will be more

direction on what was expected from the advertising plan. The requirements that we needed to have, and not putting so much importance on how the class evaluates because it can be biased sometimes. Making it a little bit fairer. I learned a lot of about the process and development of an advertising campaign and it will benefit in my future career.”

Steven H. -“Challenges- The main challenges we faced when coming up with our campaign was narrowing it down to one single campaign. We had many good ideas when we presented to the marketing class but we were scattered all over the place. The time given was sufficient but having this project right after our entrepreneurship project was tough. The entrepreneurship project took a lot of our energy and focus away from this project and I feel we did not perform our best because of it. I like the practice presentation the marketing class and it help a lot with narrowing down our final project. I also like it because you get to present in front of people that you don't know. Having the marketing team come and watch the advertising class present was a great idea. From the notes that I received we gave them several ideas that they were interested in implementing. The formal presentation was very professional and presenting it in the Scarle Philips room [Formal Board Room] made it that much better. I believe that people that attended were very pleased and it will definitely help bring them back for future classes.”

Landry N. -“When facing down this project, it seemed that the main challenge was time management. I'm not sure what the business majors had to face down, but it seemed that for me as a Communications major I had everything due on the same date. So on top of this project being due, I had 3 others due around the same time for my Communication classes alone. ..., I will say that if we were to improve anything, I would say that we need to improve how we presented our presentation (my dress code, and my partners' method of speech delivery) and we also should have been more clear about what we wanted to give the target audience and what we wanted our plan to be about; I think one of our main problems is that we decided what our slogan was, but we all had different interpretations of what the message of our slogan was, and that was evident in what we were presenting. If I am to be honest, I thought that our Advertising Plan and Presentation overall was a disaster. The only positive that I can come up with is that our plan to hit up the smaller schools and communities, put something in the target audience's hands, and to target Houston and Austin was a good plan. Unfortunately, we couldn't put a face or identity to the plan.”

Luis S. -“It was a little time consuming but that's just because a couple days before our entire group had a major project as well in another class and had to put both projects in our time. Other than that I think it went smoothly with our group ... developed [a program] that was called hop, skip and jump. In the practice presentation we didn't do terrible, we had many great ideas but we were not executing them correctly which what lead us to re due our ad campaign to hop, skip, and jump. Our formal presentation went great. I really believed that the judges had great things to say even though your idea wasn't the best. Our grouped improved greatly from the practice to the formal presentation in the practice like I said before we could not execute on one idea

which lead us to confusion to many people. In the formal we executed the hop, skip, and jump and the judges and also Dr. Coleman were pleased on our ideas and how we presented them. The positives of this project that we actually presented to the ad committee here at Schreiner they were open to many ideas and we also got a taste like what we will be expect in a job we might have later.”

Ashley W. - “For this project the challenges where simple compared to other projects I have worked on. My group was really good about coming up with ideas for the problem and finding cool and unique ways to go about answering the questions that were presented in this project. The only real challenge we faced during this was sometimes people had to leave our meetings early and sometimes a person forgot to show up/show up late due to the fact that they had forgot but overall the challenges faced where no problem for my group. For available time, my group was very on top of finding a good time for everyone to meet during the week and on the weekends. The practice presentation and the formal presentation were also very easy with this group. We all knew what we were supposed to talk about and what slides we had to cover so presenting to the Marketing class helped because we than took from that what needed to be fixed for the formal presentation which wasn't all that much. The venue for the formal presentation was, in my opinion, very different and creative. While most formal presentations for a class would have been in front of your peers in the class, this formal presentation was in front of important people at the school, who could then use our ideas.”

Panel Member’s Comments

“Very well thought out – w/ different geographic. Your tag line is better than our current ad agency. Good presentation style - professional.”

“Love the Tag Line - needed to explain why it might work. Nice Spanish additions. “Hop Skip and Jump - novel concepts.”

“Nice Presentation Skills! Why focus on communities where we already recruit from?”

“Slogan Tied to year requires change.”

“Excellent Presentation, excellent research. High School Night at Basketball game - great idea! Fear the Neer! Rise above Yes! “

“Well organized love the stats! Love the concepts. Well Done.”

“What did the survey say? Would have liked to hear from all the members at the beginning. Pay attention to body language and apprehensiveness. My Computer will not play a CD.”

“Good slogan.”

“Great idea. Needed additional research. Ambassadors goes to each school- love the idea. Brand Ambassador- Very Creative.”

“Liked the Brand Ambassadors idea in the schools. Not so sure about the CD. Printed plan needs to be more professional.”

Conclusions, Limitations and Final Thoughts

From previous experiences of conducting cross-pollination projects (in the Spring semester of 2014) which involved external clients, the lesson learned that planning

and timing is critical was quite helpful. Team projects are generally unpopular with the students and require a tremendous amount of coaxing and encouragement (Kinser, 2007). The problem of loafers and skaters (low participation) was curbed by 360 degree team evaluations, as well as the audience evaluations [calculated into the final grade] and stern looks from the professor, but did not keep several teams from straddling deadlines and preparing last minute work. Similar to the previous cross-pollination project, the proper allowance of in-class time became increasingly apparent as students struggled to complete work within timelines established and communicate with each other (this improvement from the first go-around was mentioned in the student's comments). Class schedules, as well as general time constraints created several issues with the cooperating teams' ability to communicate or be present during the formal presentations. Notably, there was one student who breached the prerequisite requirement and ended up collecting data and participating in the Ad Plan, but this was the lone exception, and while caused the student much angst, did not bother me near as much as it did the first time it happened in the Spring semester.

As would normally be expected, some of the groups delivered more than my expectations – choosing to interpretively assess what was needed, while others simply settled on the more obvious. The risk of inviting in Administrators into a class project was not lost on me, however, this cross-pollination project was personally quite rewarding as the Administrative Panel provided a final piece of affirmation with their comments, adulation and suggestions for expansion and continuation. In addition, the project also seemed to help establish a tangential relationship between upper level students of the AD class and the sophomores of the POM class, as well as inaugurate some sort of expectation of junior-senior level classes to come for the underclassmen. Interpretively, the students were challenged by the project with some saying it was the most significant project they were assigned thus far in their college career. On this you will have to take my word as only a few alluded to this in their comments. Perhaps they were just angling for a higher grade.

While the results are of a qualitatively anecdotal nature, this study intuitively concluded that the self-efficacy associated with student psychological empowerment is beneficial to student learning. Further the cross-pollination class approach engaged student team skills and developed communication competencies needed in the contemporary job market.

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