INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

A Hybrid Environment for Student Success: Combining the Worlds of Business and Education

Such jargon as "performance-based compensation," "skills-based pay," broadbanding," lateral moves," and "flattened organizational charts" indicate that the business world is giving "A's" to valuable employees. Businesses are not looking only at the number of clock hours or job descriptions of employees, but at the levels and ranges of their productivity and skills. Instructors, of course, have always judged student performance by awarding grades. Now many colleges are being tested on their performance and their funding levels are indicative of their "grades."

Education is no stranger to business strategies; colleges already acknowledge work-related experience in awarding credit hours, team assignments, off-site assignments, teleconferencing, and distributed learning. Real-time experiences have students leaving their classrooms for "city as text" courses, ghetto enrichment experiences, and internships in external work environments.

Will this trend of cross-fertilization between education and business increase student motivation and performance in college and later in the work environment? Will this "partnership" produce learning strategies that can be implemented in classrooms? Most importantly, what skills will the student "product" need to possess? The answers to these questions can help describe a successful hybrid (business and education) classroom.

In this hybrid classroom environment, students would be expected to process information as would employees. Ideal students would accept responsibilities for their education as though "their jobs were on the line." Students would have to identify learning tasks, develop the scope of learning tasks, assess accurate and complete information concerning these tasks, and organize and integrate assessed information into projects that display appropriate outcomes of learning tasks. If such students could be developed, is the goal worth working toward? If the answer is yes, then responsibility for producing them must be borne in part by instructors and learning institutions. Some of these responsibilities could play out as follows:

Information access and evaluation. Students, as well as instructors, will need to be information providers. Students will be expected to find, evaluate, and synthesize materials for their own learning experiences. Students often are more able to find information than they are able to evaluate it. Students who are adept at getting information from the Internet, for example, will have to be instructed in discerning trash from treasures. In the ethics course that I teach, critical evaluation of data and arguments coincide with evaluation of ethical content of material. Students would be able to take a course in learning to access and evaluate electronic information. Instructors, in general, would have the responsibility to drive students toward current resources, not just on reserve in the college library but in files in the global village. For example, having a "hot room" wired for access to the Internet during class time would allow the instructor to illustrate sources of information other than those in textbooks.

Responsibility for primary sources. Students should use primary source materials that will prepare them to assess data, develop critical perspectives, or practice skills encountered in disciplines. Medical journals, business spreadsheets, and governmentally published reports would allow students to encounter actual and multidimensional field experiences. In ethics courses, for example, instruction could include actual court cases to illustrate reasoning courts might use to identify moral issues.

Problem solving. Knowledge bases should be used in courses as materials for problem-solving and developing skills. Exercises using these knowledge bases should be specific and goal-oriented (to learn to graph results of experiments, assemble materials for debate, etc.). Goals should be shared—that is, students need to see that skills, not simply grades, are important. Language and math skills (desired by businesses who want their employees to be able to write or read technical manuals) will be directed toward problem solving. Connecting and/or juxtaposing ideas in order to solve problems and demonstrate results of projects will determine grades (not simply finding one right

answer on a multiple-choice exam). Student-initiated publications, art shows, and student government will be considered practical, not peripheral, problem-solving experiences.

Technology support and market research programs within educational institutions. Empowering students to take responsibility will be undermined unless institutions can furnish technological support, including people, programs, and equipment that support student and instructor initiatives. Many educational institutions have shown technological acuity in their market research programs (some more sophisticated than those used in business) that track graduates of their programs and the demands of the marketplace, and that give institutions feedback and information for improving the curriculum.

Town-gown interaction. More task forces of business and learning institutions will identify and demonstrate the advantages of town-gown relationships. At Santa Fe Community College, for example, special training programs have been designed for community businesses. Corporate interest in schools, such as those demonstrated by GTE and IBM, could be duplicated on a smaller scale with community businesses' participa-

tion. [With a grant from GTE, students in my ethics class were able to participate in a televised panel discussion about life and death issues. Since my students did not want to seem naive while talking with professionals on the panel, they diligently studied their readings, primarily primary materials including law journal articles.]

Despite a number of significant educational reforms, students often arrive at higher learning institutions without requisite preparation, motivation, or knowledge. Perhaps the ideal responsible student is to remain a figment of educators' imaginations. In the working world, however, those workers who most approximate this ideal will be the ones taking home paychecks—and will be the ones remembering and advertising their alma mater.

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Nursing Clinicals: For Fun and Information

As instructors of a sophomore-level nursing class, we decided to schedule a clinical out-rotation day to inform the public about the health resources in our county, increase community awareness of our successful nursing program, and develop a professional image within our community.

We wanted our nursing students to visit health care resources within the community, develop their interaction skills, increase their knowledge of the county's resources, and have fun, too. It was decided that students would travel in groups of three or four throughout the county, each group pursuing an area of the members' collective interest. They would arrange appointments for conducting interviews, discuss the health resources with the staff of targeted facilities, and write articles about the resources available at various sites. Six hours or one clinical day would be allotted to finishing the project.

Allowing students to choose an area that most appealed to them appeared to be a useful strategy. Choices included: (1) acute care, (2) emergency care, (3) health department services, (4) home health agencies, (5) mental health services, (6) outpatient health services, (7) school services, (8) senior citizen services, and (9) social services.

The students created a booklet of valuable information about available resources, designed the cover, and titled the book, *The Potpourri of Resources of Breathitt County;* the instructors edited and organized the students' work. The local newspaper published a feature article about the project and spread the word about this gift to the community. The book is available in the Breathitt County Library and the Library of Lees College Campus of Hazard Community College as a public resource document.

We plan to include adjoining counties in future projects in other classes, increase communitywide participation in our nursing program, and continue to train professional and knowledgeable registered nurses for the community.

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