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Border Crossing: Active and Deep Learning in a Large Global Consumption Class

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Key Words

Active Learning, Consumer Studies, Deep Learning, Global Studies

Abstract

This article describes how a class on global consumers was transformed into an interactive class using both active and deep learning techniques. Good teachers understand that to achieve a level of lasting learning, students must be engaged on many levels. While much has been written about active learning, the concept of deep learning is limited, particularly when applied to a large class setting. This paper describes active and deep teaching strategies and provides learning exercises for their integration into the classroom. Analysis of open-ended student responses and end-of-semester quantitative responses indicated that active learning enriched the learning experiences and resulted in a deeper understanding of key concepts, thus supporting the idea that these techniques can be incorporated into a large lecture setting with relative ease and can make a significant impact on learning.

Good educators believe that to achieve a deep, lasting level of learning, students need to be engaged on many levels. Yet, all too often, we fail to help students make connections between the content and their personal lives. As educators, we need to make our teaching more relevant for an increasingly global world, while at the same time we must develop critical thinking skills in our students. One way to do that is to move from the traditional teacher-centered classroom to a more experiential, or active, format for learning (Bean, 1996). The purpose of this paper is twofold. The first purpose is to present action-based learning techniques that can be implemented in a large classroom. The second is to propose a set of deep-learning techniques that makes the learning experience a lasting one.

For most professors of textiles and apparel, teaching is a double-edged sword. On one hand, we want to share with our students our own understanding of the concepts and theories that we use for our particular subject matter. The content that professors of clothing and textiles teach in our respective subject areas is intellectually rich and often based on scholarly research. This may result in the "sage on the stage" (Crutsinger, Tas, Hawley, Dickenson, 2000) approach to teaching, which requires strong lecture skills to keep students interested. Many of us are "irresistibly drawn to the podium" (Jensen, 1997, p. 102) with prepared monologue in hand, anxious to fill the minds of our students with our wisdom. Lecture courses place students in a passive role; thus, students often become receptacles into which we pour our knowledge. On the other hand, teachers also want to help students develop and use their own understanding of concepts and theories so that they can become strong contributors to the world in which they live and work. This requires them to develop critical thinking and information search skills. In other words, students are required to become active learners, not mere vessels of knowledge. While teachers are concerned with the content of textile and apparel courses, there must be equal concern with the process of learning, for they are intertwined.

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According to Csikszentmihalyi (1988), it is the student who determines whether an activity will result in flow or in boredom or anxiety. It is not in the instructor's power to guarantee that students will experience a lasting learning experience. Instructors can, however, create classroom conditions that will increase the chance that the students will have that lasting experience. The discussion below shows how students can explore the connections between their local and global worlds by merging content and process in an action-learning course on global consumers. One goal for a large class should be to engage students so that they achieve what Grauerholz (2001) refers to as a deep learning experience, where students are engaged at emotional, physical, spiritual, and cognitive levels of learning.

Textile and apparel consumption behavior has been transformed into a global economic, political, social, and cultural complexity. "In fact, no sector of commerce is more global than textiles and apparel" (Dickerson, 1999, p. 5). Students are faced with controversial and often antithetical topics of global consumption including human rights with regard to the manufacture of goods, the export of jobs to low wage countries, and the demise of cultural nuances. At the same time, they learn marketing tactics and strategic business management processes intended to increase corporate profits. Students often become confused by these seemingly polarized viewpoints of both sides of the issues.

A primary objective of this class was to help students understand the powerful impact globalization has on shaping their lives and transforming the world around them. International competition, downsizing, niche markets, environmental concerns, and government policies affect students' lives in many ways, from the prices they pay for clothing to the careers they will pursue. Unfortunately, many students lack a solid understanding of global commerce. As Heuberger, (1999) claims, "the more students know about the differences between people and culture, the more effective they will be in all parts of their lives" (p. 107). These words have validity in a world that is constantly changing. As relevant as it is to highlight diversity, it is equally relevant to teach the commonalities of what

it means to be human—"those universal truths about ourselves that assign oneness to all people in all parts of the world" (Hicken, 2002). The typical lecture format does little to bring what is global to a local understanding. Abstractly talking about theoretical concepts often creates resistance and seldom brings close the cultural ideas and nuances of people from different cultures. Often students cannot, or do not, try to understand the differences from a perspective other than their own.

If students are to grasp the importance of global consumption, it is imperative that teachers pose global problems in an action-based format rather than the sage on the stage approach. In the model presented here, there is no dichotomy of teacher/ students. Rather, everyone is on the same level, simultaneously playing both teacher and student roles (Freire, 1993). Everyone learns together and teaches together. Results of this active-learning, problem-posing based model show that students take responsibility for their own learning and for the learning and teaching of others.

Challenges

Challenges arise when conducting action-learning courses: (a) How is the action-learning/problem-posing model implemented in a large section class? (b) How do we undo the lifelong passive-learning socialization that students have undergone? (c) How can students learn important knowledge or facts without lecturing? and (d) How do we help students clarify their own values and sense of responsibility in a profound, meaningful, and lasting manner? Action-learning techniques can be facilitated somewhat easily in small to medium classes, but when class sizes grow to more than 100 students, challenges become greater. Because it is more common to lecture and give objective tests in large classrooms (McKeachie, 1999), this paper suggests ways to incorporate active learning into the large classroom.

About the Course

This three-credit, semester-long, upper-division course was taught at a land grant Midwestern

university with an estimated 30,000 students. The course met two times a week and had 119 students, with 98% clothing and textiles majors. Most students were juniors or seniors. The course addressed the cultural impact on consumer behavior in the global marketplace. Course content focused on consumer behavior theories and culture frameworks, integrated with critical and creative thinking processes, to develop a deep, global perspective that is sensitive to diverse consumers' needs and preferences for products and services in the global marketplace. Additionally, the cultural environment and its impact on multinational decision-makers were addressed. The course emphasized the need for cultural awareness in an Internet marketplace that transcends national borders.

International pair-ups. At the beginning of the semester, each student selected a country to focus on during the semester. Students were charged with finding someone from that country to interview (131 countries were represented in the international student population). At first, students were apprehensive because many did not often interact with international students. With assistance from the International Studies Center and the English as a Second Language Department, we were able to connect students with international students. More detailed assignments and activities regarding these pair-ups follow.

The Learning Process

Through strategies that promote active learning, Bean (1996) argued that students become more engaged, think more powerfully, and argue better. The global consumers class in which this model was implemented used a variety of pedagogical techniques that engaged students and encouraged both active and deep learning. The variety of pedagogical techniques included experiential learning (Kolb, 1984); videos and films as supplements to lectures (Valdez, 1999; Smith, 2002; Bluestone, 2000; Gregg, Hosley, Weng, & Montemayor, 1995); idea-generating processes (Correll, 1997); collaborative models of group learning (Williamson & Rowe, 2002; Cohen, Lotan, Abram, Searloss, & Schultz, 2002); guest lecturers (Mooney, 1998); cre-

ative presentations, and the Internet (Clark, 2001; St. Amant, 2002).

Although much research has been done on learning styles (Terry, 2001; Kolb, 1984; and Keefe, 1987), Grinder (1991) noted that few students are exclusively one kind of learner. Instead, a blend of techniques should be implemented to maximize learning for the wider range of learner-types found in a larger class. Furthermore, Schroeder (1993) revealed that students preferred active involvement in direct, concrete experiences at the time of learning, rather than learning concepts to apply later.

Deep Learning Philosophy

As they learn, students should develop a profound, meaningful, and lasting shift in attitudes, emotions, and values. Grauerholz (2001) suggested implementing a holistic approach that requires students to explore connections between the course content and their own lives, in particular the distinctions between their own values and their sense of responsibility to society. A deep learning experience is at once emotional and intellectual, social and personal, physical and mental, unique and shared. First, deep learning begins with a classroom environment that fosters affect and emotion. Second, students have multifaceted, active lives with different intelligences, experiences, and values that can engage all students more deeply. Third, teachers must validate students' experiences to learn *with* students instead of teaching *to* them. Fourth, the deep learning environment exists in a safe-haven environment. All students are acknowledged and legitimated when their voices are heard and their experiences shared. Finally, when students perceive problems and offer solutions, a deeper level of understanding is accomplished (Bean, 1996).

This class raised issues that stem from cultural differences, which challenged values, feelings, and emotions of students. It is important to limit the level of challenge to avoid violating students' boundaries. At the same time, a teacher who implements deep learning must be prepared to deal with emotional, spiritual, and moral dilemmas that arise about human rights, racism, and family structures.

Table 1. Active and Deep Learning Techniques

Active Learning Techniques

Activity	Description
Mapping it out	• Today's students are often challenged when trying to locate certain parts of the world on a map. This activity forced students to study the world map and become better acquainted with the location of countries.
Understanding American Values	• To understand the values of people from other countries, students must recognize their own values, ethnocentrism, and cultural relativism. This exercise challenges students to recognize our cultural values by pointing out the "bizarre" behaviors that Miner (1956) shared in his *Body Ritual Among the Nacriema* article.
Understanding culture and consumer behavior	• After learning the definition of a human universal, students broke into small groups and were challenged to come up with a comprehensive list of universals. The groups' lists were then compiled into one set and discussed in terms of accuracy based on the definition. • Three frameworks of culture were presented in mini-lectures. Students chose a preferred framework to analyze topics, videos, or lectures based in subsequent semester activities.
Deep Learning Activities Mind mapping	• A useful tool that allows students to analyze connections within data. Mind mapping can be used as a group activity to see connections on a topic.
Teaching anecdotally	• Sharing stories, experiences, and personal challenges humanizes educators and makes learning more meaningful for students.
Internet Activities	• Students searched and found sites for online international newspapers published in English. They monitored the papers and learned more about consumption in their research country. • The I-Consumption projects challenged students to find topical articles on the Internet. Students wrote reflective comments about the articles.
The Final Project	• After students have conducted research (interviews and experiential learning activities) with their international pair-up, they were asked to develop a computer-generated brochure that is targeted to a chosen audience. The brochure reflected the consumer behavior of people from the country they researched. This exercise also challenged students to hone their computer skills.

Class Activities and Techniques

Table 1 lists a variety of both active and deep learning techniques implemented in this class. These activities and assignments were structured to create an open, dynamic, and interactive learning environment.

Active learning activities and exercises. A learner-centered approach to teaching global consumers required activities that encouraged students to look beyond their ethnocentric understanding of the world and challenged them to critically approach cultural differences and human commonalities. Activities were selected to help students build on

their understanding of a particular culture. The following multifaceted activities were designed to lead each student to deeper understanding of the culture under study.

Mapping it out. The first exercise of the semester involved a world map. Students placed on a world map color-coded stickers that indicated the origins of items they had consumed during the previous 24 hours. Students then plotted on the same map those places they had visited or lived. Students discovered that more than half the items they consumed were manufactured in Asia, although only a few students had traveled or lived in Asia. Conversely, most international travel had been to

Mexico or Europe, though only a few items had originated in Europe. This exercise led to a discussion about the implications for our economic connections and awareness of other cultures. Students were told that the midterm exam would include world geography questions.

Understanding American values. To understand cultural nuances of other countries, it was important to focus first on our own cultural values. The semester began with a discussion about American values and their meaning to us and to others. Students broke into groups and listed at least 10 consumption nuances that are uniquely American and attributable to our cultural values. "Body Ritual among the Nacirema" (Miner, 1956) was distributed to the students with instructions to note the publication date, read the article, and write a 2-3 page paper that described how they think the Nacirema have advanced today. The purpose of this exercise was not to assess whether students "got it" (Nacirema is American spelled backward). Instead, the intention was to stretch the minds of students, assess how cultures evolve, and examine cultural practices that seemed bizarre. Even those students who did not "get it" wrote creative papers that dealt with such topics as evolution, cultural materialism, and cultural influence from outsiders.

Pair-ups (student-to-student and regional groups). After students selected countries of focus, they were grouped according to world regions (e.g., Southeast Asia, Central America, Middle East). It has been found that through the creative exchange of ideas "groups can solve problems and construct knowledge beyond the capacity of any single member" (Cohen et al., 2002). Throughout the semester, students gathered in their world region groups to compare and contrast research findings. At the end of the semester, each regional group presented their findings to the class. In addition, students paired with neighbors to share research and discover deeper, more meaningful cultural nuances about consumption practices.

Understanding culture and consumer behavior. Students were introduced to the topic of culture and consumption in different ways. The goal was to present basic background theory and material, and, more importantly, to help students understand connections between their own lives and that of people from other cultures. Understanding the differences and commonalities can facilitate deeper understanding of global consumption. To accomplish this, short lectures were presented on cultural frameworks (Hamilton, 1987; Hofstede, 1992; Victor, 1992), human universals (Hicken, 2002), and international consumer behavior (Cateora, 1993). Six videos supplemented the lectures (see Table 2 for a list of useful videos). Bluestone (2000) argued that films with conceptual links to curricular content enhanced active learning. To encourage deep learning, essential points and concepts were introduced, and students were asked to evaluate the application of concepts to situations depicted in the films. A worksheet was distributed before the films, and students wrote notes and reflective and/or critical comments about each film.

Table 2. List of Useful Videos for Teaching Global Consumers

U. o. S. C. S. Sciences (Producer), & Archer, D. (Director). (1997). A World of Differences: Understanding Cross-Cultural Communication [Motion Picture]. (Available from *The Nonverbal Workshop Series*. Santa Cruz: University of California Extension. 2000 Center Street, Fourth Floor Berkeley, California 94704).

B. B. Corporation (Producer). (1996). *Nike* [Motion picture]. (Available from Branded: The Power of Brand Names Series. Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 743 Alexander Rd., P. O., Box 2053, Princeton, NH 08543-2053).

Green Lion Productions (Producer), & Reed, J. (Director). (1992). Escaping from History [Motion picture]. (Available from The Human Race Series: Bullfrog Films, Inc., 372 Dautrich Rd., Reading, PA 19606).

B. Corporation (Producer). (1998). Human Rights in China: The Giant Awakes [Motion picture]. (Available from Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 743 Alexander Rd., P. O., Box 2053, Princeton, NH 08543-2053).

C. I. L. Corporation (Producer). (1993). Paradigm Pioneers. [Motion picture]. Available from Discovering the Future Series: Charthouse International Learning Corporation, 21 Fiber Ridge Circle, Burnsville, MN 55337-9838).

P. M. International (Producer). (1999). Secrets of Chinese Economy. [Motion picture]. United States. (Available from The Celestial Empire--Path of the Dragon Series: Landmark Films, Inc., 3450 Slade Run Drive, Falls Church, VA 22042).

Internet-based activities. Four times during the semester, students were asked to conduct topical searches on the Internet with a focus on the consumption patterns in their country. Topics for these assignments included rites of passage (e.g., marriage, birth, death) and their impact on consumption, global trends, global consumption, marketing, and fair trade (Littrell & Dickson, 1999).

Students were encouraged to use the Internet as a creative tool for gathering information. One Internet-based activity was adopted from the *Chemistry Is in the News* project used in a beginning chemistry class at a Midwestern university. "Newspapers are the mirrors of society and newspaper articles therefore are the sources which allow you to construct the important relations between society [and global consumption]" (Glaser, 2004). The Internet was used to conduct additional country research by reading English versions of the major newspaper from that country. Several international news portals were suggested for finding newspapers in English, although other sources were acceptable.[1] Students were also encouraged to use the Internet to establish pen pal relationships with people from their countries of study. Establishing online pen pals allowed students to gather additional information and perspectives through interaction with "real human beings in the real world" (Grauerholz, 2001).

Book review. Students read *The McDonaldization of Society* by Ritzer (2000). Students wrote individual reviews that reflected ways McDonaldization had impacted both global consumption and their own lives.

Deep Learning Activities and Exercises.

It is possible to develop deep learning by *what* and *how* we teach. Implementing exercises or activities in class does not in itself assure deep learning. An educator needs to create a classroom environment that encourages deep learning.

Teaching anecdotally. Self-disclosure fosters connections between teachers and students. Beck

(1983) found that students reported self-disclosure humanizes teachers and contributes to learning. Additionally, self-disclosure has been found to contribute to openness and unity, validated diversity, and a more meaningful course (C. Israelson, personal communication, May 2002). The self-disclosure method is similar to the teaching anecdotally method (Ford, 2002), in which well-told, personalized stories are applied to topics. Ford argued that well-told stories may relate to classroom material more effectively than lecture presentations.

Mind mapping. Very few students had conducted research-oriented interviews prior to this class. Therefore, a key assignment was to introduce basic research interviewing techniques to students, who paired-up to practice. Students used an interview schedule to guide their data collection. Students then used mind-mapping techniques (Goldberg, 2004) to hone their interview guides. A discussion about research ethics, active listening, and probing concluded the exercise.

Students created an experiential learning activity by pairing up with their international student partners. According to the Fontana & Frey (2000) unstructured interviewing technique, a researcher who wants to learn about general topics will avoid a formal approach to interviews in an "attempt to understand the complex behavior of members of society without imposing a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry" (p. 653). Participation activities—sharing recipes and meals, socializing, shopping, or watching television with international partners—deepened cultural understanding gathered from interviews.

The final project. By the end of the semester, each student had paired with an international student and learned more about ways their culture had impacted consumption behavior. Students had also worked in regional groups to assess cultural nuances and consumption behavior within the regional groups. Each regional group then presented their findings in a 20-minute oral presentation at the end of the semester. Finally, each student prepared a cultural brochure (Clark, 2001) focused on an identified target market and information about the culture.

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[1] *http://www.onlinenewspapers.com/* and *http://newsdirectory.com/*.

Practical Suggestions for Teaching in an Active Learning Classroom

One satisfying aspect of teaching in an active learning environment was learning along with my students. My own international experiences are limited, so I learned from student presentations on global consumption behavior. This was liberating because I did not need to present myself as the expert on every country. Conversely, as students became experts in their country of focus, they gained knowledge and therefore confidence in understanding their researched country.

Set the stage early in the semester. Let students know that you expect active participation. A syllabus that states this expectation will reinforce this requirement. In the syllabus, describe specific active learning assignments.

Develop grading rubrics that require active learning. Include active learning as a component of grading policy.

Make sure that active learning experiences add value to the class. What is the purpose of the activity? How will activities enhance student understanding? Will active listening activities clarify concepts?

There is not time both to continue with traditional lectures and add active learning activities in the classroom. Select material best covered in a lecture and material best suited to a learning activity. Students who engage in activities will uncover knowledge and better understand concepts previously presented in lectures (McClanahan & McClanahan, 2002). Shorten the more critical lectures and bracket with active learning assignments.

Debrief after active learning activities. Putting closure on an activity encourages students to make the connection between critical concepts and the activity itself. For example, ask a spokesperson from each group to give a brief report of the small group discussion. Prompting may be necessary to keep the discussion on task.

Interact with students during the active strategy. Particularly in a large class, this provides professor/student interaction that is rare in traditional lecture format. Move around the room and interact with students on a more personal level. This strategy encourages students to perceive their professors as approachable. Students who are unlikely to ask questions in a large classroom setting may be more comfortable when the professor is accessible to small group discussions.

What should be done with non-participating students? Invariably, some students will fail to become engaged in active learning exercises, even if the importance of participation is outlined on the syllabus and reiterated in class. Reasons for non-participation may include cultural differences, shyness, or different learning styles. Seek out the loners and encourage them to get involved. Also, incorporate active learning exercises (e.g., journals and mind-mapping) that do not require group participation to accommodate students who work better on their own.

Teaching a large class is more time-consuming than teaching a small class. When active learning is added, the time requirement can be overwhelming. Teachers may provide supportive and accessible out-of-class opportunities (e.g., office hours and special group meetings). There are ways to adopt action based and deep learning exercises into the classroom without restructuring teaching style.

Select a strategy compatible with your teaching style and comfort level. For example, role-playing games are out of my comfort zone; therefore, I do not include role-playing in classroom activities. Study the topics for the semester and select corresponding learning strategies that will help achieve your goal. Try your plan, reflect on the results, and make adjustments accordingly. To avoid losing key insights, reflect on the strategy immediately after each class. Make and file references notes for subsequent classes.

Findings and Next Steps

Student learning was evaluated by a number of methods. Midterm and final exams tested basic

understanding of culture and consumption theories. Students were also graded on the Internet assignments, film critiques, Ritzer book reviews, Nacirema writing projects, final brochure projects, group presentations, and a variety of short in-class assignments. Though difficult to determine if deep learning was achieved, student comments indicated this course had a profound impact on their understanding of global consumption. Perhaps more important, comments suggested that the class had encouraged students to embrace cultural differences and recognize cultural commonalities.

Observations and evaluations[2] of this class compared with previous semesters ($n = 5$) suggested this method of teaching increased learning experiences. The synergistic application of teaching techniques made the class unique and offered students a different way of learning from the lecture approach.

Material eliminated from lectures often emerged during learning activities. The number of questions, number of different students who asked questions, and quality of questions all increased, in comparison with previous classes. Students who broke into discussion groups stayed on task and discussed topics at even deeper, more intimate levels.

Pairing students with international partners improved students' understanding of cultural differences and commonalities applied to global consumption. Students learned not only about specific material, but also about the creative and cognitive processes that helped them understand culturally imposed ideas, values, and social structures that impact consumption. Learning was not merely active, but interactive.

Observations further suggested that students not only preferred active and deep learning, they found it beneficial. Students performed as well or better

than previous semesters with the mean score of the semester improving from $M = 2.89$ to $M = 3.04$. This format will be used in future semesters and will be implemented in other courses with large enrollments. The action learning model proposed in this paper builds on Bean (1996) and McClanahan & McClanahan's (2002) active learning approach as well as Grauerholz's (2001) work on deep learning.

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[2]In the class of 119 students, 92 (77.3%) reported that active learning improved their understanding of global consumption, compared with traditional lecture format. Student evaluations improved over previous semesters for *overall teaching effectiveness* (from $M = 4.3$ to $M = 4.9$ out of a possible score of 5.0) and for *class as a whole* (from $M = 4.4$ to $M = 4.8$).

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