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Making sense of academia–industry cooperative teaching

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ABSTRACT

Based on our experience, we present the sporadic, complementary, bi-relational, and tri-relational approaches to academia–industry cooperative teaching. We suggest the tri-relational approach, in which the relations do not simply refer to how the teachers' expertise and actions interrelate but also to how the teachers' expertise and knowledge relate to student knowledge. Without a tri-relational account of cooperative teaching, the process will generally ignore the required integration and communication, which instead will be minimised or marginalised and thus fail to focus on how knowledge is presented to students in relationally constitutive ways.

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1. Introduction

Cooperative teaching between academic teaching faculty and industry experts is considered to be one viable approach to bridging the divide between theory and industry practice (Ruhanen, 2005). By involving non-faculty experts from industry, hospitality education can avoid becoming disconnected from real-world applications. Although full-time academic faculty may have a background that includes industry experience, that experience may become a detached story that grows outdated over time (Ladkin & Weber, 2008). Both the academic faculty and the invited industry expert engage with classroom challenges and bring a different dynamic to the delivery of theory and practice. The academic faculty can learn from the practical knowledge, experiences, and resources that the expert may offer (Phelan, Mejia, & Hertzman, 2013), and students are exposed to substantial industry cases and real-world operations and trends that are of current interest (Kang, Wu, & Gould, 2005).

Although some people perceive the importance of cooperative teaching that involves an industry expert in the classroom, the micro-dynamics of academia–industry cooperation, which constitute the real learning process, have received little attention. To bring the academic and industry worlds together and ensure quality learning, Taiwan's government has encouraged universities to establish academia–industry partnerships and has supported proposals of academia–industry cooperative teaching by offering funds. Since 2010, we, the academic teaching faculty, have experimented with the cooperative teaching approach and have used it to innovate our teaching practices. This approach assumes that hospitality knowledge is not sufficiently delivered as an abstract enterprise of teaching fundamentals and principles of knowledge, but rather as an enterprise inherently connected with practical contexts and situatedness (Rogoff, 1984). By acknowledging the

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situatedness of knowledge, this pedagogical approach “removes the assumption of broad generality in [students’] cognitive activity” (Rogoff, 1984, p. 3) and instead focuses on the students’ ability to generalise their learned knowledge and skills to real practices and situations so that they know what their knowledge *actually means*.

Based on our experiences and long-term commitment to using this cooperative approach in our classroom practice, we present in this paper our thoughts and conceptualisations on the development of the practice of cooperative teaching between academic faculty and industry experts. Our conceptualisation of the process of academia–industry cooperative teaching, despite being constructed from our personal experiences and reflections, implies a desire for truth, with the universal intent of reaching “a hidden reality” (Polanyi, 1962, p. 311) that grounds personal knowledge development and “saves personal knowledge from being merely subjective” (Polanyi, 1962, p. 65).

We present, in turn, what we call the sporadic, complementary, bi-relational, and tri-relational approaches, and we finally suggest using the tri-relational approach to achieve a valid and sound practice of academia–industry cooperative teaching. For the sake of consistent presentation, we use the example of an academic faculty cooperating with an industry expert in one of the authors’ courses, Food and Beverage Cost Control, without considering other forms of team teaching, such as the partnering of one faculty with multiple industry experts. This example allows us to keep the descriptions of the characteristics of the four approaches focused and to provide a sense of progression.

2. The sporadic approach

Cooperative teaching (sometimes known as team teaching or collaborative teaching) may be used “for one lesson, several lessons, or an entire course, depending on the subject matter, course objectives, and funding levels” (Wenger & Hornyak, 1999, p. 326). Some research has examined a variety of cooperative styles of teaching (e.g., Bauwens & Hourcade, 1995; Cook & Friend, 1996; Helms, Alvis, & Willis, 2005; Wenger & Hornyak, 1999). Cooperative teaching can be used in rotational forms (by alternating teachers) or parallel forms (e.g., both teachers teaching together in a classroom). In the parallel form, one may take the primary teaching role whereas the other observes or plays a supporting role (Cook & Friend, 1996; Helms et al., 2005). Alternatively, there may be one teacher who lectures on theory while the other supplements with details or examples of specific applications (Wenger & Hornyak, 1999).

As an example, take the course Food and Beverage Cost Control (FBCC), which is required for sophomore students in the Department of Western Culinary Arts. The course is 2 credits and requires 2 academic hours per week over the course of an 18-week semester. The purpose of the course has been to provide both general and practical knowledge about how food and beverage cost control operates in restaurants. The focus includes food and beverage cost, sales forecasting, pricing strategy, menu analysis and profit and loss statement analysis. In 2010, the primary driving force behind the course teacher’s decision to find and partner with an industry expert was the fact that the expert can provide concrete industry cases and current applications that are not typically found in academic textbooks. The industry expert, who at that time we viewed as a guest speaker (McCleary & Weaver, 2009), serves as a supplement that could benefit students by capturing the actual goings-on in industry practice.

In this approach, communication between the faculty and the expert is minimal because it is the academic faculty who primarily develops the curriculum objectives, syllabus, topics and assessments. The expert may come once or sporadically. In the FBCC course, for instance, the industry expert may come to share his or her experiences with food material management without necessarily being aware of the curriculum objectives or the relevance of his or her speech content to those objectives. This form of cooperative teaching is similar to “parallel play” (Bingham & O’Leary, 2006; Kinnaman & Bleich, 2004, p. 314), in which the academic faculty and the industry expert, whether teaching simultaneously or alternatively, view the other teacher’s course content as outside his or her influence and control. The ability or willingness to move into and connect with the other’s content is lacking.

3. The complementary approach

In 2013, to enhance the quality of cooperative teaching, our university established a “Co-planning Curriculum” project. In this project, the cooperation between academic and industry teachers must go beyond the sporadic approach, requiring closer involvement between the two by engaging in “team play” instead of “parallel play” (Dumpe & Ulreich, 2001). In the FBCC course, the expert, who is expected to come more than once or on a regular basis, is viewed as a participating “member” in the course, rather than a “guest,” which differs from the sporadic approach. The academic faculty and the industry expert participate together in pre-discussion and planning before the class begins, and the expert’s views on the 18-week course content and design are considered. The pre-discussion and planning processes aim to (1) ensure a common understanding of the curriculum objectives; (2) determine which curriculum topics and issues to address; (3) set a teaching agenda that specifies who will present each topic; (4) identify possible educational and industry resources and assistance; and (5) discuss the types of assignments and assessments that will be used to facilitate student learning (see Gray, 1989, p. 14; Wenger & Hornyak, 1999). In 2013, the FBCC course teacher and the invited industry expert co-planned the content for the 18-week course and achieved a consensus regarding the course objectives and teaching agenda. The expert, similar to the faculty, was aware that there would be a midterm and final-term assessment for evaluating student learning and performance. With explicit pre-discussion and planning, the relevance and consistency of the teachers’ teaching actions were ensured.

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