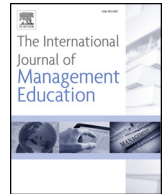


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Problem- and inquiry-based learning in alternative contexts: Using museums in management education



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ABSTRACT

This article describes a problem- and inquiry-based approach to teaching business model change, which is embedded in a museum-university partnership in Germany. The students concentrate on business model change in non-profit organisations in the public cultural sector, namely public museums in Germany. In this specific context, publicness implies that governmental bodies are more likely to determine a museum's strategic actions than market-based factors. Museums are distinct from other organisations, because diverse external stakeholder groups assess the cultural and economic value of their outputs. These outputs generate societal impact and are linked to the policy that a museum endorses. The chosen context enhances the university's commitment to community service because the students cooperate with a public organisation in its neighbourhood and develop implementable suggestions for business model change. Overall, the suggested format illustrates that partnerships with museums nurture impactful research and teaching in universities.

1. Introduction

Business schools are often blamed for providing management qualifications that drive students to seek for degrees and pursue individual wealth, status, and power (Koris, Örtenblad, & Ojala, 2017). Students might benefit from the application of knowledge in alternative contexts that require less instrumental logics, but management education rarely goes beyond profit-orientated organisations in the private sector (March 2007; Reedy & Learmonth, 2009). Based on the example of teaching business model change, this article suggests an approach that combines problem-based learning (PBL) and inquiry-based learning (IBL) and embeds it in the context of a museum-university partnership.

Management education faces many challenges. For instance, the acquisition of problem-solving skills requires the steady improvement of managerial thinking (Smith, 2005) and a setting in which team players and leaders can evolve (Peterson, 2004). Seminars and lectures must prepare students to pertinent societal needs and “Grand Challenges”. This requires teaching across disciplines and skill development rather than the acquisition of content knowledge (Annan-Diab & Molinari, 2017; Coombs & Elden, 2004; Currie, Davies, & Ferlie, 2016; Minocha, Reynolds, & Hristov, 2017; Ungaretti, Thompson, Miller, & Peterson, 2015). However, many teaching approaches in business schools emphasize the production of utility rather than wisdom. Students seize rare opportunities to engage in experiential and reflective activities that stimulate critical thinking and entrepreneurial spirit (Bissola & Imperatori, 2017;

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Cameron et al., 2009; Koris et al., 2017; Sherwood, 2004). Reasons for this development are the increasing mutual isolation of researchers in business schools and other disciplines and a strong focus on the private sector and profit-orientated strategies in research and teaching (March 2007). This situation is surprising because many business schools belong to universities, which traditionally engage in science and the production of wisdom. Teaching approaches should reflect that one of their salient tasks is to stimulate students' intellectual curiosity (Lazonder & Harmsen, 2016).

This article addresses this issue by providing an example of PBL and IBL in group-based projects in an unfamiliar context. In doing so, it contributes to our understanding of these types of learning in two ways. First, students concentrate on an ill-structured and relevant issue, which requires entrepreneurial thinking, an interpersonal, constructivist process, and active, student-centred learning (Chaharbaghi & Cox, 1995; McKinney, 2014). Specifically, they focus on business model change in public museums, which nurtures thinking across disciplines, because this issue is studied across, for example, strategic management, entrepreneurship, and marketing (Zott, Amit, & Massa, 2011). This feature enhances the effects of the aforementioned requirements.

Second, the chosen context further stimulates cross-disciplinary thinking, because the involved museums focus on either humanities or life sciences. In addition, museums are public organisations. Publicness implies that governmental bodies are more likely to determine a museum's strategic actions than market-based factors. They are distinct from private organisations, because external stakeholder groups assess the value of its outputs (Alexander, 1996; Arellano-Gault, Demortain, Rouillard, & Thoenig, 2013). Practices that students know from private companies are not necessarily suitable for museums. This feature encourages the transfer of knowledge from one context to another and its adaptation to unfamiliar circumstances.

Overall, both features enhance our understanding of how students contextualize their learning (Carriger, 2016; Sherwood, 2004). By adapting to an unfamiliar context they must question their current wisdom. Moreover, these features increase the likelihood that students engage in collaborative learning, because the chosen issue and context require the interpersonal exchange and combination of knowledge and skills from different fields.

2. Encouraging student-directed learning and scientific inquiry

2.1. Problem- and inquiry-based learning

Approaches promoting student-directed inquiry are well suited for ill-structured, authentic problems. Their solution requires commitment, the engagement in messy processes, and the creation of collective knowledge (Bissola & Imperatori, 2017; McKinney, 2014; Minocha et al., 2017; Peterson, 2004). These conditions are typical for PBL and IBL.

“PBL is an instructional (and curricular) learner-centred approach that empowers learners to conduct research, integrate theory and practice, and apply knowledge and skills to develop a viable solution to a defined problem” (Savery, 2006, p. 12). Students are confronted with ambiguous, complex and sometimes interdisciplinary problems, which serve as instruments for the acquisition of problem-solving skills instead of the simple application of previously learned knowledge (Chaharbaghi & Cox, 1995; Coombs & Elden, 2004; Garnjost & Brown, 2018; Smith, 2005). Lecturers act as facilitators, coaches, or tutors who support their students in the process of solving a “real world”-problem, rather than deliverers of knowledge who lecture to passive learners (Carriger, 2015; Coombs & Elden, 2004; Ungaretti et al., 2015).

PBL creates an environment, in which students are responsible for their learning process and collaborate with others in small groups (Savery, 2006). It helps students cope with uncertainty and the integration of knowledge from multiple disciplines, functional areas and sources; consider legal and ethical aspects; improve communication, leadership and interpersonal skills, and engage in self-directed continuous learning. It increases student motivation and the development of skills that are useful in their future workplaces (Paladino, 2008; Smith, 2005; Ungaretti et al., 2015). To accomplish these objectives, PBL must involve “placing students in a meaningful context in which they can solve a meaningful problem” (Sherwood, 2004, p. 537), such as a partner organisation of the university, that provides practice-relevant material (Smith, 2005; Ungaretti et al., 2015).

IBL is a problem- or question-driven approach that integrates inquiry in terms of student-led investigations in order to strengthen the linkages between teaching and research in universities. Forms of inquiry include, for example, literature-based research, data collection, research drawing on questions and methods pre-specified by lecturers, applied research addressing practical issues, simulations, and role-plays (Aditomo, Goodyear, Bliuc, & Ellis, 2013; McKinney, 2014). IBL resembles PBL. Both approaches draw on the Constructivist approach suggested by John Dewey, according to which learning will take place if learners are actively engaged in the process of developing an understanding of an issue (Carriger, 2015; McKinney, 2014). This active student engagement cannot only be stimulated by a practice-relevant problem in a business context, as PBL suggests. According to IBL, it can also be nurtured by an academic issue that places students in a situation in which they act like scientists and engage in inquiry in a group (Lazonder & Harmsen, 2016; McKinney, 2014).

“The primary difference between PBL and inquiry-based learning relates to the role of the tutor. In an inquiry-based approach the tutor is both a facilitator of learning (encouraging/expecting higher-order thinking) and a provider of information. In a PBL approach the tutor supports the process and expects learners to make their thinking clear, but the tutor does not provide information related to the problem – that is the responsibility of the learners” (Savery, 2006, p. 16). Lecturers using IBL provide guidance to their students. This includes, for example, heuristics and explanations of when and how to perform an action, prompts that remind students that an action is due, status overviews that reveal the progress made by the students, or scaffolds that involve that the lecturer performs selected parts of an inquiry. These forms of assistance aim at supporting the students to engage in scientific processes and acquire content knowledge and skills in science (Lazonder & Harmsen, 2016).

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