Teaching Globalization in the Broad-access Classroom:
Preliminary Observations

Diana Watts, Michael Carriger
Trinity Washington University, wattsd@trinitydc.edu, carrigerm@trinitydc.edu

Abstract
This paper provides preliminary insights concerning the design and assessment activities of critical thinking skills in the area of globalization studies set in the broad-access classroom. These activities are discussed from the perspective of two individual instructors' experiences with initial observations reported. The authors conclude that the "real" evidence to achieve this learning objective may only be evident once students leave the classroom and extend this ability to think critically into the domain of everyday experience.

Index Terms: **critical thinking, curricular design, broad-access education, globalization studies.**

INTRODUCTION

This discussion is drawn from an ongoing research agenda within the Business Department of Trinity Washington University intended to improve understanding of teaching strategies and learning outcomes to support broad –access education at the program level. The specific curriculum to be discussed here focuses on globalization studies within the Department of Business. It should be noted that the business program curriculum, in its entirety, was initially developed to be a new program offering at Trinity starting in 2007. From the outset, the decision was taken to develop a critical thinking focus rather than a concentration on pre-professional expertise.(Colby: 2011) Awareness of the significance of globalization and a commitment to challenge values such as "profit maximization" also inform the entire business curriculum. The broader research agenda concerns the relationships among this complex learning content (multi-disciplinary, holistic and emergent conceptual basis), the teaching strategies (classroom instruction/feedback) , assessment activities (electronic/ paper-based) and learning outcomes. Additionally, Trinity Washington's education is premised on providing broad-access education with the primary student demographic drawn from the Baltimore-DC public high schools. (Kirst: 2011)

RESEARCH

Globalization is the defining context of business and management but challenging to teach. There is disagreement in terms of content focused on area studies, institutions, sector studies (food, poverty, health) or some version of all of these.(Ardalan: 2009) Conceptually, it is also informed by a wide swath of disciplinary models drawing from economics, sociology, management, history and political science. (Steger: 2009) Additionally, there may be variable gaps in factual depth across all content areas and concept disciplines within any given classroom setting. Given this context, the overarching learning objective was to provide a classroom experience that would develop critical thinking skills including the ability to critique the models and assumptions being learned from a range of disciplines.

Critical thinking skills do not enjoy a common definition as noted by Bissell and Lemons. (2006) Referencing Bloom's taxonomy as a common starting point, the authors note that critical skills include application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation, but are premised on a factual basis that includes comprehension. (Bissell: 2006) Similarly, the ability to identify shared teaching practices, assessment activities or a recognized developmental pattern in terms of the skill sets, can be questioned. Nonetheless, given these caveats, the issue we will address here, is that of teaching and assessing critical thinking skills in the content area of globalization studies. The discussion below will describe two approaches. These should be viewed as classroom experiments. All courses were loosely based on this common learning objective (critical thinking) and shared (some) common assessment activities across these classrooms. However, the instructors were encouraged to develop their own teaching practice to be applied within this general framework. (appendix i)
The four courses included here are:

- BADM 210: Is Globalization Good?
- BADM 350: Understanding Global Institutions: The Business of Food
- BADM 330: Sustainability, Innovation and Green Business
- BADM 320: International Management

A total of fifty students participated in these courses over a period of four semesters. Samples of students' assessments

(primarily writing assignments) have been archived in MOODLE classroom portfolios.

TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING: EXPERIENCE OF INSTRUCTOR A

The critical thinking objectives for BADM 210 and BADM 350 are premised on students acquiring basic factual knowledge, developing insight into multiple social concepts, but most importantly exercising the preliminary capability to assess the underlying assumptions of these concepts/ models. This contrasts with Bloom's final set of cognitive skills in that it goes beyond evaluating the validity of the model to challenging the implied underlying premises. The design approach to this objective was twofold: a)to provide students a mapping exercise that identifies key actors and institutions; b) introduce multiple models for assessing and understanding the same or related social phenomena. For example, BADM 210 Is Globalization Good?, attempts to identify key global actors and institutions that shape the global environment. One assignment is for students to read accounts of life as a migrant worker in *Factory Girls* (Chang: 2009) This is primarily a journalistic account from the perspective of the young women working in the frontiers of new enterprise in China. The issue is to invite students to view these same "data" from an economic model, social/cultural model and even from an environmental science perspective. This multiple model approach seeks to provide student with the experience of limits to assumptions and the ways these shape the insights gained.

The assessment activities are incrementally developed to assign students increasingly complex levels of understanding in terms of the case being examined. (appendix ii) Short writing assignments submitted five times throughout the semester provide the basis for individual feedback and interaction with the student. Given the class size of 10-20 students, this personalized teaching can be conducted.
Inferences to link the critical objective/ assessment and learning outcomes are preliminary and based largely on classroom experiences: (appendix iii)

Observation 1: The classroom experience was central to guiding students for whom most if not all of the concepts and factual descriptive basis were rudimentary at the outset. The intention was to "catch" as many students as possible and not teach to the "top of the class" only. To do this, the classroom experience proved critical.

Observation 2: In both classes, it was determined that prior reading of the materials proved essential to introducing concepts/ideas into the classroom. Key concepts/ homework assignments that were essential to the lesson were assigned and graded. Reviewing the posted assignments permitted a quick intake of the "basis" for class discussion. The essential learning that occurred during the classroom lecture/ discussion could not occur without a fund of basic facts and basic understanding of the models discussed.

Observation 3: Feedback matters. The MOODLE classroom site permits interaction between instructor and student on a consistent and personal basis. This also permits interaction among students.

Observation 4: Multiple pathways into a narrative do not need to promote confusion. Initially, there was concern that students would feel overwhelmed by the depth and breadth of the undertaking. Providing clarity around expectations as well as iterative feedback, appeared to give the students confidence to tackle complex topics.

Observation 5: Honoring student insights and observations provide another way to entice students to think critically. Inviting students to choose a current documentary film and use their (new) abilities to deconstruct critical assumptions enabled them to recognize that critical thinking could extend beyond the classroom.

Observation 6: Critical thinking can empower students in terms of their own self-perception. This last point is offered more for purposes of discussion, however the ability to abstract and challenge assumptions of models provide students with a new perspective on their own personal ability to evaluate and come to terms with their own reality.

TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING: EXPERIENCE OF INSTRUCTOR B

For the BADM 330 and 320 courses, the focus was to create a hybrid between a traditional learning experience, captured by lecturing and testing and a move towards a more interactive learning experience, captured by a learn-by-doing or problem-based-instruction paradigm. This approach was based on leveraging Gagne's Hierarchy of Educational Outcomes.   Each course is structured to accomplish three objectives.   Students are expected to gain verbal information, which according to Gagne represents the language or the vocabulary of a particular subject matter and provides the foundation for all learning in a subject matter area. Students are also expected to learn intellectual skills, which according to Gagne represent the application of the verbal information to the particular subject matter area and represent the actual learning of the information or the ways in which the information in the course can be used. Finally, students are expected to exhibit cognitive strategies, which according to Gagne represent the application of both the verbal information and intellectual skills to read-world situations.

With these objectives in mind, each course is organized with weekly lectures providing students with the verbal information necessary to understand the subject matter and intellectual skills aimed at helping the students understand and integrate the material. The objective involving the acquisition of verbal information is assess through periodic objective quizzes – multiple choice, short-answer,

definitions, etc. The objective involving the acquisition of intellectual skills is assessed through mid-term and final subjective exams – short- and long-answer essay questions. Additionally, each course is fitted with weekly time to work on a real-world problem or issue which requires both verbal information and intellectual skills learned in the subject matter area. These real-world problems or issues can be worked on individually and/or in groups and in-class as well as out-of-class time is dedicated to their completion. The assessment of this objective is through an end of semester presentations demonstrating the various solutions that students have devised for these various problems or issues.

The ultimate goal is that, by the end of the semester, each student leaves the course with the basic knowledge of the vocabulary necessary to understand the subject matter, the ability to thoroughly understand and integrate the information presented in the course, and insight as to how this vocabulary, understanding, and integration can apply to the real world. Further, the hope is that by leveraging this process of gradually building the hierarchy of instructional outcomes the student will develop internal states that influence choices of personal action toward some class of things, person, or events. These are Gagne's Attitudes. In this particular case, the attitudes supported are attitudes of critical, value-based thinking when applied to the globalization of the business environment.

Observation 1: The classroom experience in these classes was also crucial as a means to support the learning of all students. The group presentation was a means to assess Gagne's intellectual skills was a integral component of this experience.

Observation 2: The verbal knowledge as assessed by quizzes and the integrated concepts as assessed by exams proved essential in these classes and laid the foundation for successful presentations showing integrated intellectual skills and application of the verbal knowledge and concepts to real-world scenarios.

Observation 3: The MOODLE classroom application was also a crucial method for delivering timely feedback that supported learning in these classes

Observation 4: Decided developmental progression was shown by students in these classes across the semester and in these upper-level students in comparison to newer students. The integration of verbal information and concept development seemed to have a cumulative effect in promoting the development of intellectual skills.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The similarities across this set of courses begin to provide insights into the types of course design and assessment that promote critical assessment of concepts and values. The next steps will be to provide a systematic review across the

assessment activities. However, there is an additional piece that may not be easily documented. This derives from the instructor using the classroom to engage students in developing an intellectual community. To make them aware that "knowledge seeking" is an endeavor that extends beyond the classroom. (Nakamura: 2005) It is this engagement that enables students to recognize the significance of critical thinking and suggests that the "real" evidence of this ability to think and assess premises may only be evident after leaving the classroom.

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AUTHOR INFORMATION

Diana Watts, Ph.D. Faculty, Trinity Washington University
Michael Carriger, DMgt, Faculty Trinity Washington University