Effective Teaching Strategies in Hospitality & Tourism Coursework Setting for Enhancing Student’s Involvement and Presentation Skill Development

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ABSTRACT

Presentation skill is both technical and practical in current workplace. In the hospitality and tourism setting, effective Presentation skill requires application of concepts and techniques as well as development of presentation skills. Academic studies in hospitality and tourism should impart knowledge and practical experience on Presentation skills. Traditional instruction may have limitations in addressing this need. Activity-based teaching targets knowledge building and application. The study reported on the interview accounts of students over their experiences of activity-based teaching in a hospitality and tourism presentation class. As the results showed that activity-based teaching significant learning outcomes and it made a strong positive impression on students. Students perceived activity-based teaching as an effective instruction in the class. Activity-based teaching is acceptable to students in Taiwan, contrary to a previous study. Applying activity-based teaching can improve the problem solving and as well as the learning process in hospitality and tourism coursework to thoroughly prepare students for fitting in future workplace.

Keywords: Presentation Skill Development, Hospitality & Tourism Education, Activity-based teaching, Teaching strategy application, Problem Solving Procedure

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1. INTRODUCTION

Powerful and persuasive presentation requires plenty of preparation in any kind of situation, especially in hospitality and tourism industry. Effective communication underlies successful business goal achievement (Guffey, Regin & Rhodes, 2010). Leaders may confuse instead of inspire the staff with poor communication. Grand ideas could get passed-over with unclear presentation. Firms may fail to influence consumer decision-making through offers that are weakly and vaguely communicated. To prevent these mishaps, the hospitality and tourism presentation class aims to hone the communication skills of students to make them effective communicators when they become executives, managers and supervisors, or business personnel. The tenets of Presentation skills are preparation and practice. Preparation integrates purpose and target audience characteristics to determine appropriate techniques. Practice builds comfort, familiarity and confidence. (Adler & Elmhorst, 2009) Ultimately, Presentation skills in the actual work setting depends on the effective application of presentation principles and theories. The academic environment is a venue for learning and applying Presentation skills theories and principles but practical knowledge only ensues if classes provide practice activities. The study reports on students’ evaluation of their experiences in a hospitality and tourism presentation class that primarily employed activity-based teaching to facilitate theoretical knowledge and practical learning of students. The evaluations informed on learning outcomes, impact, and effectiveness.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many previous studies show that activity-based teaching is a constructivist technique of instruction. Constructivism visualizes students actively seeking and building knowledge through participation in academic learning. Activity-based teaching supports students’ knowledge acquisition by providing sensory stimulus to facilitate brain functions in constructing meaning out of the experience. Activities that encourage student involvement in the learning process facilitate theoretical and practical lessons. (Levine & Guy, 2007)

Moreover, activity-based teaching can target various goals such as enhancing communication and people skills, innovativeness, problem solving capacity,
self-evaluation, reflection, group work, and leadership (Margaryan, Collis & Cook, 2004). The activities could be problem-based by using realistic problems for resolution to build knowledge and skills in handling actual problems (Macklin, 2001) in the business setting. Problem-solving knowledge and skills have widespread application in business. The activities could also be activity-based by recreating situations in the workplace to impart lessons (Hawkins, 2006). Work preparedness is an outcome of activities in class. Problem-based and work-based activities in class foster learning outcomes that contributes to students’ readiness for work. Specific activities can be individual or group and can take the form of role-playing, simulation, games, field exposure, or a combination of one or all of the above (Margaryan et al., 2004). The form of activity depends on the targeted outcome given the context of the class curriculum. Creative instruction that depends on teacher initiative (Lashley & Barron, 2006) enhances the activity-based teaching experience of students. The ability of activity-based teaching to augment the possible limitation of traditional instruction supports it effectiveness. Traditional instruction places full control of the learning process on the teacher (Chow, Howard & Lambe, 2008). The common teaching methods are lecture and textbook seatwork. These can provide sensory stimuli to mental processes in students and facilitate meaning construction. However, the stimuli may not be sufficient in supporting both theoretical learning and application. Traditional teaching methods may not sustain interest in the lessons to ensure retention and processing. The impact of stimulus could also decrease with repetitive teaching methods. Moreover, Presentation skills involves theory application and practical skills. Traditional instruction may not be able to support optimum retention of lessons as well as theory application and practice. Activity-based teaching can provide various sensory stimuli to improve cognitive stimulation during classes.

Therefore, on its own, activity-based teaching is effective by aligning with principles of learning. Learning is dynamic. Students need to participate in the learning process to construct meaning. Learning is a social process. Isolation of students by making them passive learners can limit learning outcomes. Interactive learning can enhance outcomes through information sharing and meaning construction from shared experiences. Learning is contextual. Theories are better understood when applied, which requires students’ participation. Knowledge develops overtime. To build knowledge, students should revisit, process, and test or apply ideas through
activities. (Levine & Guy, 2007)

Many previous studies on activity-based teaching in the general learning context supported the effectiveness of this instructional technique. Hung and Wong (2000) propounded that activity-based teaching in the project work of students supported problem solving skills and teamwork. Sivan et al. (2000) investigated active learning in two university programs and found that active learning facilitated independent learning and knowledge application to prepare students for the work setting. Active learning also enhanced interest in the course. Macklin (2001) studied the use of problem solving in a basic literacy course and found improvements in the analytical and critical capability of students. Chow et al. (2008) studied the use of different interactive instruction and found benefits to students including fun in learning, sustained interest in the topics, and ease in understanding concepts. Loyems, Magdam and Rikers (2008) considered self-directed learning and problem-based learning and found that active participation of students gave them greater influence in the learning process for better learning outcomes.

Be specific, a number of studies on hospitality education identified positive outcomes of activity-based learning. DeVries and Downie (2000) found that higher levels of student activity coincided with deeper learning in hospitality management. Martin and McEvoy (2003) investigated hotel simulation training in tourism and hospitality education and reported higher self-reported learning from highly involved participants. Duncan and Al-Nakeeb (2006) studied problem-based learning and found enjoyment, engagement and analytical skills as benefits to students.

There are two studies on hospitality education found differing results on the acceptance of activity-based learning by hospitality education students. Kivela and Kivela (2005) studied problem-based instruction in two groups of hotel and catering management classes at a Hong Kong university. The results showed student appreciation of participatory and interactive learning based on feedback indicating willingness to undergo this form of instruction again and identification of communication skills improvement and ease in learning topics as benefits. Lashley and Barron (2006) investigated the learning preferences of hospitality and tourism students in Australia and United Kingdom and found majority preference for concrete and active learning modes. However, Australian students from East Asian countries influenced by Confucian values showed greater responsiveness to abstract and
reflective instruction. The variance in the results of studies on student acceptance of activity-based teaching, especially relative to students in East Asia, such as Taiwan requires further research, because in Asia countries, students usually lack of the ability to express themselves, and feel the difficulties presenting in public, not to mention in general coursework setting.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research process took almost two years, and involving three major groups members about 156 members, two groups from hospitality major and one from Tourism major. This study took qualitative research to seek the students on their experiences of activity-based instruction in a Presentation skills class for tourism and hospitality majors. Interviews of students during a course evaluation session yielded research data. The interview involved three general questions on the learning outcomes in the marketing classes, the aspects making the strongest impression on students, and perceived effectiveness of in-class activities. Feedback from 156 members on their experiences of the class constituted research data. Typology and logical analysis were used to treat interview data. The research intended the results to present the application of a new and alternative teaching concept that could help enhance higher education outcomes for hospitality and tourism students.

4. ANALYSIS RESULTS

This study evaluated the accounts of in-class experiences by hospitality and tourism presentation students to determine the extent of learning, class aspect making the strongest impression on students, and perceived effectiveness. The results have implications on the ability of activity-based teaching to facilitate knowledge building as well as technical and practical skills building on hospitality and tourism Presentation skills. Investigation of acceptability of activity-based teaching to students in Taiwan falls under the section on perceived effectiveness and through the interaction, which encourages students’ ability of presentation skill development.

(1). Extent of Development in Class Setting

Integration of the accounts of students of the hospitality and tourism presentation class over their experiences led to three categories of learning outcomes, which are
academic lessons, practical skills, and life skills. Academic lessons pertain to theories, principles and techniques on Presentation skills in hospitality and tourism. Practical skills support the application of academic lessons. Life skills are the entirety of practical abilities applicable in day-to-day life.

The students agreed on learning the concepts, strategies and techniques of doing public presentations. The students also identified specific lessons on public presentation including organization of presentations using varying and new presentation styles and tools, use of language and expression of ideas, and communication strategies to make the audience take interest and understand the message of the presentation. Students describe different types of public presentations learned in class such as short and longer presentations as well as presentations on specific areas such as tour planning and product promotion or advertising. These accounts show that students of the hospitality and tourism presentation class learned the fundamental lessons of the subject. Even without requiring a specific textbook, students reported learning the information contained in textbooks.

A number of practical skills emerged from the experience of students of the in-class activities. Some students identified group cooperation and teamwork as skills learned from the in-class activities. A student expressed enjoyment in interacting and working with group members. A number of students expressed initial difficulties in dealing with group members because of differences in personality and majors. Towards the end of the semester, the students mentioned improvements in the way they relate to other group members. The students also identified creativity and imaginativeness as skills developed from the in-class activities. One student was surprised in discovering creative capabilities. Another student observed improvements in creativity. A student recounted the group being able to come up with extraordinary ideas, which another student explained as due to the students being prodded to think out of the box. Analysis and idea organization also emerged as skills drawn from the class.Students recounted their experience in coming up with ideas as well using different presentation techniques to ensure that the audience is able to relate to the ideas. Analysis occurred during the development of ideas for the target audience and selection of presentation techniques during the preparation stage as well as actualization during the reporting sessions in class. Many students expressed stretching their minds to complete the class activities. Information sharing and communication were also skills picked-up by students from
the class activities. Practice Presentation skillss pushed students to share ideas with the group and communicate a coherent and synthesized idea to the entire class. There were difficulties in expressing ideas and presenting to the entire class. However, improvements in communication capabilities were reported by students.

Life skills also emerged from the student accounts. Two encompassing life skills emerged from the student accounts. One is courage or boldness to move out the comfort zone. Many of the students experienced anxiety in participating in the in-class activities, especially in presenting to the entire class. However, after doing an actual presentation, some students realized their capability to communication to an audience. The other is developing self-confidence by understanding their strengths and weaknesses and believing in the things they can do. The students agreed that the lessons from class were applicable not only in the classroom but also in real life.

(2). Coursework Impression for Learners

The students referred to the mode of instruction or its specific aspects as making the strongest impression on them. Some students expressly identified the new and different teaching style as memorable to them. Others identified the activities done in class as making the strongest impact on them. A number of students identified group activities and public presentations as making the strongest impression on them. Although the students used different phrases in identifying the aspect of class that made the strongest impact on them, the responses pointed to activity-based learning and its application in the hospitality and tourism presentation class as what made the difference in the learning experience of students.

The change experienced by students during class and at the end of semester could explain why activity-based teaching made a strong impression on students. During the beginning of classes, students experienced anxiety and stress in not knowing what will happen in the class a used activity-based teaching. During in-class activities, students experienced pressure to work their brains out. Some students dreaded coming to class. However, towards the end of the semester, the students experienced change in perspective towards the class. Some students started to look forward to new activities. Other students started to enjoy the class activities. A number of students also mentioned that the casual learning environment eased stress.
(3). In-Class Activities application

Based on the literature review and accounts of the students, perceived effectiveness comprised of five aspects. These are: comparison with other classes, active knowledge building, problem solving, work-preparedness, and acceptability of the technique.

Comparison of the class with other classes showed that many of the students agreed on the class as new and different. The students experienced activity-based teaching for the first time in this class. The lively nature of the class activities were compared to the monotonous instruction in other classes. Students described the class as fun and interesting.

Active knowledge building requires sensory stimulation of the students’ cognitive functions in a participatory learning process (Levine & Guy, 2007). There was evidence of sensory stimulation of students in the hospitality and tourism presentation class. One student mentioned use of advertisements as subject of class activities. Another student expressed integration of textbook concepts in the in-class activities. A number of students described the class as having a new theme every week, which varied stimulation. Students also drew stimuli from activities such as sharing of ideas or brainstorming, team grouping, and public presentations. A student attributes different in-class activities to the unpredictability of the teacher.

Problem solving capability involves analysis and criticism of issues to determine solutions (Macklin, 2001). Student accounts provide evidence of knowledge and practice in resolving problems. In the hospitality and tourism presentation class, each session involved activities from which students learn the concepts and techniques of Presentation skills. Group activities were common. Three areas that required problem solving practice emerged from the accounts of students. One is in doing the in-class activities by understanding teacher’s instructions and executing these instructions. A student considered this a constant challenge for students. Another is dealing with group members. Many students recounted encountering problems during brainstorming because of differences in opinions. Eventually, students learned to find and reach a compromise so that the Presentation skills output represents the whole group. Last is dealing with personal issues. Some of the students are shy and uncomfortable with public presentations. Some students reported improvements in their self-confidence and public speaking skills by taking courage to do the presentation for the group and
realizing the value of this skill in life. Other students recognized this as an area for self-improvement.

Work-preparedness means having practical knowledge in the field of business and developing interpersonal skills (Hernandez-March et al., 2009) prior to entry in a professional career. There is strong evidence of these factors from the accounts of hospitality and tourism Presentation skills students. Doing public presentations every week provided students with a means of learning and practicing Presentation skills concepts and techniques. Group work including sharing of individual ideas, brainstorming, compromise building, presentation making, role assignment, assumption of leadership role, and actual presentation practiced and developed interpersonal skills.

Students outlook towards the subject as well as their learning preferences (Lashley & Barron, 2006) express the acceptability of activity-based teaching to them. Descriptions of the class included happy, fun, great, enjoyable, interesting, inspiring, impressive, and not boring. The students also described the class as fostering higher levels of learning and a good way to learn. Some of the students also expressed gratitude for the class experience. These are evidence of students’ acceptance of activity-based teaching. A student expressed being used to the teaching technique. Other students looked forward to other classes using this technique in the next semester. These support significant degree of preference for activity-based teaching. Even in knowing that activity-based teaching provides constant challenges for students, there is appreciation for its learning outcomes. Some even indicated preference for this mode of teaching in other and succeeding classes.

5. REFLECTIVE CONCLUSION

The tenets of Presentation skills are preparation and practice. Preparation integrates purpose and target audience characteristics to determine appropriate techniques. Practice builds comfort, familiarity and confidence. Activity-based teaching facilitates learning outcomes on Presentation skills concepts and techniques, practical skills, and life skills. The results presented how the application of this new and alternative teaching concept enhanced higher education outcomes for hospitality and tourism students. Activity-based teaching made a strong impression on students by providing a new and alternative experience to change their outlook towards the class
and the learning process. Students perceived activity-based teaching as effective when compared to traditional instruction and by supporting active knowledge building, problem solving skills, and work preparedness. Students expressed acceptance of activity-based teaching to support acceptability of active teaching to East Asian students. Activity-based teaching can improve learning outcomes in hospitality and tourism courses to ensure strong technical and practical knowledge of students in transitioning to professional work. As to the future suggestions for teachers in higher education level, especially in Asia countries, the educators should consider the way of bringing learners to engage in activity-based teaching through in-class activities, and help learners preparation, not just doing the lectures while learners could possibly loss their attentions easily.

REFERENCES


