

Integrating experiential education into existing courses requires, of course, faculty who are open to the idea. Although such changes potentially offer significant rewards for a teacher in the form of more engaged students and richer class discussion, in some institutions those teaching doctrinal courses may be resistant.

Properly designed experiential education will often fill gaps but many teachers are deterred from trying experiential education by the fear that such a high level of detailed individual feedback is required as to make the entire enterprise impractical in a large class. Experiential learning exercises integrated into the traditional classroom require students to apply their understanding of the doctrinal concepts. Any confusion or lack of understanding is likely to be readily apparent. Especially when performed in small groups, with an accompanying written component, such exercises can be a useful form of classroom assessment. Prompt feedback is important but grading each exercise is not necessarily the most useful way to provide it. The feedback should be encouraging where possible; if errors must be corrected, an explanation should be given. If private feedback is not possible, feedback in a small group is better than feedback in front of a large class, and might come in part from self-assessment or from peers.

By integrating experiential education into the doctrinal curriculum, law teachers can play an important role in generating passion among students and enriching their learning by placing it in context.

Investigating a new way to teach law: a computer-based commercial law course

R M Lloyd

50 *J Legal Educ* 4, 2000, pp 587–592

The University of Tennessee College of Law explored a new approach to teaching law. It conducted a two-credit-hour commercial law course without face-to-

face class meetings and with minimal use of a course book. The students learned the UCC through interactive computer-based lessons, supplemented by online chats. The course was offered under a special one-time authorisation granted by the American Bar Association in accordance with its Temporary Guidelines and Principles of Distance Education.

The students were required to complete several computer-based secured transactions lessons developed for CALI. These lessons covered specific aspects of secured transactions in more depth. They required the students not only to understand the basic concepts, but also to dig into the statutory language. Through the use of the lessons, the course not only gave the students a basic understanding of the UCC, but also strengthened their skills in statutory analysis. These lessons were also available through the Internet, by purchasing the CALI CD-ROM, or at the computer lab. For the commercial paper part of the course, we used a series of lessons developed and posted on the school's web site. These lessons combined textual explanations with interactive learning through multiple-choice questions. For sales, the smallest component of the course, we used a textbook.

While we made the computer-based lessons the primary teaching vehicle, we also held online classes in which students and an instructor met in an online chatroom. A few days prior to each chat, the students were emailed with one or more complex problems. When we got online, the students were asked to discuss each individual issue in the problems.

Commercial law was an ideal course for this type of instruction. Commercial law has a large body of black-letter rules which are well adapted to the use of computer-based lessons.

The course allowed us to evaluate the effectiveness of online learning. The interactive computer-based lessons

proved very effective. The students liked the format in which they were given a textual explanation of the concept or rule and then a series of problems in which they applied it. They especially liked those lessons which used branching multiple-choice questions. With branching questions, the student's response to a question does not elicit an immediate explanation of whether the answer was right or wrong. Instead, the student is asked a follow-up question. If the initial answer was correct, the follow-up question may probe to determine whether the student reasoned his way correctly to the answer or got it solely by luck. Alternatively, the follow-up question may attempt to shake the student's faith in his initial answer. If the initial answer was wrong, the follow-up question may probe to determine what misunderstanding of the law or what error in reasoning caused the wrong answer. The program then gives the student a textual explanation written for the express purpose of correcting that specific problem. Once the problem has been identified and (hopefully) corrected, the program sends the student back to the question. With her new understanding, she should be able to reason her way to the correct answer.

Anyone who has taught the material several times in a traditional class will know what misconceptions students commonly have and what errors in reasoning they commonly make. So a teacher designing a lesson can create questions to catch the common errors and correct them in a way that reinforces student learning.

Another advantage of the branching format is that it allows the student who grasps the material quickly to move quickly, while it forces the student who is having difficulty to move slowly, dealing systematically with his difficulties. This is an advantage over a textbook or traditional class. With a textbook, and even in a traditional class, a student who does not understand the

material often thinks he does. It is only when he is called on in class or when he faces an exam that he realises there is a problem. The branching format tests comprehension at every step, and its interactivity makes learning fun.

The online classes were also successful. It was clear both from the way the chats progressed and from the student interviews conducted that students felt more comfortable expressing their opinions in these online classes than in traditional face-to-face classes. Another advantage was that the software used allowed the students to download a transcript of the class. This meant that they could concentrate on what was being said without worrying about taking notes. Online chats do have major drawbacks. They are costly in terms of faculty time and energy. An even greater drawback is that the online chat format does not seem suited to large law school classes.

The course demonstrated that online instruction is viable for some types of law courses. Obviously there needs to be much more work done before we can say precisely what can and cannot be taught effectively online.

Of caterpillars and butterflies: the introduction of metamorphosis at the UWA law school

J Allen & P Baron

35 Law Teacher 3, 2001, pp 346–359

The purpose of this paper is to report on an innovation in learning recently introduced at the University of Western Australia (UWA) Law School. Metamorphosis is a program that attempts to foster metacognition in the learning of law by introducing students to the theoretical basis of the processes of learning.

Small group seminar teaching was introduced in first year units in the UWA Law School as a substitute for the traditional lecture/tutorial mode of teaching. The impetus for this change lay in dissatisfaction with the traditional lecture mode of teaching that promoted

a culture of passive and often shallow learning and a growing sense of alienation between teachers and students that had accompanied a rapid increase in the size of the law school. Small group seminar teaching was introduced in order to promote active learning, to support the development of generic and discipline specific skills and to expand the contextual and critical content of the curriculum.

The Metamorphosis program was prompted by our recognition that, if small group teaching is to succeed, we need not only raise the awareness of teaching and learning issues amongst staff, but foster a better understanding of the processes of learning amongst the students. The problem we identified after our introduction of small group teaching was that students often misunderstood what we were trying to do and were confused as to their role in the teaching and learning process.

Metamorphosis is a valuable strategy in improving the learning experience for first year law students. The feedback from participants has been positive, and a marked increase has been noticed in confidence in the in-class performance of Metamorphosis participants. If these results are sustained, then we must ask whether, and if so, how, these benefits can be provided to the wider student body.

Legal education is unique in that it seeks to attain a very wide range of learning outcomes. These range from mastery of a body of knowledge, through understanding, the ability to order knowledge in a coherent framework, generic skills, legal skills, professional, ethical and social qualities, as well as characteristics which will allow students to be life-long learners.

Traditionally, law has been taught by lectures and tutorials. This method of delivery has been found to be largely ineffective in fostering the wide range of desired learning outcomes. In particular, legal education requires a

deep approach to learning that is not encouraged by traditional legal education. Different law schools have tried various methods to overcome this problem. One means is the introduction of seminar or small group teaching.

The focus of the Metamorphosis project is upon student learning. Small group teaching in general places more responsibility upon the students for their own learning. Law students, however, come to the study of law with very little knowledge and appreciation of the processes of learning and with an orientation to learning that may well be inconsistent with a small group teaching approach. Accordingly, if law students are to profit substantially from the use of small group teaching, they need to reflect upon the following questions: What orientation to learning do I bring to the study of law? How does my orientation to learning affect the learning outcomes I hope to achieve? How does the small group method affect my approach to the study of law? What study practices do I need to adopt both within and outside class to maximise the effect of the learning experience and ensure quality learning outcomes?

The aims of Metamorphosis are to promote in law students an understanding of the pedagogical principles of small group teaching, to develop in law students a more sophisticated conception of learning and their own approaches to learning so as to foster a deep understanding of law; to enable students to critically reflect upon different approaches to teaching and to provide ongoing support to law students in the difficult first year of law.

Our intention was to pilot the Metamorphosis program with a small group of students and extend it in subsequent years to the entire first year cohort. The first part of the program was a formal half-day workshop that was designed to introduce students to a range of pedagogical theory and to initiate students into a process of reflection about their own learning. It was conducted at