Facilitating Success: Using Self-Regulated Learning and Servant Leadership in the College Classroom

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Abstract: Student-centered pedagogy shifts the power dynamics, function of content, role of the educator, responsibility for learning, and purpose of evaluation within the classroom. By redirecting student effort toward self-regulated learning activities within a learning management system (LMS), educators can focus on the application of material during in-person class meetings. Moving from a traditional role of lecturing to a more contemporary role of facilitating learning, educators are better equipped to embrace the philosophy of a servant leader and put student needs first through the utilization of self-regulated learning activities within an LMS. This reflective essay will focus on the application and benefit of self-regulated learning activities with a focus on the use of LMS-based activities and a flipped-classroom strategy utilized by two business communications faculty members. The discussion of classroom activities and online self-regulated learning activities will be backed up with research related to reports of student stress levels decreasing, connection to educators increasing, and student engagement levels increasing with the use of student-centered pedagogy and servant teaching practices in the college classroom.

Keywords: learning management systems, student-centered pedagogy, servant leadership, self-regulated learning activities.

Students crave hands-on learning but often lack the skills necessary to be self-directed learners (Fink, 2013). By shifting the classroom experience to a focus on terms and concepts via assessments and readings integrated within a learning management system (LMS), faculty members have more time in the classroom, whether virtual or in-person, to focus on building opportunities for students to engage with and practice the material more in depth. For the course discussed in this reflective essay, an ebook with publisher-based assessments is utilized for students to gain baseline knowledge of the material while in-class activities help reinforce the concepts for real-world business experience and prepare students for success in higher level courses.

Student-Centered Pedagogy and the Servant-Style Educator

Student-centered pedagogy, sometimes referred to as learner-centered pedagogy or person-centered pedagogy, puts the needs of the students first and allows students to take a more active approach in the learning process (Crumly et al., 2014). Instead of being a "sage on the stage," educators embracing student-centered pedagogy move into the role of a "guide on the side" (Fink, 2013). Flipped classrooms are consistent with student-centered pedagogy and ask students to accept responsibility for their learning by coming to the classroom with a baseline knowledge of the material from reading and online assessments. Faculty then facilitate time spent in the classroom to help students apply the theories presented in the course reading material. A variety of methods are utilized within a student-

centered pedagogy to increase success for students with a variety of experiences, learning styles, abilities, and interests. Whereas the traditional classroom environment requires rote memorization and frantic note taking during lectures, student-centered pedagogy allows students the opportunity to practice the material in a variety of ways, teach the material to one another, and play a more active role in the learning process.

Student-centered pedagogy is ideal for faculty embracing a servant leadership philosophy in the classroom because it puts the needs of the follower first (Greenleaf, 1970, 1979). Servant leadership consists of a variety of attributes (Hunter, 1998; Russell & Stone, 2002; Spears, 2000) that have been organized into a list of 12 categories of traits servant leaders embody (Wong & Page, 2003). These traits include caring for, developing, and empowering others, goal setting, humility, integrity, leading, modeling, servanthood, team building, shared decision making, and visioning (Wong & Page, 2003). With a student-centered pedagogical approach in the classroom, embodying the traits of a servant leader almost becomes second nature; however, it might result in students and faculty needing to be slightly more vulnerable in the process because both parties are more likely to have new experiences.

In a classroom with servant-leader-focused behaviors, the environment lends itself to the utilization of a civility code addressing respectful and anti-harassment behaviors (Weeks, 2011), which might potentially make higher risk activities, including a group project analyzing a business, a more comfortable experience for students. Peer relationships also develop during the course that might lead to higher overall persistence rates for students as evidenced by low dropout and failure rates for the course sections. Although student-centered pedagogy might not work for all educators, it aligns well with the follower-first philosophy of servant educators (Greenleaf, 1970, 1979) and is applicable for this course because it gives students an opportunity to practice responding to a variety of business situations to develop competencies necessary for future success in the workplace.

Self-Regulated Learning With an LMS

In business communications classes, following a student-centered pedagogy works because of the size of the classes (approximately 30 students) and the high level of interaction both among students and between students and faculty. Business communications courses are taught in two formats. One version is a standard 16-week course with 75-min course periods two times a week. The other is a hybrid 16-week course with one 75-min course period each week. Both courses utilize the university's chosen LMS in a variety of ways, with the hybrid version also using the system's discussion board feature. In the self-regulated learning phase of the course, students are introduced to key concepts within business communications, such as developing credibility, improving interpersonal communication skills, writing various types of business messages, and presenting on various business topics (Cardon, 2015). Students also practice building and developing grammar skills within the LMS. Utilization of resources within the LMS varies from term to term and among faculty members; however, all faculty teaching the course are required to utilize an ebook, which contains a plethora of publisher-provided test banks and other activities.

Various other aspects of the LMS are utilized for this course. The quiz tab allows faculty to easily gather data for midterm and end-of-term peer evaluations. Whereas in past sections of the course it was necessary to hand peer evaluation forms out to students and then aggregate the data, students are now able to enter peer-assessment information into a quiz within the LMS. In addition to setting up LMS quizzes for peer evaluations, Qualtrics (an online survey platform) is utilized to gather audience evaluation information for end-of-term presentations. Although setting up the Qualtrics surveys before the presentations takes some time, it has eliminated the need to aggregate information from the audience surveys while also allowing students to see scores immediately

following final presentations and decreasing faculty workload at the end of the term. Having the survey data in a digital repository also saves space since it is no longer necessary to keep paper copies of the assessments for grade-appeal purposes.

Groups are also set up within the LMS for the final project in the course. Once students are assigned to a group in the LMS, a group collaboration area appears where students can have discussions, submit files for other members of the group to view, and chat in real time. Although a lot of student groups may choose not to utilize this space because they are more comfortable with Google Docs, or other collaborative platforms, it does give students a common space within the course shell. If more guidance is necessary for groups, it is also possible for faculty to complete observations and provide feedback when group discussions take place within the LMS. For some courses and groups, this additional level of feedback and observation within the LMS might be valuable.

Self-Regulated Learning and Servant-Style Leadership in the Classroom

Self-regulated learning refers to a cyclical learning process in which learners set their own goals, create and participate in tasks directly related to their goals, and seek support from significant adults in their life (Zimmerman, 1986). Self-regulated learning combines cognitive, motivational, and emotional aspects of learning and applying new information. Although there are several models the process, what they all have in common is that they are cyclical and require full participation and buy-in from the learners themselves.

It is important to understand that self-regulated learning is different from self-learning. Students are not on their own under the self-regulated process but rather they remain in a supportive environment (Zimmerman, 1986). As researchers have explored what makes self-regulated learning successful, it has become clear that the guide, coach, or faculty member plays an integral role in the success of goal setting and administration of the process itself in a classroom (Sitzmann & Ely, 2011). When used effectively, the cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational factors in the self-regulated learning model support a servant leadership model (Zimmerman, 1986).

Servant-style classroom leaders work effectively with the self-regulated learning model because they understand the importance of self-regulation and the autonomy needed throughout the classroom. When a self-regulated learner sets a goal, for example, the servant-style classroom leader will work through in-class activities in an effort to ensure that the student is able to successfully meet that goal (Sitzmann & Ely, 2011). The goals and achievements related to the carefully constructed and engaging in-class activities can be managed through the LMS.

Real-World Classroom Activities

To help students gain a deeper understanding of how to apply the material in a business setting, faculty lead students through a variety of in-class activities. These activities are fairly low risk in terms of point value, but to be truly successful, they require students to feel safe in the classroom environment. Following a servant-leader philosophy of putting followers first (Greenleaf, 1970, 1979) and caring for and empowering others (Wong & Page, 2003) can help increase the success of these activities.

Timed Speech Activity

The first activity students complete is a timed speech. Students prepare a 2-min speech related to a written assignment completed for the course. When the students arrive in class, the instructor presents a brief lecture on the concept of building upon or truncating an idea to comply with a timeframe. Students then draw a notecard from a hat and present their prepared speech in accordance with the

length of time specified on the card (from 15 s to 5 min), adapting it if necessary. This activity prepares students for situations in the workplace where timeframes are adjusted at the last minute based on how long other segments of a meeting were. Overall, students have fun with the activity and feel the most pressure if 15 s or 5 min is the selected timeframe. Students who draw 30 s, 45 s, 1 min, 90 s, or 2 min often feel more comfortable presenting than their peers at either extreme of the timeframe allowed for the presentations.

Termination Speech Activity

Another real-world activity completed during the course is a termination speech. Students prepare a mass layoff or a one-on-one termination speech prior to class. Through this process, students are allowed to experience the process of terminating employees while also seeing examples of how peers might handle this task. Although many of the students hope to never need this knowledge in the workforce, it is a task that frequently occurs in the business world. By helping students practice this task in a college classroom, it will ideally be a more seamless process when termination and/or downsizing discussions are necessary in the student's career.

Press Release Speech Activity

Students also complete a press release speech during the course. When students come into the classroom the day of the presentation, groups are created to represent teams of higher level leadership at an organization. Students are then told about a crisis such as a listeria outbreak or an exploding appliance. The teams are allowed 30 min to prepare a statement for the media about what has happened. The goal is to decrease the company's liability while also sharing the message effectively with the media. Students often have a lot of fun with this activity while also learning the importance of being able to gather appropriate information within a very limited timeframe.

Benefits for Students

Although utilizing a student-centered pedagogy might initially take some adjustment, this teaching methodology often has a positive impact on the learner. Because this classroom environment creates more opportunity for personal interaction and support, an increase in self-confidence might occur (Hays, 2008), which can potentially lead to higher self-esteem (Wei et al., 2011). Building self-confidence and self-esteem can lead to an increased success identity, which often results in students persisting to graduation (Downing, 2005). Strong relationships with peers might also develop (Sung & Yang, 2008), which can create a positive emotional experience within the classroom. Having this type of environment in place has led to students openly asking questions, actively participation, and rarely dropping, withdrawing from, and/or failing the course.

Benefits for Faculty

Because students often thrive in a positive classroom environment (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005, 2013; Losada, 1999), it is likely the faculty member will thrive, too. Additionally, following a servant style of leadership allows the faculty member to be present in the moment (Crippen, 2010). Finally, a student in a servant-led classroom once said:

> He has opened our eyes and our minds (and believe it or not, even our hearts)—something rare that is found in only the very best teachers. He has made us think about ourselves, our

work and our lives. This is real guidance as its influence doesn't leave after the final assignment. It will stay with us as an invaluable part of our being as we continue on with our careers. (Hays, 2008, p. 115)

Being able to have both a short- and long-term positive impact on students is often reward enough for faculty members. Being intentional as a servant teacher while using student-based pedagogy and an LMS might initially be challenging, but the overall classroom experience for both students and educators is often worthwhile.

Conclusion

When students are able to review basic terms and concepts using an LMS, faculty have more time in the classroom to focus on application of skills and building a cohesive and welcoming learning environment. In business communications, using assessments, activities, and discussions within an LMS frees up more time in the classroom to focus on building skills related to business acumen. These skills include being able to adjust presentations to available time, having difficult conversations such as the termination of employees, and handling a crisis in the workplace. Overall, the use of student-centered pedagogy and a servant leadership style in conjunction with an LMS allows faculty to have the time to build a stronger learning environment.

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