

Multimodal Teaching and Arts-Based Pedagogy for Management Education

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Abstract

International business students from Haiti, Malaysia, Mongolia, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkmenistan, USA, and Vietnam created original artwork as metaphors for business management concepts. Students were able to widen their capacity to make sense, deepen their knowledge of core course content, and improve their ability to engage in extemporaneous English speaking. A 23-item survey of student responses demonstrates the positive benefits derived by using multimodal teaching techniques and an arts-based methodology. Art-as-metaphor provides an enriching complementary approach to ways of knowing, making sense, and verbally expressing oneself in a foreign language. It is a proven methodology to the otherwise standard, traditional teaching method - one that is largely teacher-directed, and bound by logic and rationality.

Keywords: Arts-based Pedagogy, Extemporaneous English Speaking, Management Education

Introduction

The fast-paced changes of the world today require currency of knowledge, a broad array of technical skills, and a perspective agility to span multiple ways of making sense for effective strategic decision-making (Rigby, Gruver, & Allen, 2009). Amongst the abilities most prized in business leaders nowadays are the ability to use innovative thinking and creative problem solving (Florida & Goodnight, 2005). Additionally, the international business language of exchange is English (Nickerson, 2005). Thus is the nature and challenge confronting IB programs - the charge to prepare future business leaders to excel in order to succeed amidst uncertainty, complexity and change while at the same time, being able to communicate those successes in English. However, "Many schools typically provide basic offerings. Despite claims of innovation, there is still relatively little differentiation in what most of these schools offer," (Lorange, 2005) Are students open and ready for innovative approaches to classroom teaching? Are our institutions? What can international business (IB) programs offer?

Globalization eras are not new to the human experience; but what is new is the intense compression of time coupled with the equally intense and rapid speed of communication, innovation and change (Mittelman, 1996). A key courier of modern global business interactions is the Internet; the currency of modern global business communications is English, and the currency of global competition is the creation of new services and products for customers. Those new creations can only happen when imagination bears fruit. Education, of course, provides a primary means to preparing for individuals for participation in globalization – formal education at universities as well as on-the-job training in the workplace.

Inclusive in IB education, especially in non-English speaking countries, is business English instruction. The mode of English in greatest need of development is speaking and listening. According to Pang, Zhou, & Fu, (2002), "Learners...should be able to extemporize on a given topic to a group of listeners....This ability to give an uninterrupted oral or written presentation needs to be trained and practiced." The role of English in international business is widely accepted (Nickerson, 2005; Rogerson-Revell, 2006) and has set researchers and

practitioners alike in search of best teaching practices. IB programs at universities in non-English speaking countries around the world typically task their instructors with having to teach English while also teaching in English. Professors in the classroom as well as their counter-parts in higher-education administration face a conundrum: if international business students' speaking needs are great and growing, then speaking opportunities in the classroom must be abundant and increasing. But what can be done?

In this paper, a unique teaching method will be described that uses art as a metaphor to deepen students' understanding and promote expansive thinking while simultaneously facilitate English language speaking. This methodology has been significantly influenced by the works of Ryman, Porter, and Galbraith, (2002 and 2009) as well by Littlemore and Low (2006). This paper will report the preliminary results of a two-year study currently underway at a university in Taiwan.

Assignment Method

To date, 73 students studying in Taiwan have participated in this study. In this paper, a comparison group of 19 non-traditional students from the USA is also included for discussion purposes; obviously, extemporaneous English speaking was not a target issue in the case of the USA students but all other elements of the overarching classroom methodology and survey assessment were identical. The USA non-traditional working adult students' average age was 36.7 years, including 11 females and 8 males. The Taiwan IMBA students' average age was 26.3 years comprised of 21 females and 13 males; the Taiwan undergraduate IBA students' average age was 18.9 years and included 20 females and 19 males. All student participants were enrolled in classes conducted by the author.

In this study across various business classes, each student must select a topic related to the course content; sources may include textbook, lectures, outside research and/or class discussions. A complementary set of two assignments based upon the chosen topic are due on the last day of class: a research term paper and a related arts-based creation. The papers are typically 2,000 to 3,500 words in length while the arts-based creation typically has only a short paragraph caption or no words at all.

As students may not plagiarize any written work, their artwork similarly cannot be plagiarized, copied, or built from any pre-existing design/model. Although students may choose from a wide-range of modalities, most works have included drawings, paintings, sculptures, mobiles, assemblages, food, plants, and photography.

The artwork serves as a visual expression of the student's imagination with the chosen topic serving as the sense-making lens. The artwork also serves as a medium of communication allowing the creator/student to express his/her thinking that might otherwise not be readily experienced or easily discernible by another person. "When theorists build theory, they design, conduct, and interpret imaginary experiments," this is typical of "disciplined imagination" according to Weick (1989). For the students, art-as-metaphor helps create new lens of inquiry and considerations of organizational life (Ryman, Porter and Galbraith, 2009). Evidence is also notable in actual student samples that course material was engaged meaningfully and student imaginations were stretched both literally as well as metaphorically.

On the final day of class, the artwork serves as a stimulus for discussions with guests who have been invited to the classroom; a unique aspect of this study is the examination of extemporaneous English speaking for the foreign language learners in IB programs. The classroom itself is set-up in a fashion similar to an art gallery grand-opening viewing. One by one, for about 5 minutes with 4 or 5 native English speakers, students must engage in extemporaneous English speaking. Teachers from amongst the faculty as well as specially

invited guests are asked to circulate amongst the class and ask questions. In advance, the guests are given a handout of Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Skills and instructed to move up the ladder of Bloom's Taxonomy with successively more challenging questions. That is, to intentionally move from the lower-levels to the higher levels: recall to understanding to analysis to synthesis and finally evaluative questions. These short interactions provide an excellent opportunity for enhancement of extemporaneous English language speaking. Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognition (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) provides a quick, easy-reference for determining the student's cognitive level of engagement.

To clarify, one goal of this study was the enhancement of extemporaneous English speaking – not the delivery of an extemporaneous English speech. The latter is a rigorously defined interscholastic competitive event such as sanctioned by the University Interscholastic League in the USA and other similar international bodies. For this study, extemporaneous English speaking was intentionally far less formal and structured. Instead, the tone was highly conversational while the classroom climate and event were arranged in a manner similar to open-space technology (OST) (Owen, 2008). In OST, the interactions are intimate and free-flowing with direct face-to-face encounters, much the same in this case between the student/speaker and the visitor/listener. Questions and the flow of discussions were emergent, unscripted and spawned in the moment by the piqued interests of the visitors in relationship to the student/artwork.

Regarding the arts-based projects, students were evaluated according to a holistic rubric initially developed by Ryman, Porter, and Galbraith, (2002) and modified by the author. Regarding the extemporaneous English speaking aspect of this study, the instructor met with each visitor for a short-debriefing at which time, general observations, comments, suggestions and feedback helped provide a sense of the level of the students' extemporaneous English speaking ability as well as cognitive engagement of the topics at hand. Additionally, student participants are asked to complete a short, open-ended questionnaire. Finally, all students completed a 23-item survey instrument (Ryman, Porter, and Galbraith, (2002 and 2009).

Results

As mentioned earlier, students were asked to identify the specific strengths/weaknesses of this approach and were additionally asked for suggestions for improvements. The following representative student comments are insightful, varied and will be put to immediate use for improving the teaching/learning process.

When asked to identify what they thought were "strengths" of the extemporaneous English speaking dimension of the arts-based pedagogy/project, students shared the following comments:

"When I was doing the art, I always made the metaphorical thinking in English. And, when I was presenting my project, I could improve my English skills step by step."

"More practice on English speaking, and during the practicing we may understand more about our project [topic]. I found out that there is no need to give tests to students because through the metaphor projects, we may understand more about organizational theory, almost replaces the function of tests."

"Visitors for the exhibition were from different countries and they use different intensity, speed, etc. of English."

“Teachers all from different countries and have their own opinions and talking with them and explaining our art metaphor was interesting. This kind of exam (presentation) is a good way to improve our speaking skills since English is not our native language.”

“This is good way to improve English skills. We must thinking by English as soon as possible to answer audience’s questions. With metaphor, we can explain our idea flexibly. Sometime we can add more idea when talking and by audience’s questions which we’ve not known before.”

Then when asked address the “weaknesses” of this approach, their comments included the following:

“Students could actually practice what they are going to say regarding their project before the exhibition at home, so probably the question is [What is] the actual level of extemporaneous in this case?”

“The weak point is that it cost too much time on doing the art project in order to explain theory we propose.”

“It becomes tiring to talk the same thing with visitors. I had to explain from the beginning for everyone comes. Didn’t have time to see other’s art and listen what they did if for. Students didn’t share information with each other.”

“The limitation of time so visitors just talk with us for a while. Sometimes we want to ask visitors some questions or suggestions but it’s not time enough.”

“*Time* [original emphasis] is problem. Sometime we can’t explain clearly ideas in short-time.”

Also, when ask to look ahead, in order to improve the extemporaneous English speaking portion of the arts-based final project, some of the specific suggestions were:.....

“Maybe we could make the exhibition as individually, instead of all students facing all teachers at the same time.”

“I guess the one should be to count the English practice [extemporaneous speaking] as one of the scores, so more people may do it seriously!”

“Introducing art individually. It saves time and also doesn’t make it boring. We can present for all visitors and students at the same time.”

Lastly, there were some general comments for consideration, such as:

“One of the possibilities is to make the paper and [arts-based] project unconnected to each other. This will add an additional English language challenge to students.”

“I think photo [photo-essaying] is better than art. Making art is spend a lot of time

and difficult to make that (but was interesting).”

“Maybe if we can make the English practice [extemporaneous speaking] more fun, for example, a small party with candies and cookies and some coke.”

“I would always feel nervous when speaking English face to face.”

“This was a great experience to do art for paper that I can have more idea what I am writing about. It’s very interesting. We’re not just working on theory, we bring it out to the art. You don’t have to be a good artist to do art for the paper. I felt proud of what I did. Also didn’t spend much time on it so I think it’s good idea to explain my paper through art.”

Shown in Table 1, statistical findings of the study revealed that all student groups perceived positive value in the arts-based metaphorical assignment. The results revealed that the traditional-aged IBA students were most highly satisfied (Item 16) and generally thought their learning had appreciable depth, breath, innovation, and content knowledge enhancement (Items 1-6). The native English speaking, non-traditional working adult students from the USA indicated that spoken and written communication were adequate (Item 10) and that they struggled more so than the IMBA and IBA groups in coming up with an idea and then completing the arts-based metaphor project (Items 11 and 12). The IMBA students invested the greatest amount of time in conceiving/creating their art-as-metaphor projects (Item 23).

Table 1:
Different Satisfaction Means among Three Student Groups

Item	ADULT (n=19)		IMBA (n=34)		IBA (n=39)		Tukey HSD Comparison
	mean	sd	mean	sd	Mean	sd	
01. To increase my understanding of the concept, theory or model	1.89	0.88	1.44	0.56	2.18	0.89	*IBA> IMBA
02. I found myself engaging in a deeper level of thinking	1.74	0.99	1.59	0.74	2.18	0.89	*IBA>IMBA
03. I learned things about innovation, communication	1.89	0.94	2.32	1.09	2.74	0.94	*IBA>ADULT
04. To express concepts that are hard to describe in words	2.05	0.97	2.00	0.85	2.77	1.16	*IBA>ADULT, IMBA
05. I used various artistic techniques to highlight the subtleties	2.05	0.85	1.88	0.98	2.56	1.07	*IBA>IMBA
06. They are effective method to enhance my knowledge	1.74	0.93	1.71	0.63	2.28	1.00	*IBA>IMBA
07. Art is an important part of life for me.	2.50	1.10	2.00	1.02	2.15	1.23	
08. In normal everyday living, I am a creative	2.63	1.12	2.39	0.93	2.74	0.95	

Item	ADULT (n=19)		IMBA (n=34)		IBA (n=39)		Tukey HSD Comparison
	mean	sd	mean	sd	Mean	sd	
person.							
09. I struggled with the technique of the art more	3.84	1.26	2.53	1.21	2.85	1.07	**ADULT>IMBA, IBA
10. Spoken and written communication are adequate	3.58	1.43	2.21	0.98	2.49	0.94	***ADULT>IMBA, IBA
11. It was difficult for me to come up with an appropriate analogy	4.16	1.07	3.06	1.17	3.49	1.05	**ADULT>IMBA
12. It would have been possible to do well without understanding	4.26	1.10	3.24	1.62	2.87	0.95	**ADULT>IMBA, IBA
13. These assignments made the material more meaningful	1.94	0.87	1.85	1.21	2.18	0.80	
14. I consider myself to be very knowledgeable about art	3.74	1.10	2.56	1.13	2.64	1.04	**ADULT>IMBA, IBA
15. I am to be very adept at creative artistic expression.	3.16	1.21	2.29	0.94	2.63	0.94	*ADULT>IMBA
16. I am very satisfied with my efforts	2.05	0.85	1.59	0.66	2.36	1.29	**IBA>IMBA
17. I spent more time on these projects	2.47	1.26	2.12	1.01	2.13	1.08	
18. These assignments were very frustrating	4.37	1.26	4.35	1.70	3.66	1.55	
19. These assignments were more fun than a normal exam.	1.47	0.84	1.56	1.13	1.64	0.81	
20. The concepts in the domain of innovation, etc are very complex	2.89	1.29	2.91	1.06	3.18	1.10	
21. The concepts are very difficult to understand.	3.95	0.85	3.24	1.28	4.03	0.97	**IBA>IMBA
22. The concepts are useful for running an organization	1.58	0.69	1.76	0.78	2.38	0.85	***IBA>ADULT, IMBA
23. How many hours did you spend on these assignments? ^a	2.53	0.96	3.84	2.03	2.78	1.62	*IMBA>ADULT, IBA

Note. (1) *p< .05; ** p< .01; *** p< .001 (2) The point 1= strongly agree, 2= agree, 3= somewhat agree, 4= somewhat disagree, 5= disagree, 6= disagree; the higher mean, the stronger disagree (3) a item23 point 1= 0-3, 2=4-7, 3=8-11, 4=12-15, 5= 16-20, 6= 21- more; the higher mean, the more time.

^aAdapted from "Art in the management classroom: A pedagogical experiment", by Ryman, J., Porter, T., & Galbraith, C. (2002), paper presentation. Academy of Management, Denver, Colorado: USA. Copyright permission granted in 2003 by primary author Dr. Joel Ryman.

Discussion

Since the author's previous 12 years of university-level teaching was with native-English speakers in the USA, the potency the arts-based methodology for enhancing extemporaneous English speaking for IB foreign language learners was never apparent as the need was never present.

The significance and importance of this research is many-fold. Pedagogical theory will

be informed by the use of multi-modal teaching and specific examples of arts-based pedagogy. Future research regarding the efficacy of an art-based, extemporaneous English speaking activity will be stimulated. The findings of this study revealed that arts-based pedagogy can be effectively used for (1) development of disciplined imagination, (2) enhancement of extemporaneous English speaking, and (3) reinforcement of key subject-area content.

However, there were several limitations of the study that need be noted. Contextual issues such as possible spillover effect from other classroom-based extemporaneous English speaking activities make it difficult to isolate and/or measure the actual impact of the arts-based English language enhancement; as one student noted, some students practiced in advance (role-playing) and when the day arrived found themselves repeating the same or highly similar remarks to each passing visitor. The ability to accurately assess students' cognitive engagement via Bloom's Taxonomy was severely limited by the sheer number of students and limited amount of time for verbal interactions. Also, culturally influenced teaching/learning norms may come into play that might influence the degree of comfort and facility in the students' open, largely public expression. And, as one student mentioned, it would be most beneficial if a more precise evaluative assessment/instrument were available in order to gauge the student's actual level of success with extemporaneous English speaking.

It is clear that for IB programs, non-English speakers need extemporaneous English speaking most. Equally important, human advancement is spurred by new ideas and innovations. For IB teachers, their learners' needs can be met with innovative multimodal pedagogical approaches such as the arts-based metaphorical project and the extemporaneous English speaking activity described in this study.

Conclusion

In closing, people naturally draw upon metaphors. Oftentimes, metaphors of all sorts provide mental-models that bridge the ecological, holistic, image-bearing right-brain hemisphere with the rationally grounded, literal, logic-driven left-brain hemisphere, an integrative agent (Taylor, Taylor, & Martin, 1990). However, creating a visual metaphor is only a temporary cosmology-enabler. With encouragement and challenge from teachers, an arts-based metaphor may yield more discriminating, synthesizing and/or differentiated thinking – disciplined imagination - an ability highly prized in global businesses.

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