Beyond Recalling Information : Experiencing the Real World through Authentic Teaching Strategies

มากไปกว่าการจดจำข้อมูล : ประสบการณ์แห่งโลกความเป็นจริง ผ่านทางกลยุทธ์การสอนตามสภาพที่แท้จริง

Pataraporn Sangkapreecha[1]*
ภัทรภร สังขปรีชา[1]*

บทคัดย่อ

ภายใต้กรอบวิธีการเรียนการสอนในปัจจุบันนั้น วิธีการเรียนการสอนที่เรียกว่า "ประสบการณ์การเรียนรู้ตามสภาพที่แท้จริง" (Authentic learning experiences) ได้รับการกล่าวถึงกันว่า วิธีการนี้เป็นวิธีที่สนับสนุนให้เกิดการพัฒนาความรู้ความเข้าใจ รวมทั้งพัฒนาทักษะที่เหมาะสมที่สามารถเตรียมพร้อมให้ผู้เรียนก้าวไปสู่บริบทของสายงานวิชาชีพได้เป็นอย่างดี การเรียนรู้ตามสภาพที่แท้จริงนั้นคือ ระบบการเรียนการสอนที่จัดให้ผู้เรียนได้เข้าไปสัมผัสกับการเรียนรู้จากประสบการณ์ในโลกที่แท้จริงแห่งสายวิชาชีพ การคิดสร้างสรรค์แผนการเรียนการสอนเพื่อการเรียนรู้ตามสภาพที่แท้จริงให้เกิดขึ้นในสถานที่ที่เป็นสถาบันการศึกษาอย่างเป็นทางการและสามารถก่อให้เกิดการเรียนรู้จากการปฏิบัติงานจริงภายใต้ชุมชนวิชาชีพจริงนั้นมีแนวโน้มว่าจะเป็นเรื่องที่น่าท้าทายสำหรับอาจารย์ผู้สอนในมหาวิทยาลัย บทความวิชาการเรื่องนี้นำเสนอถึงกลยุทธ์ในหลากหลายวิธีที่ผู้เขียนได้นำมาใช้ในการเรียนการสอนตามหลักสูตรของภาควิชาวิทยุกระจายเสียงและวิทยุโทรทัศน์ คณะนิเทศศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยกรุงเทพ ซึ่งกลยุทธ์การเรียนการสอนที่ผู้เขียนได้สร้างสรรค์ขึ้นและนำมาอภิปรายในบทความเรื่องนี้นั้นมีเป้าประสงค์หลักเพื่อการสร้างเสริมประสบการณ์การเรียนรู้ตามสภาพที่แท้จริงของผู้เรียนโดยจัดการเรียนการสอนให้มีการประกอบกันระหว่างแบบฉบับมาตรฐานของการเรียนการสอนในมหาวิทยาลัยกับการเรียนรู้ในโลกอุตสาหกรรมแห่งวิชาชีพวิทยุกระจายเสียงและวิทยุโทรทัศน์

คำสำคัญ : ประสบการณ์การเรียนรู้ตามสภาพที่แท้จริง, กลยุทธ์การสอน, อาจารย์มหาวิทยาลัย

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[1] ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ ภาควิชาวิทยุกระจายเสียงและวิทยุโทรทัศน์ คณะนิเทศศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยกรุงเทพ

[1] Assistant Professor, Broadcasting Department, School of Communication Arts, Bangkok University

* Corresponding author. Tel. : 084–1397277, E-mail : pataraporn.s@bu.ac.th

Abstract

Within current teaching approaches, authentic learning experiences have been said to assist students to develop appropriate understanding and skills that would serve them well in any professional context. Authentic learning involves alignment of student learning experiences with the real world for which they are being prepared. Creating a teaching plan for authentic learning that taking place within formal institutions and learning within real-life communities of practice can be challenged for university lecturers. This paper reports various strategies employed through a one-semester course within Broadcasting Department, School of Communication Arts, Bangkok University. The teaching strategies that aim to develop authenticity in students' learning experiences by cooperating between university study and learning about the world of broadcasting industry are discussed.

Keywords : Authentic Learning Experiences, Teaching Strategies, University Lecturers

Introduction

If we walk around most university campuses, we can observe what we see in the way of teaching and learning. If we are fortunate, we will find students engaged in motivating and challenging activities that reflect the tasks seen in real professions and workplaces. For most students at Thai universities today, however, the reality is different. Large lecture theatres, centre-staged with full time lecturers, continue to feed theoretical knowledge for passive learners to consume.

The approach taken by many lecturers in our universities today reflects the way we were taught. Since everyone behaves according to his/her beliefs and traditions (Bandura, 1986; Pajares, 1992), a lecturer's background plays a vital role in determining behaviour and the organisation of knowledge and information in the classroom which can then have an impact on classroom practices. According to Bandura (1986), behaviours can be effectively predicted from an individual's way of thinking; and that embedded thoughts are believed to be the best determinants of how individuals make decisions throughout their lives. Lecturers' teaching performances are constructed from their learning and life experience (Li, 2002) which is derived from contexts such as "culture, education, language, gender, religion, family culture, and environment" (Spiro cited by Tsailexthim, 2007 p. 21). We thus are perpetuating a tradition of formal university teaching.

Typically, university education has been a place to learn theoretical knowledge devoid of context. Essentially, for students, this has meant that their lecturers transmit the facts and skills that they are required to absorb and bring up on exams. Textbooks and lecture notes are

the main resources for study, with the practice of cramming for exams. This common learning strategy has long been of concern to educators to produce a gap between theory and practice (Dewey, 1938; Whitehead, 1992). The knowledge and skills gained through traditional learning would not serve well for application in real-life setting. Preparation for the world of work involves not only developing an understanding of the knowledge base of a discipline, but also how it relates to real-world practice.

Since the growing influence of constructivism as a philosophical approach to learning, and a wide range of research studies investigating alternative models of teaching and learning over the last decades, many lecturers in universities implement more "authentic" teaching and learning environments (Herrington & Herrington, 2006 p. 3). Engaging learners in authentic activities of the kind that reflect the ways in which knowledge and skills are used in the real world can offer a means to bridge the gap between theory and practice. The rationale for authentic activities comes from the belief that knowledge is context-dependent, and therefore should be acquired in realistic contexts (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996). The aim of an authentic task is to encourage learners to "think like practitioners" as they face cognitive challenges similar to those experienced in the work environment (Savery & Duffy, 1995). Authenticity is not inherent in a task, but comes from its real-world relevance (Honebein, Duffy, & Fishman, 1993) and the context within which the activity is set should reflect as much as possible of the characteristics and complexity of the real-world setting (Barab & Duffy, 2000).

This paper, therefore, reports my teaching strategies that aim to develop authenticity in students' learning experiences with 240 students through a one-semester course within Broadcasting Department, School of Communication Arts, Bangkok University. It also demonstrates the students' viewpoint towards my teaching strategies. I hope to give insights for other university lecturers in implementing authenticity into their teaching.

The Course Implemented : Special Issues in Broadcasting

I implemented 3 sections of the special issues in broadcasting course in semester 2/2009 that consisted of weekly face-to-face sessions with approximately 240 students (80 students per section) enrolled in the course. This course was about any current issues in radio and television context. Special issues dealt with across the semester were related to the topics of student's interest. In this course, my students' topics of interest were the issues related to various aspects. For example, radio production skills and physical appearance of disc jockey (DJ), a situation comedy television program (sit com), horror television series and reality television show.

The first half of the semester was made up of eight modules, which covered students' practices in integrating theoretical frameworks, conceptual ideas and current situations related to issues within broadcasting environments. Students formed a team, discussed and set particular issues and ideas drawn from a variety of sources as their case-based study. They were encouraged to question, critique, synthesis their thoughts and integrate their understandings of

the theoretical ideas into their current (personal) way of thinking about current broadcasting environment. In the class session, each team presented their issues of interest and let other students in the class asked the questions, exchanged and discussed their opinions.

During the second half of the semester, the focus of the sessions was on the students' authentic learning experience from special guests in the broadcasting industries. Each team invited the guest speaker who they thought could provide knowledge and authentic experiences according to their issues of case base study. The class sessions was set up as "TV Talk Show" in which each team managed and organised the show by itself, yet under my supervision. The show involved students (in the teams) acted as the TV hosts interviewing professionals in the field they invited about significance, recent situation within their professions and the planning and implementation for the future. For instance, one team of my students invited the producer of the most popular sit com, *Neu Ku Yak Ru Wa Krai*? (Want to Know Who is My Soulmate?) as a guest speaker to their TV Talk Show. They investigated what and why the professionals did what they did, the consequences of their actions and their reflections on how successful or otherwise the actions were. Before the show ended, other students in the class discussed and exchanged their ideas with the guest speaker. Each team then developed a written report. They had to analyse the information they had gained in the light of the theoretical ideas they gained in the first half of the semester, and draw conclusions about why they thought the current situation of their issues occurred. This report was an assessment task, as was a TV Talk Show script and a written assignment on a description and explanation of their personal views and understandings about the real world of broadcasting industries.

Key Features Contributing to the Authenticity of the Learning Environment

Barab, Squire and Dueber (2000) have argued that authenticity occurs "not in the learner, the task, or the environment, but in the dynamic interactions among these various components … authenticity is manifest in the flow itself, and is not an objective feature of any one component in isolation" (p. 38). Three features of the course, therefore, have been selected to exemplify how I believe my special issues in broadcasting course represented an authentic learning opportunity for the students, that is, there was personal relevance for the students within an appropriate discipline context. Each feature is discussed in terms of how elements of the discipline were emended into the pedagogical structures of the course.

1. **Group interaction : contextual authenticity for learning and for the discipline**

The timetabled weekly sessions were like informal meetings, with discussion focusing on key issues and questions in the first half of the semester, and on the TV Talk Show in the second half. As can be seen, there were no formal lectures presented within my course. These group interactions provided the students with opportunities to wrestle with theoretical ideas and frameworks of understanding, to analyse and critique, and to synthesise ideas to make them their own. The specific classroom environment was not a real broadcasting

environment. However, the guest speakers were a knowledgeable member of a community of broadcasting practices. This meant that students were provided with the chance to interact with real broadcasting industry ideas, authentic to broadcasting practitioners, and use/develop/ be exposed to an appropriate learning experience—all within the assumptions about the nature of them, as determined by me, a lecturer, of course.

2. Case-based learning

It has been suggested as one instructional strategy that might be used to support authentic activities. Duffy and Cunningham (1996) proposed that case materials be used as a stimulus for problem-solving activities in a particular domain, similar to the approach used in medicine. By analysing the cases, learners would come to understand the conditional application of knowledge within its context of use (Jonassen, Mayes, & Mc Aleese, 1993). Jonassen (1999) extended these ideas, proposing a model of a constructivist learning environment in which related cases are incorporated to support learners as they solve a problem or work on a project. Such cases present solutions to past problems that can compensate for learners' lack of experience, and help them develop an understanding of concepts and strategies that might be useful in similar situations.

The case-based learning environment in my course was a low-risk one for the students because, as they wrestled with ideas, they were allowed to make mistakes and encouraged to make links between the new ideas and their developing understandings. As well as the discipline area authenticity, personal relevance for the students was also in evidence as well. My aim was for students to be in charge of their own learning. I was just observing, talking to the students, providing information and offering suggestions.

On the other hand, I believed that, students needed scaffolded support to assist them to understand what it means to be an independent learner and thinker in a discipline area. For me a course or programme of study was a process of empowering people to do things for themselves and that involves periods of holding hands and not holding hands. Thus, I provided information at times, through such means as my occasional mini suggestions, but also provided plenty of opportunity for independent and group thought and interaction.

3. TV Talk Show : an authentic learning from professionals in the industries of practice

The TV Talk Show project described earlier provided opportunities for authentic learning, because through it the students interacted with professionals in the field, and gathered knowledge and experiences about the real world. The students were given the opportunity to engage with a real community of practice to gain first-hand knowledge. In addition, the students applied theoretical principles drawn from case-based study, and critiqued and analysed by them in the early part of the semester, to the TV Talk Show project they were undertaking. It was through the show project that students faced the connection between the theory and practice of broadcasting industries.

The show provided a chance for students to respond to their analyses and to synthesise their own ideas in relation to the real-life event and theoretical analysis. For example, one team of my students explored the current issue of a popular trend of being DJ, questioning about the physical attraction and the real skills and qualifications of DJ in the radio station today. As we can see in the real life, many popular DJs are TV stars, singers and TV master ceremonies (MCs) who have good appeal and charm. They then invited one good looking and well-known DJ to the class and investigated all aspects related to theoretical skills and physical appearance they questioned. They were thus given the opportunity to make the experience personally meaningful by problematising the current situation they met for themselves. At the same time, I and group peers provided structure and guidance.

It could be suggested that the TV Talk Show was not authentic to the real practice of broadcasting practices, as the students did not engage in the practices themselves. Rather, they looked on "from the outside" and critiqued the situation using theoretical principles, frameworks and ideas. My view was that students learn better if I could get them to actually do it, rather than just read about it and write about it and talk about it, but to actually have some real experience, work out what it feels like. However, I acknowledged, nobody's going to allow a bunch of broadcasting students to go into some company and instigate some sort of working process. Even though the students were only "looking in from the outside" at a broadcasting industry environment, opportunities for them to actually engage in other practices were incorporated into the show. This occurred through the planning and organising of the TV Talk Show by each group.

At the end of this course, I was pleased to know the reflection of my students toward my authentic teaching strategies. Most of them said the course provided them skills and abilities in applying knowledge to related career skills with logical analysis. They also expressed that this kind of teaching strategy encouraged them for self-learning, team leading and stimulated interest among students. Thus, not only were the students gaining insights into authentic broadcasting environments, they were also gaining authentic first-hand experience of organizing and learning how to manage a show themselves. The show and report they had to produce were authentic tasks, authentic on a personal learning level, for their own personal learning, and at the same time were authentic to the discipline of broadcasting in that they were real tasks.

Conclusion

Challenges for university lecturers come in finding the balance between what is meaningful to students, and, at the same time, purposeful and appropriate for the discipline or industry of practice context. There is a constant challenge to bridge the gap between the university learning experience and experience of the world beyond the university to prepare students to become competent persons who be able to contribute meaningfully to ever-evolving industries of practice. This paper has reported my actions and beliefs as a university lecturer who attempted, through the teaching, to bridge the gap between the institutional educational experiences and the "real-life" worlds of the broadcasting environment. I sought to provide experiences of the broadcasting world beyond the university within the "safe" learning environment of the classroom. I wish the teaching strategies I implemented may be a useful model to focus lecturers' attention upon the underlying assumptions they make about the nature of learners, of learning and of their discipline or field, and from those assumptions assemble a worthwhile, appropriate and effective set of learning experiences, that are authentic not only to learners but to the community of practice as well.

Acknowledgements

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