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PRACTICING WHAT WE PREACH: USING PROFESSIONAL DEGREE PRINCIPLES TO IMPROVE HRIR AND MANAGEMENT TEACHING

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Abstract

Many of the central principles of professional degrees taught to HRIR and business school students—putting theory into practice, knowing your customers, benchmarking against best practices, and using diverse toolkits for problem solving—are equally valid for the practice of teaching HRIR and business courses. Learning theory needs to be put into practice in the professional classroom, instructors must understand students and their diverse learning styles, teaching practices should be benchmarked against best practices, and instructors need to develop teaching toolkits for creating effective courses. As teachers of professional students, we should practice what we preach.

1. Introduction

Professional degrees for human resources and industrial relations (HRIR) and business students rest on an underlying principle of putting theory into practice. The goal is to demonstrate the importance of basing managerial decisions and corporate policies not on idiosyncratic personal experiences, naïve views of "the way it's always been done," or fads and hot topics, but on best practices informed by sound theories and supporting empirical evidence. Deciding to implement self-directed work teams, for example, should be based on a careful evaluation of the costs and benefits, not on a perception that everyone else is doing it; implementation should be underpinned by an understanding of the economics and psychology of team dynamics and employee decision-making, not by an emotional reluctance to share power or other misguided traditions.

But what happens when the academic community practices its own teaching craft? Is theory put into practice? Is the practice of business school teaching based on a careful examination of educational theory and supporting empirical evidence? Usually not. Rather, business school teaching is largely based on idiosyncratic personal experiences (mostly experience with lecture as the dominant and preferred method of instruction), naïve views of "the way it's always been done" (again, mostly lecture), and hot topics or fads (such as technology). The rich educational literature on learning theory and best practices is largely ignored. If business practices should be based on the principle of putting theory into practice, then HRIR and business school instructors should practice what they preach and base their teaching on this same principle of putting learning theory into practice. A review of learning theory reveals that standard teaching methods rooted in lecturing and other passive tools are based on an inappropriately narrow focus on one, somewhat outdated, theory of learning; the recognition of

developments in contemporary learning theory over the past forty years forces us to update and broaden standard teaching practices.

As a second element of practicing what we preach, consider one of the most popular business maxims: “know your customer.” While I do not advocate the equation of students to customers, this maxim nevertheless begs the question of how well we understand our students. In particular, teaching methods need to be responsive to students’ learning styles. The presence of diverse learning styles in a professor’s classroom means that diverse learning activities are needed. Some students learn effectively from the traditional methods such as lectures and written, textual materials, but others learn better using other methods so the traditional methods need supplementing. Knowing the customer in this context also implies that instructors must understand what motivates students to learn and must assess what students know about the subject matter from the start of the course. Note carefully that this does not mean that traditional teaching methods should be completely purged; rather, they need to be updated and enriched.

Business school and HRIR students are also taught other aspects of effective professional practice. They are taught to benchmark best practices. They are coached to develop robust toolkits for tackling applied business and HRIR problems. Both of these tools for professional practice should be adopted by professional school instructors. Faculty should monitor their teaching effectiveness and search for areas of improvement by benchmarking their instructional techniques against well-accepted best practices. And faculty should develop rich teaching toolkits that provide varied methods for connecting with today’s students.

In sum, HRIR and business school instructors need to practice what we preach. Our own teaching methods should be based on putting theory into practice, on knowing our “customers,” and on benchmarking best practices. As the next three sections illustrate, each of these principles

reinforces the fourth dimension of practicing what we preach—developing rich toolkits of instructional methods. A variety of concrete examples from my own instruction of a focused HRIR course (labor relations) in a business school are thus presented to stimulate thinking about a toolkit approach. While the examples come from a labor relations course, the themes and lessons are widely applicable across HRIR and business courses.

2. Putting Learning Theory Into Practice

2.1. Learning Theory

Table 1 summarizes a useful categorization of learning and instructional theories into three major strains: behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism (Cooper, 1993; Driscoll, 2000; Ertmer and Newby, 1993; Schunk, 1996).[1] An individual's response to a stimulus is the foundation of behaviorism. Positive and negative reinforcements are used to reward and punish behavior in order to change behavior through operant conditioning. As a learning theory, behaviorism conceives of learning as a form of behavior modification. This is the familiar paradigm in which educators teach by using reinforcers such as good grades to reward correct answers. While not exactly what behaviorism advocates as a preferred instructional method, behaviorism is consistent with traditional instructor-centered learning in which the expert professor lectures to a passive but hopefully receptive audience (the "sage on the stage" using "chalk and talk").

Behaviorism is particularly associated with the work of B.F. Skinner from the 1930s to the 1960s (Morris, 2003), but largely faded from educational psychology between the 1960s and

[1] This is, of course, a gross oversimplification which overlooks many variants of these three categories and other elements of learning (e.g., motivation), but these three categories are useful for the objective of this section which is to get HRIR and business school instructors (not educational theorists) to think about the connections between learning theory and instructional methods.

1990s (Pressley and Roehrig, 2003).[2] This decline partly stems from the fact that in behavioral learning theory, the mind is a black box—information processing is not important, reinforcers are (Driscoll, 2000). Cognitivism—the second category of learning theories in Table 1—largely displaced behaviorism by looking inside the black box and focusing on cognitive information processing. Cognitivism sees the human mind as similar to a computer. As such, learning means storing information in the brain's memory.

Cognitivism represents a shift from emphasizing the environment and external stimuli to emphasizing the individual learner and sensory stimuli. The output of the learning process is seen as the capacity to recall and use information stored in memory, not as producing the correct behavioral response to an environmental stimulant. The cognitivism literature is vast, but two common denominators are important here: one, memory, and therefore learning, depend on connecting information to previous knowledge, and two, learners must be actively involved in the learning process.

While cognitivism emphasizes the importance of information processing for learning, it is nevertheless similar to behaviorism to the extent that both theories view knowledge as objective. In both theories, "knowledge is thought to exist independently of learners, and learning consists of transferring that knowledge from outside to within the learner" (Driscoll, 2000, p. 376). In contrast, the third and most recent view theorizes that knowledge is *constructed* by individuals from their own experiences. The third category of learning theories is therefore called constructivism and is summarized in Table 1.

[2] In fact, the fraction of articles published in the *Journal of Educational Psychology* on behavioral learning went from 20 percent in 1960-61 to 0 percent in 1997-98; the fraction of articles on cognition went from 1 percent to 24 percent (Pressley and Roehrig, 2003).

Constructivism grows out of cognitivism's focus on cognitive activity, but in constructivism, "humans *create* meaning as opposed to *acquiring* it" (Ertmer and Newby, 1993, p. 62, emphasis in original).[3] Jean Piaget, for example, theorized that learning is constructed when individuals discover—for themselves, not from someone else—discrepancies between their prior beliefs and new outcomes (Brainerd, 2003). Constructivists therefore promote the use of participation and reflection, self-discovery, consideration of multiple perspectives, integrated curriculum, and learner ownership. Social constructivists further emphasize the importance of social interaction and therefore promote collaboration among learners.

2.2. Classroom Implications of Learning Theory

Most instruction continues to be teacher-centered (Weimer, 2002). Instructors lecture, control classroom discussions, provide examples, and summarize material. This traditional model, in essence, reflects the behavior modification vision of learning inherent in behaviorism.[4] Instructors control the stimuli and are concerned with producing the correct responses. Or in the context of technology in education, to use the internet only as a static source of information in which students read text or watch a multimedia presentation, and then take an online quiz is a form of programmed instruction in the behaviorist tradition (Smith-Gratto, 2000). These behavioral methods are effective for basic learning (e.g., discrimination, generalization, and association), but not for higher order learning (e.g., critical thinking, complex problem solving) (Ertmer and Newby, 1993).

[3] As with behaviorism and cognitivism, I recognize that constructivism is a vast theoretical label and that I am including diverse perspectives under a single umbrella. The commonalities rather than the differences, however, are important for the purposes of this paper. Schunk (1996) provides a textbook overview of different constructivist theories.

[4] It should be noted, however, that a true behaviorist would not suggest that good instruction consists solely of lecturing to a passive audience. Specific behaviorist instructional methods

In contrast, cognitivism implies that instructors must do more than lecture, summarize, and reward correct responses—they must also help students make connections between pieces of information. In short, instructors must make the material *meaningful* by linking it to what the students already know (Schunk, 1996). For example, each chapter of Budd's (2005) labor relations textbook begins with an advance organizer which draws on the previous chapters to set the stage for new learning. This is not a chapter summary—an advance organizer instead uses existing knowledge to lay the foundation for what is to come. Each class session can also start out with its own advance organizer. Integrating themes that run throughout a course—such as the struggle to balance property rights and labor rights in a labor relations course (Budd, 2005)—can also help students connect various pieces of information to make better sense of them.

The most significant challenges to traditional university-level teaching come from constructivism. The emerging calls for learner-centered teaching are rooted in constructivism (Weimar, 2002) as is the increasing attention on the social aspects of learning (Phye, 1997). The constructivist assumption that students need opportunities to actively construct their own knowledge underlies active learning (Meyers and Jones, 1993) and its subset of cooperative or collaborative learning (Barkley, Cross, and Major, 2005; Millis and Cottell, 1998). Specific examples of such learning activities will be discussed in section 5. Constructivism (and cognitivism) also imply that instructors should use technology as a tool for increasing active and collaborative learning with diverse materials, not just for delivering lectures or additional content (Budd, 2002).

Just as HRIR and management instructors preach that students should put theory into practice, so too must instructors put these learning theories into practice. This is not to say that

include programmed instruction, contingency contracts, and personalized systems of instruction

there is a single best learning theory. In fact, the three broad theories described here have significant commonalities in terms of the implications for instruction—for example, all three imply that regular practice and feedback are important (Schunk, 1996). Moreover, each theory draws our attention to different elements—the environment in which learning occurs (behaviorism), the brain's method of processing information (cognitivism), and the interaction between the environment and the individual (constructivism). Putting learning theory into practice requires considering all three of these elements and theories.

In particular, putting learning theory into practice requires that instructors not overlook the constructivist implications. While behaviorism and cognitivism focus on very different aspects of learning (the environment or the individual), they both assume a high degree of uniformity. In behaviorism, effective stimulus-response techniques are assumed to be effective with all learners. In cognitivism, effective ways of structuring information to promote memory and recall are assumed to be effective with all learners. But in constructivism, learners "are not empty vessels waiting to be filled, but rather active organisms seeking meaning" (Driscoll, 2000, p. 376). Instructors must therefore not only provide opportunities for self-discovery (see section 5 below), but must also recognize that different methods are more effective with different types of learners. This is the focus of the next section.

3. Know Your Customer: Understanding Students

An important business maxim is "know your customer." Applying this to teaching implies that instructors need to understand their students. This section focuses on three key elements of knowing our students: 1) understanding how students learn, 2) paying attention to what motivates learning, and 3) assessing what students know when they start the class and what

(Driscoll, 2000; Schunk, 1996).

they are learning as the course progresses. Each of these three elements are important for effective instruction.

3.1. Learning Styles

Complementing the previous discussion on learning theory, there is a large body of educational research on individual differences in learning styles. This research generally spans four dimensions: personality, information processing, social interaction, and instructional methods (Claxton and Murrell, 1987). The conclusion of all of this research? Instructors need to use diverse teaching methods to connect with learners with different strengths—that is, with students with different learning styles. There are numerous ways to categorize learning styles. One simple categorization is auditory learners, visual learners, and tactile/kinesthetic learners (Sarasin, 1999). Traditional lectures might fulfill the needs of auditory learners, but not visual learners (unless there is significant visual support) or tactile learners (who learn by doing, not listening).

My own experience indicates that HRIR and business school classrooms include a wide range of learning styles. Though an anonymous online survey, 39 students (a response rate of 60 percent) from a required labor relations course in the HRIR M.A. program in the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management completed, among other things, Kolb's (1984) learning style inventory. Kolb's (1984) learning style inventory is arguably the most widely-used and well-respected learning style inventories available. This inventory has four dimensions: active experimentation (doing), abstract conceptualization (thinking), reflective observation (watching), and concrete experience (feeling). As summarized in Figure 1, four learning styles are derived from these four dimensions: Accommodators (favoring active and concrete learning),

Convergers (active and abstract), Divergers (reflective and concrete), and Assimilators (reflective and abstract).

Figure 2 presents the scatterplot of the 39 students in my sample against Kolb's four dimensions. Even with a small sample size, the diversity of learning styles is very striking. The four learning styles appear almost equally in these data. Nearly as many prefer an active approach as do a reflective approach to processing information, and nearly as many prefer to think in concrete terms as do in abstract terms. In short, students are all over the map in terms of learning style, even though this sample is fairly homogeneous demographically. At the time of the survey, all of the respondents were full-time Master's students in an HRIR program with a strong professional degree orientation in a business school, with similar career interests, and with a relatively narrow age range. And yet, their learning styles are evenly distributed across all four styles and are nearly as diverse as they could possibly be. There is little reason to expect that many HRIR and business school classrooms at other universities are not just as diverse. Figure 2 is therefore a powerful diagram.

The implication for HRIR and management instructors is straightforward. All four learning styles are particularly well-suited to *different* types of learning activities.[5] Assimilators are particularly well-served by lectures. Convergers need hands on experiences to learn how things work. Divergers prefer listening and sharing ideas. Accomodators need opportunities for trial and error self-discovery. These predictions are supported even in my small sample of 39 students. On a five-point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree, accommodators

[5] Neither Kolb's inventory nor the results presented here support a naïve view that lectures are bad and active learning exercises are good (or vice versa). Instead, the results imply that the situation is complex—because the observed learning styles fall into all four quadrants, an effective classroom needs varied learning exercises—some active and some reflective, some

rated the importance of lecture a full point above assimilators. Accomodators and convergers (the two active information processing categories) rated the importance of active learning activities more than half of a point above Assimilators and Divergers (the two passive information processing categories). For classrooms that mimic the diversity in Figure 2 even partially, diverse learning activities are therefore clearly needed. Some examples are discussed in section 5.

3.2. Motivation for Learning

Another aspect of knowing your "customer" in the context of classroom instruction is understanding student motivation for learning. For example, self-efficacy—the extent to which individuals feel capable or in control—is viewed as a major source of motivation for learning (Bandura, 1997). Putting various motivational elements together yields a widely-cited model of motivation in instructional design—the attention-relevance-confidence-satisfaction (ARCS) model (Keller, 1987a, 1987b). Attention focuses on arousing a learner's curiosity and interest. Relevance ties course material into students' interests and goals. Confidence draws on the importance of self-efficacy as a motivational factor and thus reminds instructors to establish clear goals and opportunities for success. Satisfaction pertains to the provisions of rewards for successful learning. All of these elements are viewed as important for student motivation for learning.

Understanding our students requires that instructors evaluate these motivational issues for each class. In fact, my call for knowing our "customers" is similar in spirit to Keller's (1987b) recommendation that instructors perform an audience analysis to evaluate the presence of motivational problems. Conveniently, the ARCS model reinforces many of the same

concrete and some abstract. Lecturing and traditional instructional methods have their place, but

instructional implications already derived from my earlier reviews of learning theory and learning styles. The element of Attention implies that diverse learning exercises are important—people generally like variety so even those who are well-served by lecture methods, for example, can get bored with them. In fact, in my survey described above, students in all four of the categories of learning styles agreed or strongly agreed (on average) with the need for varied learning exercises. Relevance harkens back to the cognitivism emphasis on meaningful material that is linked to what students already know. Confidence reinforces the constructivist's call for active learning and self-discovery. And Satisfaction includes behavioral elements of reinforcing correct responses. HRIR and management instructors who know their "customers" will therefore use rich, multi-dimensional teaching strategies.

3.3. Assessing What Students Know

A third element of knowing your customer is understanding what students know about the subject matter of a particular course. Instructors frequently start a course with implicit assumptions about students' prior knowledge. If these assumptions are inaccurate, learning will be impaired. For students who know more than the instructor assumes, the course will be redundant and de-motivating. For students who know significantly less than the instructor assumes, the lack of a foundation for mastering the new material will be a barrier to learning. Understanding students' prior experiences can also help an instructor create opportunities for students to tie the course material into what they already know.

These same principles apply throughout a course. Knowing our students includes monitoring their learning during a course to keep the material challenging and interesting, but not overwhelming. Formal tests and other graded exercises are, of course, often used to assess

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should be supplemented with other types of learning activities.

student learning, but an exclusive reliance on these formal exercises—which often come later rather than sooner in a course—fails to reveal problems soon enough to handle them effectively. Suggestions for assessments that are embedded in course activities are discussed in section 5.2 below to help us know our students better and thereby become more effective instructors.

4. Benchmarking Teaching Best Practices

A third element of practicing what we preach is using benchmarked best practices. HRIR and business students are taught that in business, theory and research are translated into professional practice through benchmarking an organization's existing practices against a set of accepted best practices. The same should be true for teaching. "Informed teaching requires making instructional decisions based on collected wisdom from scholarship and practice" (Barkley, Cross, and Major, 2005, p. xiii). Luckily, research on the effectiveness of instructional methods has been used to construct lists of best practices. HRIR and management instructors should use these lists of best practices to benchmark their own instructional practices.

One widely-cited list is Chickering and Gamson's (1987) seven principles of good teaching practices:

1. Encourages contacts between students and faculty.
2. Develops reciprocity and cooperation among students.
3. Uses active learning techniques.
4. Provides prompt feedback.
5. Emphasizes time on task.
6. Communicates high expectations.
7. Respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

These seven principles are based on over 50 years worth of research and represent the "grand synthesis of research on learning in college" (Barkley, Cross, and Major, 2005, p. 16). Note that the second and third principles reflect the importance of contemporary learning theories in which learning is rooted in collaborative student construction rather than receipt of knowledge. The fourth principle reinforces the behaviorism emphasis on feedback and in conjunction with principles five and six also underscores the importance of student motivation. The seventh principle underscores the need to appreciate the diversity of learning styles described in section 3.

Alternatively, Angelo (1993) develops a list of best practices that includes fourteen principles—what Angelo describes as a "teacher's dozen." These best practices include "active learning is more effective than passive learning," "information organized in personally meaningful ways is more likely to be retained, learned, and used," "learners need feedback on their learning," and "teachers need to balance levels of intellectual challenge and instructional support." These lists of best practices reinforce the need to consider research-based pedagogy in designing updated and effective teaching practices. And these lists provide a straightforward way for HRIR and business school instructors to benchmark their own teaching methods.

5. Putting it All Together: Teaching Toolkits

The previous three sections all support the need for instructors to develop strategies that engage learners in a more active fashion than has been traditionally been the case, and that are responsive to a diversity of learning styles. In other words, just as HRIR and business professionals are taught to develop rich toolkits for solving business problems, so, too, should faculty develop rich toolkits—portfolios of varied teaching methods, learning exercises, and assessments—for solving the teaching problem of creating more effective courses. In this

section, I explore three categories—active learning, informal classroom assessment techniques, and rubrics—from which instructors can draw various examples and ideas for adding to their teaching toolkits. Neither these categories nor the examples therein are meant to be exhaustive; rather, they are intended to stimulate instructors to think about different possibilities and are presented from the perspective of a disciplinary colleague, not a researcher or specialist in educational theory and practice. Some of the ideas described here may appeal to a certain instructor and fit with a certain subject; others may not. But they illustrate just some of the rich possibilities. The reader is encouraged to consult the references cited for more ideas and implementation hints.

5.1. Active Learning in HRIR and Management Teaching

Based on contemporary learning theory, the existence of a diversity of learning styles, learning motivation, and empirical research on effective teaching practices, active learning is now widely accepted as a teaching best practice (Johnson, Johnson, and Smith, 1991; Meyers and Jones, 1993). Active learning is based on four elements to help create new mental structures and therefore promote learning (Meyers and Jones, 1993):

- Talking and listening
- Writing
- Reading
- Reflecting.

These four elements have been pursued in diverse ways so that many active learning exercises have been developed, ranging from simple and quick informal small group activities such as “Think-Pair-Share” to formal cooperative learning situations such as group projects. Active learning can be an individual activity (such as a student journal) or a group activity (such

as a peer writing group). Active learning exercises can involve concrete experiences (as in a simulation) or reflection (as in the construction of a Mind Map). But again, active learning is not intended as a wholesale replacement for lectures and other traditional methods. Rather, the intent is to make lectures more effective by complementing them with varied exercises in which students are engaged in creating their own discoveries and knowledge.

An easy and widely-used active learning exercise is “think-pair-share” (Barkley, Cross, and Major, 2005; Millis and Cottell, 1998). This is an in-class exercise that starts with the instructor providing a challenging question to the entire class. Before soliciting responses, however, students are given a little time (such as one minute) to think about the question individually. The students might be asked to write down their individual thoughts. Students then informally pair up with another student to discuss their thoughts and responses. In sharp contrast to a traditional situation in which one student is called on to answer an instructor’s question during a lecture, this paired stage of the “think-pair-share” exercise allows all students to discuss their thoughts. The final step of the exercise is sharing individual responses with the entire class. The “think-pair” steps typically greatly enrich this sharing stage because students have been able to test and validate their ideas in the safety of small group before sharing their ideas in front of the entire class. The paired step also promotes the development of better responses through exchange and refinement (Johnson, Johnson, and Smith, 1991).

“Think-pair-share” is not time consuming and does not involve significant preparation or supporting materials. Not only does it promote student participation, connections with existing knowledge, and construction of new learning, but it can also be used as a change of pace in the middle of a lecture (recall the Attention dimension of the ARCS model of learning motivation). Other similar exercises can accomplish these same objectives, such as a round robin

brainstorming exercise or buzz groups discussion groups (Barkley, Cross, and Major, 2005). There are many HRIR and management applications of these easy-to-implement, ungraded, informal, small group exercises. Examples from labor relations include having students generate alternative union suppression tactics, develop ethical arguments pertaining to strike replacements, consider the pros and cons of union versus nonunion voice mechanisms, and tackle legal and functional case studies.

Another modification of the "think-pair-share" idea is to use concept tests in which students are presented with a short problem, "vote" on several choices, and then work with a partner to verify or change their answer. However, in my experience when an instructor asks for a show of hands to vote on the choices, many students do not raise their hand for any of the choices, and others raise their hand after seeing the popularity of the choice—in other words, students are passive rather than active participants. I therefore created simple "multipurpose concept quiz response cards" consisting of a pair of laminated cards—one printed on green paper with various positive responses ("yes", "true", "legal", and "A"), the other printed on red paper with various negative responses ("no", "false", "illegal", and "B"). Each student is provided with both cards.

To use these cards, I create a question that has two possible answers. This can take many forms—for example, a problem to solve, a legal case, a business case, or a question about a concept. I ask students to derive an individual answer and then show the appropriate card to indicate their response. This simple exercise prompts active participation and thinking in several ways. Since each student has both cards, I can easily make sure everyone is voting—and I do not proceed until everyone is holding up a card. Because each card has the same blue backing, students in the back cannot see the votes of those in front, thereby lessening the "popularity

effect." Hesitant students have to actively think about their answer and can not rely on seeing what other students answered to avoid thinking through their decision. This provides a solid basis for either immediate class discussion which has broader participation than usual, or for a quick "think-pair-share" refinement of their answers before turning to the full-class discussion.

The principles of "think-pair-share" can be adapted and applied in other diverse ways to fit different contexts. In teaching labor relations, I noticed that students were not engaged or making connections when I simply lectured on historical union organizations such as the American Federation of Labor. I therefore created a "think-rap-match" worksheet in which groups of students use philosophical statements from four historical union organizations to match strategies, structures, views on strikes, and other issues to the correct organization. Rather than passively listening (or not) to an instructor's piece-by-piece lecture, students must think carefully about these organizations by talking, listening, and reflecting. The students are therefore actively engaged in creating their own associations between pieces of information.

As another labor relations example, I have largely replaced lecturing on the bargaining environment with an exercise I call "think-rap-map" (Budd, 2004). By using a newspaper-type background description of an upcoming labor-management negotiation (Budd, 2005, Box 8.18), small groups cooperatively create a Mind Map of the bargaining environment for that negotiation.[6] As such, rather than passively listening to an instructor describe each element of the bargaining environment, students actively brainstorm to generate their own ideas, and then

[6] A Mind Map is a radial (rather than linear) outline in which ideas and pictures flow out from a central concept (Buzan and Buzan, 1993). Each branch is labeled with a key word and perhaps a reinforcing image. Major topics or categories associated with the central topic are presented by thick branches radiating from the central image; subcategories and examples flow out of these major branches. As a result, a Mind Map organizes information into hierarchical categories as in a traditional outline. But compared to a traditional outline, a Mind Map presents the outline in a single, radial, colorful diagram.

analyze the ideas to present their own interpretation of the important elements of the bargaining environment. This Mind Map exercise also provides a rich learning activity for visual and tactile learners who are traditionally not as well served by lectures. As a result, in addition to being an active learning exercise, this "think-rap-map" exercise also supports classroom teaching that is responsive to diverse learning styles. For other topics, groups could make a concept map—or what Barkley, Cross, and Major (2005, p. 226) call a word web—rather than a Mind Map with many of these same pedagogical benefits.

As an example of an individual rather than group active learning exercise, consider another application in labor relations. A central topic in labor relations is the nature of U.S. union contracts. To help students experience these contracts for themselves, as an in-class exercise I give each student an actual contract. As a whole, these contracts come from diverse industries and occupations. I then ask them to find common provisions (union recognition, just cause, seniority rights, management rights, and the like) and share them with the class. They are then asked to find clauses in their contracts which are unique to their industry or occupation and to share these with the class. This exercise can be particularly engaging for kinesthetic learners who benefit from seeing and touching the contracts, and for concrete learners who can see specific contract clauses as actually written by the parties (rather than an abstract description of clauses). There are undoubtedly similar applications in many other courses—employee handbooks in a human resource management course, corporate mission and ethics statements in a strategic management course, business contracts in a business law class, or financial documents in a finance or accounting class.

Debates and collective bargaining simulations are excellent examples of more ambitious active learning exercises in formal rather than informal groups, and are already widely used in

labor relations courses. These exercises—and many others (Barkley, Cross, and Major, 2005; Johnson, Johnson, and Smith, 1991; Meyers and Jones, 1993; Millis and Cottell, 1998)—have numerous applications to other HRIR and business school courses and can help instructors actively engage students in the learning process while being responsive to the needs of students with different learning styles. Such exercises are a critical part of every instructor's teaching toolkit.

5.2. Classroom Assessment Techniques

Complementing lectures with active learning exercises (and other elements such as the rich use of technology) can greatly enrich learning, but feedback is also essential to guide students in their learning (Huba and Freed, 2000). Moreover, part of understanding our "customers" to support more effective learning is knowing the experiences and knowledge they begin a course with, and monitoring their learning during a course. Complementing formal, graded assessments such as exams which often come later in a course, are a variety of informal methods for assessing student learning and providing feedback. These classroom assessment techniques can be embedded in course activities and therefore promote active learning, assessment, and feedback.

A simple (and very popular) classroom assessment technique is the one-minute paper (Angelo and Cross, 1993; Huba and Freed, 2000). A one-minute paper is typically used at the end of a class session and students are asked to briefly describe in writing the most important point from the class session and the most important unanswered question. A close cousin to the one-minute paper is the muddiest point assessment. At the end of a class session, students are asked to indicate the muddiest point from that class session. Index cards are commonly used for

both of these assessments and students hand in their anonymous responses on the way out of the classroom.

The one-minute paper and muddiest point assessments are very easy ways to assess the effectiveness of a class session and to therefore shape the next session. If a number of responses point to a similar area of confusion, I start the next class session with a review of this area or I send an e-mail message to the entire class that tries to clarify the confusion. If the responses reveal multiple areas of confusion, I sometimes start the next class session by reading some of the statements and briefly responding to them. As another variation, before the students hand in their muddiest points, I ask them to pair up and try to clear up each other's confusion. Only the unresolved muddiest points are turned in.

The response cards described in the previous section can also be used as a quick assessment mechanism. If I ask a true-false or other types of question that has a correct response (as opposed to a discussion question), based on their responses with the cards I can quickly gauge whether there is more mastery or confusion across the class.

Another classroom assessment technique is directed paragraphing (Angelo and Cross, 1993). In a directed paraphrasing exercise, students paraphrase some material for a specific audience. An HRIR example is "in a concise paragraph, paraphrase what you have learned about globalization to explain to a policymaker why globalization has profound implications for domestic employment issues." A second example is "in a concise paragraph, paraphrase what you have learned about union strategies in organizing drives to describe these strategies to a new union organizer." Note again how this exercise combines active learning with assessment and how it can be easily applied to a wide range of subjects in HRIR and business school courses.

Understanding what students know in order to promote effective learning also requires assessing what students know at the beginning of a course. A background knowledge probe is a short questionnaire used at the start of a course to determine how much students already know (Angelo and Cross, 1993). This can be done through simple multiple choice questions (for example, comparable worth—a) I have never heard this term, b) I have heard this term, but I don't know what it means, c) I have a vague idea of what this means, or d) I can clearly explain what this term means) or open-ended questions. Background knowledge probes can also be used to gauge student confidence, motivation, and relevant prior experiences. Such probes can also be useful when starting a new unit in the middle of a course. All of these informal classroom assessment exercises can be important elements of an instructor's toolkit.

5.3. Rubrics in HRIR and Management Teaching

An assessment-related component of a teaching toolkit that does not seem very widespread in HRIR and business school teaching is a rubric. A rubric is a grading matrix that provides specific scoring anchors for different levels of performance in an exercise (Arter and McTighe, 2001; Huba and Freed, 2000). An example of a rubric from a labor relations exercise is presented in Table 2.[7] The exercise for this rubric is one in which students write a brief of a legal decision, post the brief to an online threaded discussion forum, and respond online to questions posed by the instructor and other students. Note how this rubric defines the standards of good and poor student performance by decomposing the assignment into its important elements (in this case, factual clarity, explanation of the legal logic, implications, and answering questions) and by attaching scores to explicit anchors within each element. Rubrics can therefore

[7] For tips on creating a rubric, see Arter and McTighe (2001) and Huba and Freed (2000).

be used to both inform students of performance standards and to judge their actual performance against them.

Not only do rubrics such as this one help provide consistency in grading, but they can also be powerful teaching tools (Arter and McTighe, 2001; Huba and Freed, 2000). I provide the grading rubrics for various assignments to the students at the beginning of the course so these rubrics are available to them as they work on the assignments. By decomposing assignments into their important elements, and by providing specific anchors for varying levels of performance, students can better understand the nature of the assignments and my expectations. This leads to better work. As the rubrics are used directly for grading the assignments, they also provide clear feedback for improvement for students who did not perform at the top level. In addition to the example presented in Table 2, I have successfully used rubrics in HRIR-related courses for debates and group presentations so rubrics have wide applicability in professional school instruction.

In other words, rubrics can be another element of a teaching toolkit that helps us practice what we preach and deliver rich courses to HRIR and business school students. They provide explicit learning expectations which are important in many theories of learning. Rubrics help boost student confidence and self-efficacy which are key elements of motivation for learning. And rubrics help convey high expectations which is an important part of teaching best practices.

6. Conclusion

To promote reflection on up-to-date instructional methods that are appropriate in today's HRIR and business school classrooms, this paper provides a review of learning theory combined with striking evidence on the diversity of learning styles that professional school instructors should expect is present in their classrooms. As captured by the resulting list of teaching best

practices, the theoretical and empirical evidence from the education literature indicates that college and university instructors must supplement traditional teaching methods with learner-centered practices, exercises, and assessments that are responsive to diverse learning styles.

In fact, you've probably already experienced some of the challenges—the 20-minute student attention span, lectures that don't seem to energize the class as much as you had hoped, exercises that connect with some students but not others, or a lack of curiosity and other motivational elements among your students. The solutions to these challenges are admittedly complex. There are no one-size-fits-all simple solutions. It is therefore useful to think of having a teaching toolkit—a portfolio of varied learning exercises and assessment mechanisms to create stimulating and effective courses. This paper presents some ideas for starting or adding to your toolkit. Some of the best practices and learning exercises may fit with your teaching style, students, and course content, others may not. Other elements such as formal assessments (Huba and Freed, 2000), "teaching within the rhythms of the semester" (Duffy and Wright, 1995), and the pedagogically-rich use of technology (Abbey, 2000; Budd, 2002) and textbooks (Budd, 2005) are also important. The discussion here is therefore intended to be inspirational, not exhaustive.

Lastly, many of the central principles of professional degrees that we teach to HRIR and business school students—putting theory into practice, knowing your customers, benchmarking against best practices, and applied toolkits for problem solving—are equally valid for our practice of teaching. As teachers of professional students, we should practice what we preach.

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Table 1
Learning Theory Overview

Theory	Vision of Learning	Role of the Instructor
Behaviorism	Behavior modification	Structuring the learning environment so that learners correctly respond to stimuli
Cognitivism	Information processing	Helping learners connect new concepts and applications to existing knowledge
Constructivism	Knowledge construction	Helping learners create, not simply acquire, new knowledge

Table 2
Example Rubric

SCORE	Possible Points	Description
Description/Factual Clarity (20 points)		
	18-20	Easy to follow description of the facts of the case. Sufficient details are presented to understand the legal ruling and the implications, but excess details are omitted.
	16-17	The necessary facts are included, but sometimes hard to follow. Excess details clutter the description and make it harder to follow.
	13-15	Key facts are missing (this might include key events or contract provisions).
	< 13	Irrelevant and impossible to follow.
Comments:		
Explanation of Legal Logic (30 points)		
	28-30	Clear statement of the legal question(s) including relationship to the NLRA and if relevant, major precedents. Clear description of the issues needed to answer the legal question(s) and how the facts of this particular case support a particular ruling. Easy for the reader to understand what part of the NLRA the case involves and to understand why the NLRB ruled how it did.
	24-27	The legal question(s) and supporting facts are included, but are not always clearly presented. Missing connection with NLRA and/or major precedents (if relevant). Reader can figure out the issue and ruling, but with some effort.
	21-23	Missing significant aspects of the legal question(s) and/or application of the facts to the legal question. Difficult for the reader to understand the issue and ruling. Reader will not be able to answer a short-answer exam question on the major issue of the case.
	< 21	Reader cannot figure out why the NLRB ruled the way they did, even with great effort.
Comments:		
Implications (30 points)		

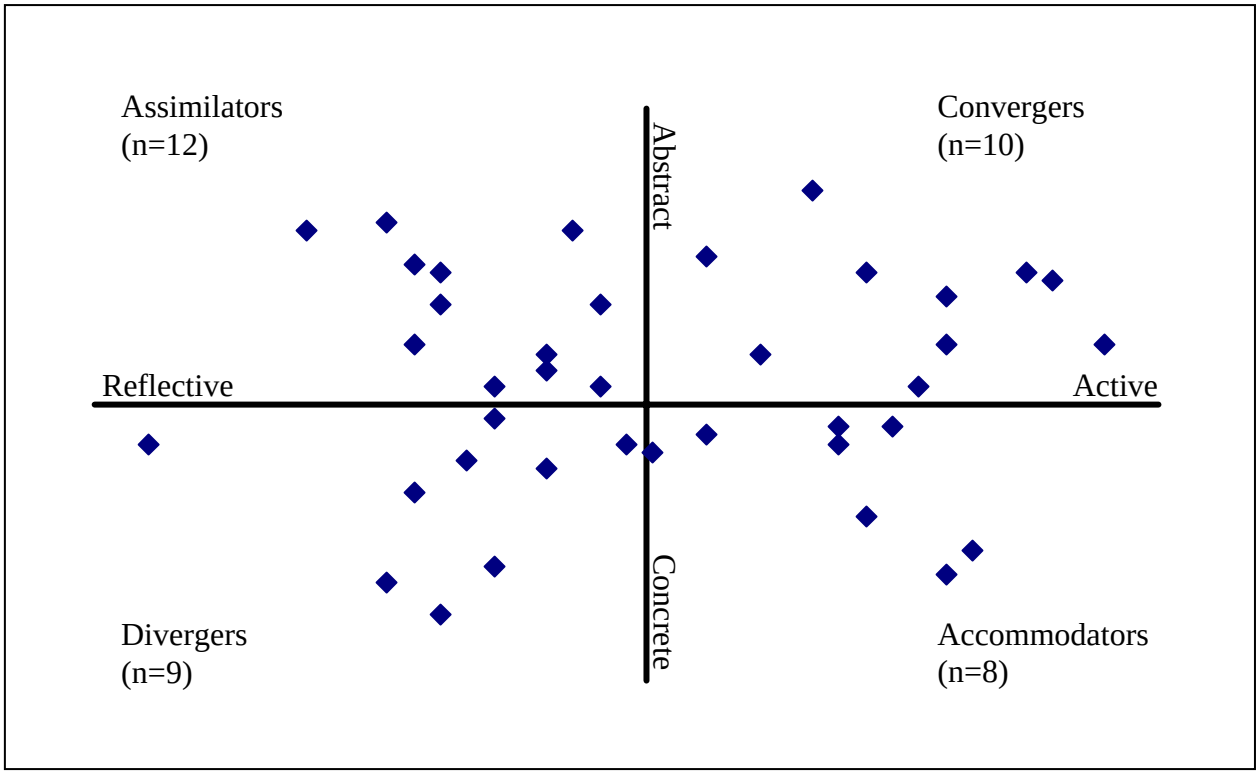
	28-30	Meaningful legal and practical implications are discussed. The legal implications describe what the case means for subsequent NLRB cases on similar issues. The practical implications provide important lessons for managers, unions, and/or individual employees, such as things they should be aware of, guard against, or not do. Reader is well-prepared to answer a short-answer exam question on the major issue of the case.
	24-27	Some good legal and practical implications are presented, but they are incomplete. Reader is somewhat well-prepared to answer a short-answer exam question on the major issue of the case.
	21-23	Only legal or practical implications are presented, not both. Implications are overly narrow and do not reflect careful thinking about the nature of the case and how it might apply to related situations.
	<21	No implications or incorrect implications. HR managers or unions are likely to violate the law, or individuals are likely to forfeit important rights.
Comments:		
Answers to Questions (20 points)		
	18-20	Questions are completely and clearly answered in a timely fashion.
	15-17	Questions are answered, but follow-up questions are needed for the reader to understand the answer.
	<15	Questions are ignored or are never resolved. Reader will not be able to answer a short-answer exam question on the major issue of the case.
Comments:		

Figure 1
Kolb's Learning Styles

		Processing of Information	
		Active	Reflective
Perception of Information	Concrete	Accommodator	Diverger
	Abstract	Converger	Assimilator

Source: Kolb (1984).

Figure 2
The Diverse Learning Styles of HRIR Students: Scatterplot of Kolb's Learning Styles



Source: Author's survey of University of Minnesota HRIR graduate students, N=39.