LET'S COLLABORATE! COURSE CONTENT COLLABORATION: GLOBAL BUSINESS AND SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Merri Pedersen, Grand Canyon University
Helen G. Hammond, Grand Canyon University

ABSTRACT

Faculty commonly engage students in collaborative efforts within both the online and face-to-face classroom settings. From a teaching best practice perspective, it is valuable to consider other collaboration opportunities. Based on this idea, two faculty from a private Christian University conducted a cross-course collaboration between students in a Global Business course and students in a Servant Leadership course. The cross-course collaboration was examined through the lens of Bandura's Social Learning theory. The key takeaways of the study include potential teaching best practices that can be implemented through cross-course collaboration. Such a collaboration may enhance 21st-century leadership skills, specifically in the areas of presentation, problem solving, and communication skills.

Keywords: Bandura social learning theory, collaboration, teaching best practices, adult learners, traditional students, higher education, course content, global business, servant leadership

INTRODUCTION

Preparing undergraduate business students comes with several responsibilities, the most obvious being content engagement and mastery. Faculty engage students in class discussions, group work, and activities that give the students opportunities to learn and experience beyond the content itself; but this also allow them to develop as critical thinkers, effective communicators, and global citizens. This extension of learning beyond the course content takes on many forms and may provide the skills needed to be successful in the 21st century workplace. Baird (2019) described the skills needed for the 21st century workplace such as teamwork, collaboration, and problem solving. Thus, learning these skills in an undergraduate setting may help students be more prepared for the business world.

Two faculty in the college of business at a large private university located in the Southwestern United States set out to explore collaborative teaching best practices using content in common between two different undergraduate courses: MGT 410-Servant Leadership and BUS 390-Global Business. The intent of the study was to give students an opportunity to share their perspectives on the course content and to broaden their understanding of the opportunities to learn through the lens of Bandura's Social Learning Theory. Zulkarnain and Rizkita (2020) noted the value of social learning through techniques such as group problem solving and collaborative learning where students work together to discuss difficult concepts. Combining adult cohort students with traditional students, each from different courses, supported the concepts of social learning theory.

SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

Bandura's Social Learning Theory explains that people learn from one another through observation, imitation, and modeling (Kurt, 2020). Most of what they learn is the result of observing someone else and then trying to replicate what they have seen through observation, imitation, and modeling (2020). However, it is possible to observe, imitate,

and model; yet not engage in new behavior (2020). In fact, Bandura posited that one can observe, imitate, and model, yet not learn (2020). He identified that, in addition to observation, the learner must engage in four key areas for learning to occur: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (2020). Learning occurs through reciprocal interactions between personal cognitive factors, behavior, and environmental influences (2020).

Traditionally, students at the college level have been exposed to lecture centered learning, but new teaching techniques that involve learning from each other have started to gain popularity (Zulkarnain & Rizkita, 2020). Cooperative learning, where students are actively engaged with other students, builds on the social learning theory by expanding on the ideas of observation, imitation, and modeling. In the case of cooperative learning, activities carried out by students can stimulate the learning process (Zulkarnain & Rizkita, 2020). Based on this research, we devised a collaborative learning environment where the students could engage with each other to improve their overall learning experience.

THE COLLABORATION

Learning beyond course content takes on many forms and may include peer learning, service learning, collaboration, and problem solving. We set out to explore collaborative teaching best practices using common content between two different courses. The goal was to give students the opportunity to share perspectives on content and broaden their understanding of business fundamentals by collaborating on the key topics of ethics, service, and global business.

We chose two undergraduate courses offered in the Spring 2020 semester, both scheduled on Thursday evenings. The first course was an 8-week section of Global Business comprised of adult cohort learners in the face-to-face format. The second course was a 16-week section of Servant Leadership comprised of traditional students in the face-to-face format. We reflected on the importance of collaboration, our understanding of Bandura's Social Learning theory, as well as the shared content topics in both courses, and decided that a cross-course collaboration may be an excellent way to explore future teaching best practices.

Course: Global Business

The Global Business course surveys the global business environment with an emphasis on international markets and the global supply chain that impact all organizations and consumers. Students learn about basic international trade and currency issues and strategies to enter global markets successfully. Students focus on communication tools and negotiation tactics to enhance their cultural competence and business acumen. Business topics such as marketing, economics, leadership, communication, and business organization are discussed through the lens of global business. During the time of the course collaboration, the global business students focused on cultural differences and their role in leadership, with the objective of understanding the characteristics and competencies of leaders in different cultures and the challenges and opportunities associated with leading in other cultures.

Course: Servant Leadership

The Servant Leadership course design at this university was developed using a standardized course shell that included both 8-week and 16-week formats and utilized the same curriculum. We used the 16-week format to deliver the course content for the undergraduate Servant Leadership course.

Servant leadership is a follower focused approach to leadership based on the seminal research of Robert K. Greenleaf (1970). The characteristics of servant leadership include listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and community building (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006).

It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test is: "Do those serve grow as persons, do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?" (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 4).

The course provides students with foundational understanding of servant leadership and its practice, as well as its application in global contexts and its religious viewpoints. Values based leadership and

the development of a personal model of leadership are also included in the course, as well as a service-learning project. Students learn about application of servant leadership at the individual, group, organizational, and societal levels, and the attributes and value of followership through the lens of ethics, values, accountability, and responsible leadership.

TWO ACTIVITIES

The collaboration was done over a 2-week timeframe and involved traditional students from a 16-week Servant Leadership course and adult students from an 8-week Global Business course. The 2-week collaboration was completed at the beginning of the Spring 2020 semester prior to COVID-19 shutdowns, so the students were able to meet in a face-to-face environment. We collaborated on the planning and organizing of the activities and learning objectives for the activities, and two activities were chosen. The first activity was based on shared content in both courses that focused on Hofstede's Global Values. The second activity was based on shared content in both courses related to ethical decision making in leadership.

Presentations

The first week, the traditional (younger) Servant Leadership students attended the Global Business class to hear student presentations on the cultures of countries around the world. The Global Business students described the cultures based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Hofstede (1984) conducted research on cultural differences and similarities in 40 nations and defined six cultural dimensions, which each Global Business student evaluated by comparing the United States to a country of their choice.

It is important to note the course content alignment at the time of the activity. The Servant Leadership students were also studying the application of Servant Leadership in diverse contexts and the relevance of the practice of Servant Leadership in national cultural contexts and in global religious viewpoints. Understanding and mastering Hofstede's cultural dimensions was key to applying Servant Leadership in national cultures. The Servant Leadership students were encouraged to take notes and participate by asking questions of the Global Business students at the end of each presentation.

Video Case

The second week, the adult (older) cohort of Global Business students attended the Servant leadership class. In this session, the students collaborated on a video case study related to content common in both courses. In this activity, the students were evenly distributed into small groups comprised of students from both courses. The focus in this activity was collaboration through interaction and problem solving.

The video case study dealt with ethical decision making and leadership in global contexts. The case questions aligned with the learning objectives for both sections. The students were divided into six groups, with each group having a mix of traditional Servant Leadership students and adult Global Business students. Both classes viewed the video together and then collaborated in small groups using the questions provided.

RESULT

Adult Global Business Students

In the first activity (presentation), the students in the Global Business class were hesitant about the students from the Servant Leadership course listening to their presentations. But after the presentations were finished, the Global Business students were pleasantly surprised, and some of the key takeaways were:

- They felt challenged to do a better job presenting due to the larger audience, which helped contribute to honing their presentation skills (a key skill in the business world).
- They felt accomplished because they "taught" younger students about global cultures.

Traditional Servant Leadership Students

The Servant Leadership students also reluctantly approached the first activity. Ultimately, they were excited to have been invited for the cross-course collaboration and voiced their desire to stay connected to the Global Business cohort as they finished their program. Key takeaways from the Servant Leadership students included:

- They felt privileged to have the opportunity to observe adult learners who, while academically at a similar level, were far

more seasoned. They had established business acumen because they were adults who were in the workforce and had already started working and in many cases well into their careers.

- The result of the second activity was what could be described as true engagement.

Following the small group discussions, which we observed by walking the room, we engaged the students in a large group discussion related to the video and questions. It was fascinating to see the level of respect that the students from both sections developed for each other by the end of the second activity and the desire that students from both sections had to engage with each other and share their point of view.

LESSONS LEARNED

By the end of the first activity, the Servant Leadership students were keenly aware of the realities and challenges of the adult learner. Many of the Global Business students were married, had kids, and had second jobs that they referred to as "side hustles." In addition, the Servant Leadership students realized that the Global Business students were completing their degrees as a cohort, meaning they started together and take every course together—and each course is in a compressed format. While traditional students complete multiple courses concurrently in a 16-week format, adult students attend one class at a time in a compressed 8-week "cohort" format. The cohort students stay the same throughout the entire program—they even take each course in the same room—and the only change is the instructor every 8 weeks when the new course begins anew.

By the time the Servant Leadership students returned to their classroom, there was an air of amazement and respect for the Global Business students. A class discussion provided a recap and opportunity to reinforce the key take-a-ways. Opportunities were identified and addressed related to future occasions for a second cross-course collaboration. As these discussions played out, the interest both class sections found in the perspectives of each other as they engaged in civil discourse centered on shared course content stood out.

Because faculty prepare students for the next phase of their lives, understanding the unique perspectives of others and the ability to engage in civil discourse is key for them. When we set out to engage in a cross-course collaboration, our intent was to share knowledge between two classes. The key takeaway revolved around the demographics of the students (traditional versus adult) and how that played a significant role for both classes. In the Global Business class, the adult learners (who already had careers in the business world) enjoyed sharing their business knowledge with the younger students. The Global Business students also benefited from the challenge of presenting and answering questions from the younger Servant Leadership students. In the end, the students from both courses felt they grew from the experience of collaborating with each other.

CONCLUSION

Student collaboration is something that faculty engage in regularly in face-to-face classrooms. The research supports student collaboration and links it to student engagement and achievement (Baird, 2019; Giel et al., 2021). Collaboration is identified as one of four "21st Century Skills" (Begum et al., 2020; Giel et al., 2021), and we were curious how a collaboration between courses might benefit students and become a potential teaching best practice. Experiences such as teamwork, presentation skills, and communication within the classroom setting are valuable, but combining students from different demographics brings additional learning opportunities. Course content collaboration is one way to apply Bandura's Social Learning theory to help students be more prepared for the business world.

Our observations from the two-part, cross-course collaboration indicate a value to faculty looking beyond their classroom to allow students to collaborate not only with each other but with students in other courses on shared content. Among the benefits realized during the two collaborations are the opportunity to fine tune presentation, problem solving, and communication skills, while students engage in civil discourse related to issues in leadership, ethics, and global business and learn more about the challenges of each instructional format (adult cohort and traditional). Faculty and administrators have an opportunity to build on the collaborative efforts their students are already engaging in and consider what more could be done.

REFERENCES

Baird, M. (2019). Project based learning to develop 21st century competencies. In R. Power (Ed.), Technology and the Curriculum: Summer 2019. https://techandcurr2019.pressbooks.com/chapter/pbl-competencies/

Barbuto, J. E., & Wheeler, D. W. (2006). Scale development and construct clarification of servant leadership. Group & Organization Management, 31(3), 300–326. https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601106287091

Begum, R., Dhana Lakshmi, R. N., & Simha Goud, G. V. (2020). Collaborative learning: Strengthening learner's interpersonal skills. Palarch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology 17(7), 4049–4057.

Giel, L. I. S., & Noordzij, G., Wijnia, L., Noordegraaf-Eelens, L., & Denktaş, S. (2021) When birds of the same feather fly together: the impact of achievement goal compatibility in collaborative learning. Educational Psychology, 41(1), 79–98. https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2020.1787352

Greenleaf, R. K. (1970). The servant as a leader. Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership.

Hofstede, G. (1984). Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values. Sage.

Kurt, S. (2019, December 26). Social learning theory: Albert Bandura. Educational Technology. https://educationaltechnology.net/social-learning-theory-albert-bandura/

Zulkarnain, W., Sunami, & Rizkita, K. (2020, October). Development of information and communication technology-based hybrid learning in group dynamics courses with collaborative problem solving models. In 2020 6th International Conference on Education and Technology (ICET) (pp. 192–199). IEEE. https://doi.org/10.1109/ICET51153.2020.9276632