

Interactive Learning for the Property Professional in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

The author has been a practicing Chartered Surveyor for 28 years. He has held senior management positions for the last 20 years in private practice Local Government and multi-national like McDonalds hamburgers Ltd. He has always believed that when in practice a large element of his management post was to assist, train, educate and develop subordinate staff..

This paper combines commissions two and nine questioning existing methods of teaching and learning. The author has a new updated approach and creative style and adopts a different and more radical approach to the education of "wannabe" property professionals. He majors in and the paper will discuss the use of interactive learning and "real-life" scenarios in the classroom. The paper discusses problem solving, group presentations and a "team approach" which he feels are crucial to students professional development. The paper looks at a number of different ways of assessing both formally and informally student development.

The paper will also examine these methods and look at the accelerated use of Information and Technology in Property Management. There is interesting feedback involving post graduate students who have used this technology and familiarised themselves with it. The paper touches on research into the use of the internet to aid property marketing.

The R.I.C.S have recently formed a new partnership with Anglia Polytechnic University for accredited courses. The author was one of the team instrumental in achieving this and revalidating all new R.I.C.S/BSc Honours degrees in Real Estate.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Property/Land/Buildings/Real Estate are a tangible item. If they are "in situ" the majority of them are capable of being seen visited, photographed, filmed or seen or touched. If they are in a conceptual form ie a development/redevelopment scheme they are capable of being modelled. Property Professionals in the UK – Chartered Valuation Surveyors are generally very practical individual almost "hands on" and therefore there is a need to adopt a more practical or interactive stance when teachin "wannabe" surveyors and under graduates who are to become the Property Professionals in the future.

An analysis of results undertaken at my University shows those students who take a sandwich year out (12 months practical experience) have a better comprehension and perform better in Property Management modules than most full time students.

Because the subject matter in Property Management degrees can rather be described as "dry" there is a strong "driver" to make the courses more interactive analysis and research at my University shows that the student normally learns better in an environment where they can create their own leaving framework. If in class student participation and ownership is engendered students personal learning is much deeper and longer lasting.

This paper therefore seeks to take a view on interactive learning and perhaps questions the established methodology at teaching property valuation. The use of "real life" situations for "project based" learning proves dividends to student comprehension and improved grades for final degrees.

2. EFFECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR MOST STUDENTS

The following questions need to be answered with regard to students effective learning.

What is it that our students want to learn?

How can they learn most effectively

How can we judge what they have learnt?

2.1 What They Want to Learn

At Anglia in the Department of the Built Environment we use Study Guides. The Study Guide provides the answer, the answer to what in that it is comprehensive and in a general sense contains the majority of information required to pass the exam/coursework. The provision of the Module Reference Sheet at the front of the Study Guide defines the goals and objectives of the module.

Supplementary reading is required in private study periods responsibility of the individual student. It is a task of the lecturer to monitor this. Progress can then be checked.

2.2 How Best Can They Learn?

Different learning activities exist and some are most suited to different subjects. Valuation is an art, not an exact science, many students have difficulties with this, and therefore involves the student in making assumptions on aspects of a particular project/ property/piece of land. As such, work based learning uses real life situations i.e. the Compulsory Purchase of a renowned football stadium like Highbury (the Arsenal) where students can “connect” to the facts clearly in Valuation modules it is essential for the student to undertake a variety of examples and gain familiarity with the processes. Working through examples on the white board and in private time is essential to comprehend the methodology.

2.3 How Can Lecturers Judge What They Have Learnt?

Judging what the student has learnt is a key skill of the Lecturer. Class numbers are all important. In a smaller class, more individual attention can be given. The methods normally used at APU are:

Recap Review - constantly asking questions of each of the students at subsequent levels of their development on their understanding of previous lectures. Correcting concepts were necessary.

Most valuation modules taught have questions at the end of each lecture, undertaken by the students in private time and checked by the lecturer the week after.

The student can be asked to make a presentation. If they do well, good, if poorly, then you can be sure they learn/improve for the next time.

The procedure at APU is to group together a series of lectures issues that have been discussed/taught in earlier lectures to aid student comprehensive. That gives me an indication whether the student has presented the subject matter.

Formal examination and coursework are a useful monitor for progress. Extra classes prior to exams can be held for those with difficulties and post exams for those doing resits.

Whilst some of the content of study modules for students may be very similar for BSc and MSc (e.g. they both need to study the valuation of property), the students skill development is of course quite different.

The goal must be to create a learning environment which enables students to be creative in skills and practices that they choose to employ in managing a project. Rather than create an abstract project for them to work on, it has proved beneficial to use a real scenario which captures my students’ imaginations and ensures that they remain motivated throughout the

work that they carry out. The lecturers role is to act as a facilitator helping to support where new learning is needed, and to act as the catalyst.

This approach adopted has been shared with colleagues at APU and from a number of other universities in the U.K. (internal and external staff workshops), and the feedback is positive. Learning outcomes are being achieved and students enjoy the resulting experience.

The two approaches described use real life situations, which students connect to more readily than abstract or constructed scenarios. It follows therefore, based upon experience managing Valuation two modules, that the more students can relate to the context within which their studies and learning will take place, the more motivated the students are and from this should exhibit high levels of performance in the given modules.

2.4 Developing Effective Learning Environments for Students

The 2 examples of successful approaches to student learning environments in modules delivered at APU on the BSc Hons Property Management are given.

2.4.1 Valuation 2

The first is in Valuations 2 where a “real life” situation is used in a project based scenario. Students are asked to problem solve; they are split into groups – the issue being the installation of a computer systems to an outdated Real Estate Company (demonstrated at campus where experts are brought in). They are asked to make recommendations in the form of a formal report to the Managing Director. Lecturer input is facilitating, guiding and stimulating new learning. Feedback from students, external examiners, QAA and Surveying Practices indicate a high level of satisfaction with the approach. Internal and external audit mechanisms also indicate that the learning objectives are not only met but are exceeded. Running this module has influenced the way at APU tailor course design. Students learn much faster when they are faced with a problem or series of problems to solve.

The aim therefore is to create an environment within students can establish their own learning framework.

2.4.2 Valuation Coursework

The second example is in the coursework for the Valuations module, using another real life example is used compromising a Valuation report for a row of shops with offices above in a provincial town.

In terms of students support systems, there is a need to have empathy with the students and “connect” to them. Certainly at the end of term, to see them for a social drink, and sometimes, when we have a particularly hard topic, and one which is proving difficult, we often have a break and revert to the bar. I feel it important to actually have the relationship between student and lecturer on the basis of the Surveyor helping the aspiring Surveyor.

One to one tutorials, particularly with the less able performers, are required to coax and extract from the students the issues that are concerning them and their academic problems in specific areas. On a pastoral basis, there is a need to be supportive.

Dissertation tutoring for several final year students about to graduate. Is crucial input is dealt with on a one to one level in a conducive environment. The student will come with his/her thoughts over a period of months. We refine the dissertation, building on solid blocks, using a phased approach. Last year one final year student was involved in an interesting thesis, involving Estate Agency and the Internet. The student developed a questionnaire, which was mailed to local agents. The research/results analysed.

3. IMPROVED COURSE DESIGN / PLANNING

The Built Environment team at the University has recently redesigned of most courses that run within the section. Over the last 6 months as a department have had all courses re-validated. The process being concluded in June 2001. The bias to make the modules and courses more “user friendly” and in touch with real life, influencing the bias towards a practical presentation.

Study Guides are revised annually for all the subjects lectured. By using detailed study guides the student is more aware of what is required in terms of the course content and breadth. The school at APU was one of the first to use Study Guides it has received positive feedback from the students on the value of these. Study Guides are effectively the students “Bibles” , enabling the student to prepare for lectures and familiarise themselves with the terminology.

From these Study Guides, the student can and does gain knowledge of property related issues. This process is enhanced by arranging site visits in which the student can see the theory in situ.

Individual roles within the school requires lecturers to update of programmes and the management of the overall student experience. At Anglia we have to have been involved with developing new graduate and post-graduate programmes. We are currently developing an M.A. in Property Management for which there appears to be a strong market evidence there will be high demand from non-cognate graduates.

3.1 Computer Based Learning

Most if not all Property Practices in the U.K. are heavily dependent on computers for portfolio management.

Designing suitable software system Property Management is critical for students. ”Estates Suite” is one that is used. This system and its design has been brought into the learning arena of APU, students particularly on Valuations 2 have a minimum of 8 hours using and gaining familiarity with this and other software. It has been found that whilst there was initial resistance from the students, particularly those who are not “IT literate” that the students

quickly develop skills, not only in Valuations techniques but in the use of computer software and technology.

Interestingly enough, the software is now being successfully marketed commercially but the benefit is that the student learns much more effectively from simulation and experimentation than by many conventional means.

4. ASSESSMENT METHOD FEEDBACK TO STUDENTS

One of the most important tasks we lecturers undertake is to design suitable assessment methods and provide meaningful feedback to students. Early feedback is crucial to student development. Students learn best by doing and by responding to early feedback from their tutors.

4.1 Types of Assessment

A wide variety of assessment methods are available including presentations. These presentations are made in the form of a group presentation which not only teaches the students aspects of design and valuation, but also teaches them to jointly work as a team and improves their self confidence by public speaking. This is as an important issue for students as more and more employers are demanding presentation skills. Teamwork is also encouraged in group design projects. Multi-choice questions are used in exams which gives the “weaker student” the ability to obtain some marks from a subject which he/she is not particularly competent on.

Module reference sheets “sit” at the front of Valuation Study Guides. These very clearly stipulate the projected outcome of the module and how the students will be assessed. They give a clear indication of the number of private study hours required and the coursework also included within my coursework briefs and projects are the marks to be awarded and a standard marking scheme with grading. In written exams the number of marks for each question and subsection are given.

Assessment needs to discriminate between the good and the less good performer.

A good assesment should cover.

- A) Designing the exercise to allow the student to demonstrate the learning outcomes
- B) Ensuring that a wide variety of approach and methods are acceptable (Valuation is an art not a science)
- C) Ensuring that all students are able to develop their capability/performance within a variety of ways.

Based on University standard lecturing process recap and review is undertaken after all lectures, having students hopefully (!) answer questions which demonstrate an understanding

of what they have learnt previously. Comments are registered on previous lectures i.e. which parts they found easy/difficult, which in turn helps modify/adjust my lecturing and develop. .

4.2 Feedback to Students

Marking scheme should be in the form of a “performance specification”. This approach has assisted constructive and meaningful feedback to the students and class. Private tutorials should be available for those with difficulties in some subject areas.

When using Formative assessment exercises, feedback is given, which is predominantly oral. In study guides, questions are generally set at the end of each lecture. These are undertaken by the students privately or in class. Their approach to the questions discussed are corrected with constructive feedback.

Clearly there is more difficulty giving feedback to a larger group.

Coursework project feedback is given by written feedback on the actual coursework giving the student the ability to discuss any shortcomings with the lecturer.

APU produces an examiners report which gives feedback to students who may be “flagging” prior to the exams. Surgeries are also held for students resitting exams and coursework, which enables the students to discuss particularly weak areas and identify new learning programmes.

The University likes to encourage the class to give constructive feedback on each class members work, encouraging them to be self critical and identify how improvements can be made. Many students find this exercise difficult but one that is very rewarding.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

The property profession in the U.K. is not as attractive to school leavers graduates as it was in the twentieth century Consequently Project Management appears to be taking our best graduates.

There is a need therefore for the professional bodies in RICS to make the profession more attractive and in doing that academics need to deliver more stimulating interesting and interactive courses.

The design of the courses and the need for ”real life” experiences in property is in no doubt. Academics as part of their continuous professional development should moderate research and property consultancy.

There is a need to convert at a personal level to the students and feedback must be two way with field progress presentations being paramount, if an effective property professionals are to be produced for the future.

A.P.U., and particularly the school of surveying, runs a peer assessment process. This is most helpful as it enables a colleague to constructively criticise and give feedback to the persons mode of working and presentation. Feedback can be provided to colleague, which makes for a good two way learning process. Over the past 12 months benefits have accrued from this enormously; sharing of ideas, continuous improvement and others.

As a Chartered Surveyor and Lecturer the authro finds it crucial to keep abreast of developments in the profession so as to enable him to share them with the students and ensure they are “up to speed” with current practice in the outside world. This is achieved from networking at R.I.C.S. and by attending conferences on related issues. Maintaining links with property construction through he R.I.C.S. and attending their Education forums and certain links with the Police Property Services management Groups by attending their meetings.

The objective in all of these exercises is to learn from the work and experience of others, and to bring these experiences back to help improve the work of the institution.. The process adopted is seen as positive, and in fact the outcomes have been beneficial in fostering a team approach to the work of academic staff. The process has ensured that close working relationship is maintained with colleagues and that individuals approach to team teaching has been enhanced.

Staff attend away days which are run twice a year. These are designed to focus on the improvement of collective teaching and the quality of the student experience. Linked to this is the staff appraisal exercise where they reflect on their performance over the previous 12 months with their appointed line manager and identify development objectives for the forthcoming year.

In terms of personal development, the author has started to undertake research in the Field of Valuation. A recently organised research visit to The Netherlands has resulted in a draft paper which will probably be published/delivered, entitled the “Green Heart of the Netherlands”.

At A.P.U. academic staff undertake an end of Semester review from the student feedback forms, which aids Study Guide and lecture development.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

John R Chadderton

A Senior Lecturer in Property Management within the Department of Built Environment at A.P.U. A fully qualified Chartered Surveyor with 28 years of experience and a Fellow of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. Qualified from Liverpool John Moores University in 1973. Held several senior management positions in the profession since 1980. Have always believed that a large element of my management post was to assist, train and develop subordinate staff. Always had a strong interest in teaching, and indeed learning because dissemination of information is crucial to personal development. In 2001 became a full member of the Institute of Teaching and Learning.

When managing staff in my management positions, have facilitated teaching and learning through running Continuing Professional Development courses.

Is currently module leader for all Property Management courses at Anglia Polytechnic University for both full time and part time students and act as personal tutor for a number of students supporting them in their learning, with one to one tuition. .

A strong believer in interactive learning and major on this. He takes feedback from students and involves them on course design/improvement it is much easier to set the student a problem, for them to obtain ownership of the problem and act as a “catalyst” for them to find a solution. Teaching across a range of levels which helps clarify exactly what is appropriate across each level and more importantly what is applicable for the range of skills each student has. Lecture on the BSc (Hons) courses in Surveying which successful students achieve exemption from the R.I.C.S. exams. Is currently involved with the development of a MSc.