Reflective case narrative one

Promoting peer feedback and critical thinking in an advertising media strategy course

Para | Reflective case narrative | Comments
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1 | I have taught my Advertising Media Strategy course three times. The course provides students with a basic understanding of mass media in Asia and shows them how the media planning process is incorporated into advertising strategy. Planning, selection, and evaluation of all major advertising media are the focus of this course, as are the various decisions that arise in these processes. Class and online discussions focus on strategic approaches to solving different challenges in advertising media planning. Assignments and in-class exercises are geared toward practising specific parts contained in a media plan, resulting in a term project focused on writing an actual media plan. The key specific intended learning outcomes for students in this course are that should by the end of the course:

1. be able to develop tools for critical examination and evaluation of media strategies in advertising;
2. have become familiar with a variety of media strategies and tactics used in advertising;
3. have developed skills necessary to write and execute advertising media plans;
4. be able to apply basic statistical methods to analyse advertising research data.
5. be prepared for an entry-level media position or be equipped with the basic knowledge and skills to work with a media planner.

2 | I require my students to develop and write a marketing-driven media plan for a specific consumer product as a term project. In order to teach them how to defend their decisions, students are required to write a brief rationale for each objective and strategy they are setting in their project. Reviewing their rationale provides me with a way to assess whether students can see the bigger picture in a marketing context. While some students have excelled in writing a rationale that clearly showed their understanding, I found that most students’ either did not provide a justification, or they offered answers directly from the book or lectures without including their own original thoughts. In other words, my students have been writing rationales that reflect what I wanted them to think, not how I wanted them to think. This made me wonder what I could do to
strengthen students’ project rationales: what strategy I might use to support a deeper approach that would help them to reflect on their design decisions.

Many of my students are minoring in marketing and understand the basic principles, but they are not always able to apply new materials to the larger marketing context (i.e. see the big picture). One reason might be the fact that my course is, as it were, based on numbers as much as, or even more than, words. The course involves many new concepts that students haven't been exposed to before and they seem to get lost in these abstract ideas, terms and definitions, with the result that they are unable to relate them back to the marketing problem they are asked to solve. In order to help students, in Semester 1 of 2016, I have decided to use peer review. This involves students’ providing comments on their fellow students’ or peers’ work, so that every student can get feedback from other students on his or her work during the project. According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), feedback is a powerful determinant of learning and peers can be a resource in this process, as with proper guidance they can provide valuable feedback to one another and also learn in the process of providing such feedback. I therefore decided that students would provide feedback to one another on their draft written reports, focusing in particular on the project rationale. They would do so through the university’s online discussion board, which can be a useful tool for collaborative learning and feedback. Apart from getting the students to provide feedback, I also provide commentary on their feedback so as to ensure that their suggestions are indeed appropriate.

I was very much interested in evaluating the effectiveness of student peer review in helping them to write better media plans and to think critically about how the tools of strategic media planning fit into the bigger picture of advertising and marketing. I decided to examine more closely the data collected from students’ assessment scores on the final report, the online archive of student discussions / feedback responses, my own online comments to individual students’ reports, and students end-of-course evaluation of the course. An analysis of students’ results for this project from the semester in which I decided to implement peer review as compared to the previous semester (in which there was no peer review component) revealed that more students scored a higher grade in comparison to the
previous semester (Figure 1). In addition, fewer projects scored below average (C or lower) compared to the previous semester, with the exception of media plans that failed due to non-submission. While there may be other factors that could account for these improved results, I was heartened that at least students were not doing worse.

![Graph showing comparison of grades for the media plan project](image)

**Figure 1**: Comparison of grades for the media plan project

From a review of students’ feedback responses to their peers, I noticed that those who provided specific feedback to their peers tended to score higher in the final report. This was also true for their friends who received and used the feedback suggestions to revise their draft reports. For example, on helping her friend to grasp the “reach and frequency” objectives in the media plan, a student offered the following feedback:

*This is very well written – I have a just a few suggestions. First, you didn’t mention if you are emphasizing reach or frequency – it looks like they are both pretty high. There is a page in our textbook which explains when you should emphasize reach and when to emphasize frequency. Also, when giving reasons for the different media choices, there are two figures in our lecture notes, which give reasons why the different media are beneficial – you might back up your choices up with some examples from these.*

On reading the students’ feedback comments, I found that most of them were able to focus on identifying the rationale and providing more suggestions on ways to find information to support their writing of the report. My comments were more on pointing out areas where there was a lack of explanations or to help students stay on track with the project. Because the process of providing comments involved them writing drafts, on
which they then received the feedback, and since I was checking the feedback students were providing, I also noticed that I was able to correct any misinformation or poorly crafted rationale in a timely fashion, giving sufficient time for students to revise their work before the final report. The analysis of students’ qualitative comments in the course survey further showed that they valued the timely feedback from their peers and the teacher, although some lamented that this process was time consuming and added to their workload. One student noted:

*The peer review throughout the project was very helpful – it allowed us to share ideas and thoughts and critique to improve.*

Another student pointed out that:

*It was great to know that my peers have the same concerns and problems, and the feedback allowed us to make changes along the way so that we don’t have to wait until the last minute to complete the report.*

Overall, I found that students were able to produce a better report and the constructive peer feedback that students gave their classmates further indicated that they were more reflective and able to think more critically about media strategies in advertising and marketing. Thus, to me, this peer review approach has helped my students improve their learning outcomes and gain a better appreciation of feedback from their peers. In moving forward, I will look into reducing the number of reports that students have to comment on (i.e. lower workload) and to re-engineer the grouping of students so that there is a fair amount to feedback from all the groups. Another suggestion my students have made is to allocate some of the final grade to the quality of feedback students were giving. I will consider whether to incorporate this suggestion into the next semester’s course by doing some additional reading on good processes of providing feedback and assessing it.

Adapted from: