Project-based Peer Teaching on Socially Responsible Business

Lynn Eunjung Kwak and Michelle Price
Southern Connecticut State University and Ohio University

This study assessed students' perception of their learning outcomes towards socially responsibility after participation in a project-based peer teaching method. A pre-and post-survey was used to compare perceptions between the group of students who participated in the project-based peer teaching (n = 79) and those who participated in the traditional teaching method (n = 91). In a project-based peer teaching method, teams of five-to-six-students created presentation projects to educate their peers on socially responsible businesses. The results indicated the project-based peer teaching method significantly enhanced students' understanding and familiarity of the issues. This study provides insightful implications including instructional technology benefits and the interdisciplinary curriculum development for business ethics.

Key Words: Peer Teaching, Project-based Learning, Social Responsibility, Fair Labor Issue, Instructional Technology
Disciplines of Interest: All Business Disciplines

INTRODUCTION

Project-based learning, a category of active learning, involves the process of creating a product while collaboratively investigating a given task. Based on their review of published articles on project-based learning, Helle et al. (2006) stated research needs to be done around appropriate types of project-based learning and how project-based learning changes students' attitudes. The current study aims to assess the effectiveness of a project-based peer teaching method on students' perceptions regarding their knowledge (understanding and familiarity) and attitude toward social responsibility. Utilizing peer teaching, students can be effective models and share mutual benefits as they teach and learn from each other. This study seeks to contribute to the literature related to effective teaching methods for social responsibility, specifically fair labor practices.

Students who learn to value social responsibility are more likely to improve these practices within their work places. In order to be better business leaders, students need to be aware of fair labor issues (Arnold, 2003). Fair labor issues

require comprehensive understanding to effectively apply class lessons to the real world industry. Therefore, educators need to utilize effective teaching methods to enhance critical problem-solving skills around this issue.

Project-based learning often uses technologies to assist students in creating media productions in today's classrooms (McLaughlan & Kirkpatrick, 2001). Technology effectively serves as a tool in the transmission of knowledge as students become producers and consumers of knowledge, especially among the Gen Y population (those who were born from the mid 1970s to the early 2000s) (Erstad, 2002; van Eeden-Moorefield & Walsh, 2010). In our study, students created their own iMovies/Movie-Maker presentations as an educational tool to educate their peers on fair labor issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Responsibility and Fair Labor Issues

Social responsibility implies the duty that businesses have to society and a point of reference for balancing ethics with profit, so that the business actions result in positive outcomes for people and the environment (Dahlsrud, 2006; Kolodinsky, Madden, Zisk, Henkel, 2010). The fair labor issue, as an element of social responsibility, includes child labor issues, ethical consumer decision making, and environmental protection (Dickson, 2000). Fair labor is an effort to improve labor conditions worldwide by exposing and ending sweatshops and abusive labor conditions. Manufacturers, human rights groups, consumer groups, and universities have partnered with fair labor organizations to ensure that companies producing merchandise are operating in socially responsible ways (Rudell, 2006). For example, students on college campuses nationwide continue to focus attention on the problems of sweatshops.

While companies tend to prioritize profits at the cost of social responsibility, it is important to raise ethical awareness among students, who will be leaders in business. Christensen et al. (2007) found that 42% of the top MBA programs require social responsibility in their core content. A study by Dickson (2000) indicated that 74% of college instructors taught the issue of social responsibility in their retail curriculum. To achieve long-term success, organizations find social responsibility efforts to be a vital source of competitive advantage (Porter & Kramer, 2006). Although increasing the importance of social responsibility is apparent both in academia and in practice, much of the research has been either theory focused or case based (Kolodinsky et al., 2010). Moreover, there is a lack of investment on effective teaching methods on the subject of social responsibility. In this study, we compared the effectiveness of a project-based peer teaching method with a traditional teaching method. We examined three learning outcomes of social responsibility including students' understanding, familiarity, and attitude.

Active Learning

Higher education is shifting its emphasis from lecture-based teaching to active learning methods. Teacher-centered instruction, a traditional teaching method, communicates information in a complete and orderly form. It tends to emphasis the development of basic skills using note taking, teacher presentations, and lectures, while students learn facts and concepts (Graeff, 2010). On the other hand, active learning involves interaction and collaboration among students, while the instructor's role is to stimulate critical thinking and involvement (Cavanagh, 2011; Spronken-Smith & Harland, 2009).

Active learning enables students to think critically and to engage, rather than simply to listen to a lecture (Rotzien, 2005; Willis & Miertschin, 2006). Active learning involves a flexible class meeting time (Barron & D'annunzio-Green, 2009), peer feedback (Chen & Lou, 2004; Paswan & Gollakota, 2004), and an active learning experience environment (Montgomery, 2008). Active learning is as much a part of the process as it is about the end project. In this teaching method, instructors monitor that the learning process keeps moving and stays on a topic, students are involved in the learning process, and groups maintain appropriate learning challenges. The teacher takes on the role of facilitator. Active learning often employs a team approach, which enables students to help each other, see things from another's point of view and solve their learning problems jointly with a certain level of team skills. Utilizing active learning in their teams, students successfully complete projects, discuss pertinent business issues (e.g., social responsibility) and can engage in service learning (Mumford, 2010). Active learning includes hands-on participation, short writing assignments, and peer teaching, in order to encourage students to engage and interact with their peers in class (Rotzien, 2005). The anticipated outcomes of this approach include gaining new experiences and reflecting on them from a variety of perspectives.

Project-based Learning

Project-based learning, which is under the umbrella of active learning methods, deals with the creation of an artifact and an informational presentation. Project-based learning involves small group interactions and draws on the strength of each individual participant to produce a successful end product (Barak & Dori, 2005; Cherney, 2003; Isbell, 2005; Lou & MacGregor, 2004). Accommodating different learning styles, project-based learning provides students with greater control and ownership for their project (Lou & MacGregor, 2004). Therefore, the project is more enjoyable and more memorable; as a result, it creates more motivation. Compared to the traditional teaching method, O'Sullivan (2010) found that students' learning outcomes were better in their qualitative and quantitative analyses. A study using part-time MBA students conducted by Fish (2008) indicated that most of the students evaluated that the experiential project

had a positive learning experience and the project had a substantial impact on content learning.

With the increased use of technology in the classroom, greater flexibility and numerous options have been created for implementing project-based learning into the curriculum (Barak & Dori, 2005; Geva, 2010; Isbell, 2005; Lewis & O'Sullivan, 2010). Technologies, such as the Internet, YouTube, and video editing software, have enabled peer teachers to communicate with large numbers of learners beyond the classroom setting and to expand the scope of the active learning. For example, the format of YouTube allows for videos to be easily accessed and shared, providing interesting potential for project-based learning.

Peer Teaching

Project-based learning has been incorporated into a number of peer learning experiences. A peer refers to one who is an equal in rank and has similar worth, quality, and ability. Dealing with peer interactions, precious studies mostly focus on peer evaluations (Chen & Lou, 2004; Paswan & Gollakota, 2004; Rieber, 2006; Ward, 2005). Various evaluation methods have been used for peer evaluation and to reduce conflicts relating to a fair share of the work among peers.

On the other hand, peer teaching encourages students to take on multiple roles or approaches in order to explain the subject matter to their peers (Tessier, 2004). Previous studies in higher education propose that peer teaching is one of the most effective methods overall. Rubin and Heber (1998) stated that collaborative peer teaching is supported by three theoretical perspectives: the cognitive approach, motivational theory, and social perspective. The cognitive approach focuses on learning that is maximized when students organize it, make their own connections with it, and then apply it to new contexts. Motivational theory is concerned with how learning is initiated with accountability to educate peer students. Social perspective is the type of environment most conducive to learning, characterized by communication and cooperation. Because students are actively engaged in the subject matter, it encourages them to think more critically. In the peer teaching method, students build upon each other's strengths and take on roles of both teachers and learners through diverse activities.

Although peer teaching is considered to be an effective method for improving student learning, there is limited research examining the effectiveness of peer teaching methods used in the classroom. Most of the existing empirical research on peer teaching is from science education (Depaz & Moni, 2008; Secomb, 2008; Tessier, 2004; Tien, Roth, & Kampmeier, 2002). These studies confirmed that students not only acquire knowledge, but effectively evaluate class contents and peer performance in a communicative and cooperative

learning environment (Depaz & Moni, 2008; Tien et al., 2002). For example, Tessier (2004) found that after their peer teaching experience, student test averages increased significantly. Tien et al. (2002) found that in terms of a social perspective of peer teaching, students encourage their peer teachers by observing the presentation, raising questions, and offering suggestions.

Despite the value of peer teaching methods, previous research has been mainly focused on the benefits to students who received the instruction and few studies have examined the impact on those who act as the peer teacher. Tessier (2004) confirmed that this approach relates to getting each student more personally involved. In addition, the peer teachers felt a responsibility to prepare thoroughly by reviewing instructional content in order to be effective models.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Examining effective teaching methods for social responsibility, we focused on the benefits to students who act as peer teachers in contrast to the previous research which emphasized benefits to learners. The purpose of the study was to assess the effectiveness of a project-based peer teaching method on students' perceptions when they acted as peer teachers. The nature of the social responsibility learning is for students not only to obtain knowledge (understanding and familiarity) but for them to "practice what they preach" (attitude). This study measured students' attitude changes. Attitudes refer to evaluative judgments about issues ranging from positive to negative (Fabrigar & Wegener, 2010) and influence on people's choices and actions (Petty & Briñol, 2010). Attitudes have importance on an individual's interpersonal, decision making, ethical, and performance behavior (Ng & Burke, 2010).

Effectively interacting with their peers and working together to accomplish a shared goal, students produce better outcomes in performance, retention, and attitudes about the course (Tien, Roth, & Kampmeier, 2002; Young & Henquinet, 2000). Therefore, this research proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Compared to the traditional teaching section, students in the project-based peer teaching section will have significant differences between a pre- and a post-self-assessment of their knowledge (understanding and familiarity) and attitude change toward fair labor issues.

H2: Students in the project-based peer-teaching section and the students in the traditional teaching section will have significant differences in a post-self-assessment of their knowledge (understanding and familiarity) and attitude change toward fair labor issues.

METHOD

Class Descriptions

Two university instructors taught introductory retail courses that included fair labor issues. Three learning objectives for the students in this project were: 1) to understand ethical and social issues significant to product and service development, 2) to be familiar with the nature of socially responsible business activities, and 3) to apply this knowledge to gain a deeper perspective and attitude on fair labor issues. The following are examples of questions that were covered in both traditional and project-based peer–teaching methods in order to accomplish the objectives.

Can social responsibility and profitability be compatible in business?
Do businesses have a social responsibility beyond making a profit?
What issues are related to women's rights and child labor?
How effective have production site monitoring systems been in improving worker conditions?

Both instructors had extensive teaching experience (over 10 years) and competency to the fair labor issues. The instructors closely discussed the contents that they covered in each section throughout the term. However, it cannot be ruled out that the instructors' teaching effectiveness may have influenced the current study results rather than the methods that they used.

Traditional lecture course: One instructor approached fair labor issues utilizing a traditional lecture method. With teacher-centered instruction, the instructor was the main distributor of knowledge for students (n = 91). Students took notes while the teacher presented information. When students asked questions, the instructor answered them. The instructor used a one and a half hour class session for this topic. About half of the class time the instructor lectured using about six PowerPoint slides. The rest of the time, the instructor led discussions among students. In order to facilitate the discussion, the instructor asked questions such as "how do you feel about the issue" and "what do you see on media such as TV and websites about this issue?" The discussion covered not only the questions above, but also fair trade issues. Throughout the discussions, some students openly expressed interest in the subject because the topic was current and on the news. The instructor informed students that one or two questions on the next exam would cover this content.

Project-based peer-teaching course: The other instructor utilized a project-based peer teaching method. In this course, 13 teams of six students participated (n = 79). After the instructor presented the project description, the students examined fair labor issues while engaging in discussion with their group members. Students utilized their laptops for in-class Internet research. As

students addressed the questions above, they were asked to create educational presentations using Movie-Maker, or iMovie software. Movie-Maker (PC) and iMovie (Mac) are software packages that are bundled with the PC and Mac operating systems. They use drag-and-drop editing techniques, combining pictures, video, music, and special effects. PowerPoint was also used by those who were not familiar with these tools. To work on this project, students were given 30-40 minutes at the end of two class periods. Some teams also needed to meet outside of class to complete the project. All of these projects presented to their class peers. Two of the best quality movies were posted on a university student website as an educational tool to enhance the awareness of fair labor issues among their peers. Unlike the traditional lecture course, this learning activity provided students an opportunity to be peer teachers on fair labor issues.

Data Collection and Respondent Characteristics

The data collection procedure for this study was approved by the University Human Subjects Committee and students consented to participate. This study took place during fall quarter (10 weeks long). The 170 participants were undergraduates ranging from freshmen to seniors. Seventy five percent were female (n = 127), and more than half (56%) were between 18 and 19 years of age. Eighty-four percent of participants identified themselves as Caucasian.

To evaluate how these two teaching methods affected students' perception toward fair labor issues, a five-minute survey was conducted with 1) the group of students (n = 79) who were taught by the project-based peer teaching method and 2) the group of students (n = 91) who were taught by the traditional teaching method. The same set of survey questions was administrated to both pre- and post-participants. The pre-participant survey was conducted during the first week of a term. The post-participant survey was conducted during the last week of the term.

Students in the traditional learning methods had higher pre-participation mean scores (M = 3.45) in their understanding of fair labor issues compared to students in the project-based peer teaching (M = 3.39). Students in traditional learning methods had lower mean scores (M = 3.22) in their familiarity with fair labor issues than students in the project-based peer teaching (M = 3.24). Students in the traditional learning methods had higher pre-participation mean scores (M = 3.40) in their attitude toward fair labor issues compared to their counterparts (M = 3.29). However, t-test results indicated that these mean differences in the pre-test were not significantly different for understanding of (t = -0.35, df = 135, p > .05), familiarity with (t = 0.19, df = 136, p > .05), and attitude (t = -1.16, df = 136, p > .05) toward fair labor issues.

To assess similarities among students who participated in each session, Chi-square and t-tests were conducted for demographic and academic characteristics: gender, age, ethnicity, major, grade level, and grade point average (GPA). Based

on the analysis results, there were no significant differences by gender (X^2 = 1.54 , df = 1, p > .05), age (X^2 = 2.16, df = 4, p > .05), ethnicity (X^2 = 3.24, df = 4, p > .05), major (X^2 = 0.76, df = 1, p > .05), grade level (X^2 = 1.61, df = 3, p > .05) or GPA (t = -0.05, df = 201, p > .05). These tests found that there were no significant differences between the two groups, indicating that any group differences found in the study results would not be due to demographic and academic characteristics.

Measurements and Data Analysis

To measure students' perceptions regarding their understanding of fair labor issues, they were asked "I believe that I have a good understanding of what are fair labor conditions." They were also asked "I am familiar with fair labor issues" to measure their familiarity with the issues. The statements were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

Regarding attitude toward fair labor issues, students were asked six items measured by a 5-point Likert scale. The items to measure attitude toward fair labor issues included questions such as "I am willing to pay more for a garment if it has been produced under fair labor conditions" and "it is important for me to learn more about whether the garment that I buy has been produced under fair labor conditions" (see the Table 1 for remaining items). These statements were developed based on the review of the literature in consumer attitudes toward sweatshop labor (Dickson, 2000; Rudell, 2006). These statements were evaluated and revised by three fair labor experts in academia. In order to secure content and construct validity, the final questionnaires were distributed to senior class students (n = 27) who had learned fair labor issues. For the current study, the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for the students' attitudes toward fair labor issues was .89. A principal component factor analysis among these six items resulted in one factor (Table 1).

RESULTS

The results of this study (see Table 2 and Table 3) indicated that after the students' participation in project-based peer teaching, their level of understanding of fair labor issues was significantly changed (t = 2.90, df = 126, p < .01). Students who participated in the project-based peer teaching had higher post-participation mean scores (M = 3.78) in their understanding of fair labor issues compared to their pre-participation scores (M = 3.39). Their familiarity with fair labor issues was significantly different (t = 3.64, df = 126, p < .001). Students who participated in the project-based peer teaching had higher post-participation mean scores (M = 3.80) in their familiarity with fair labor issues

Table 1. Question Items and Factor Loadings for Self Assessments of Attitude of Fair Labor Issues

Items: It is important for me to	Factor Loading	Cronbach's α
Promote fair labor conditions through the garments I purchase.	.77	.89
Learn more about whether the garment that I buy has been produced under fair labor conditions.	.85	
Know that the garment that I purchased was made under fair labor conditions.	.86	
Encourage others to know about companies that produce their garments under fair labor conditions.	.83	
Discourage sweatshop conditions through the choice of garments I purchase. I am willing to pay more for a garment if it has been produced under fair labor conditions.	.84 .76	
Eigenvalues	3.99	
% of Variance	66.52%	

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations by Traditional Teaching and t-test Results

	Traditional teaching					
	Before (1st week)		After (10th week)			
Fair labor issue	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t* value	*p* value
Understanding	3.45	0.89	3.70	0.84	1.86 *df* = 164	*p* > .05
Familiarity	3.22	0.92	3.47	0.98	1.68 *df* = 166	*p* > .05
Attitude	3.40	0.73	3.31	0.82	-0.71 *df* = 163	*p* > .05

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations by Project-Based Peer Teaching and t-test Results

	Project-based peer teaching					
	Before (1st week)		After (10th week)			
Fair labor issue	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t* value	*p* value
Understanding	3.39	0.89	3.78	0.65	2.90 *df* = 126	$p < .01$
Familiarity	3.24	0.97	3.80	0.74	3.64 *df* = 126	$p < .001$
Attitude	3.29	0.75	3.25	0.73	-0.24 *df* = 120	$p > .05$

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations and t-test Results (after, 10th week)

	Traditional teaching		Project-based peer teaching			
Fair labor issue	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t* value	*p* value
Understanding	3.70	0.84	3.78	0.65	0.69 *df* = 154	$p < .05$
Familiarity	3.47	0.98	3.80	0.71	2.31 *df* = 154	$p < .001$
Attitude	3.31	0.82	3.25	0.73	-0.50 *df* = 147	$p > .05$

than their pre-participation scores ($M = 3.24$). However, there was no significant difference in students' attitude toward fair labor issues before and after their participation in project-based peer teaching, ($t = -0.24$, $df = 120$, $p > .05$).

After the students' participation in traditional learning methods, the results indicated no changes in the level of student understanding of ($t = 1.86$, $df = 164$, $p > .05$), familiarity with ($t = 1.68$, $df = 166$, $p > .05$), or attitude toward ($t = -0.71$, $df = 163$, $p > .05$) fair labor issues compared to their pre-participation. Therefore, the results indicate that compared to the traditional teaching section, students in the project-based peer teaching section have significant differences between a pre- and a post-self-assessment of their knowledge (understanding and familiarity). However, students' attitudes were not significantly different

after their participation in either project-based peer teaching or traditional teaching methods.

The results of the post-tests indicated that the level of understanding of fair labor issues for students in project-based peer teaching was significantly different than in traditional learning methods (t = .69, df = 154, p < .05). Students who participated in project-based peer teaching had higher mean scores (M = 3.78) compared to their counterparts, who learned the subject through traditional learning methods (M = 3.70). Also, their familiarity with fair labor issues was significantly different in post-tests (t = 2.31, df = 154, p < .01). Students who participated in the project-based peer teaching had higher mean scores (M = 3.80) in their familiarity with fair labor issues than students who learned with traditional learning methods (M = 3.47).

Therefore, the results support that students in the project-based peer-teaching section and the students in the traditional teaching section have significant differences in a post-self-assessment of their knowledge (understanding and familiarity). However, when students' attitudes toward fair labor issues were compared, there was no significant difference between students who experienced the two different learning methods in the post-test (t = -0.50, df = 147, p > .05). Thus, a significant difference in a post-self-assessment of their attitude was not supported.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study suggest that project-based peer teaching was positively related to the students' perceptions regarding their knowledge (understanding of and familiarity) with fair labor issues. On the other hand, students' attitudes toward fair labor issues were not significantly different after their participation in either project-based peer teaching or traditional teaching methods. Pertaining to attitudes, the results agree with Churchill's (1982) study that teaching students to advocate certain sets of values/attitudes after *one* stand-along course may not be successful.

This study provides practical implications for educators who want to instill sound ethical attitudes in their students. The results of this study support exploring the advantages of the interdisciplinary nature of business ethics (Norman, 2004; Puri, Jocums, & Latif, 2010). With collaborative and adaptive efforts among instructors across the curriculum, students may shape and develop their attitudes on social responsibility by integrating knowledge from various courses and disciplines. This finding suggests the importance of holistic curriculum planning for social responsibility in the business curriculum and in interdisciplinary approaches. The results of this study also echo a previous study in consumer attitudes that concluded educating consumers alone is unlikely to change purchasing behaviors in regards to socially responsible businesses. Dickson (2000) conjectured that the lack of association between understanding

and responsible attitude/purchasing behaviors was likely due to the consumers not wanting to limit or give up a full range of selections in a marketplace. Companies need to supply products that consumers want with the assurance that the business behaves responsibly.

In the current study, the project-based peer teaching method was more effective than a traditional teaching method even in a large class (n = 79). When there are over 100 students in a class, their engagement with course content and meaningful discussions with their peers can be challenging (Laverie, 2006). In this study, project-based peer teaching was accomplished in a team setting with five or six members. Each individual collaborated and the team members had to come together on their points of view in order to complete their projects. This study result showed that the project-based peer teaching method significantly enhanced students' understanding and familiarity of fair labor issues. During the study, some comments were collected. One person who participated in this study commented that "This course helped me to approach business practice from a different point of view. In typical business courses, profit making has been the major focus with lack of consideration of social responsibility." Another student stated that "I think this was a good project because it gave everyone a better background on sweatshops and what is really happening behind the scenes."

Instructional technology can provide students with effective learning environments to maximize learning experiences. Learning benefits occur when nonverbal and verbal communications provide congruent information. As Gava (2010) suggested, nonverbal objects (e.g., iMovies/Movie-Maker presentations) overlapping with verbal content (e.g., code of conduct, compliance policies) enhances knowledge (e.g., understanding and familiarity) and long term memories. This study's results support that project-based peer teaching utilizing technology enables students to enhance knowledge and to do more than simply listen to a lecture.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

As a limitation, this study focused on students' cognitive aspects (understanding, familiarities and attitudes) regarding fair labor issues rather than their engagement in and satisfaction with their projects. If students enjoy a project, they will be more engaged in the subject and in their classroom experiences. When one has helped to educate or make a difference in the lives of others, it may evoke deeper interest in the subject, and more of a desire to change one's attitude. Thus, it will be beneficial to examine the level of students' motivation and satisfaction in future studies.

Another limitation is that there might have been a teacher effect in the results, since the two sessions were taught by different instructors. We cannot eliminate the possibility that the results may stem from instructors' teaching effectiveness rather than the methods that they used. In addition, students who were in the peer teaching

class might have been more motivated than ones in the traditional teaching class. Future research that eliminates teacher differences should be done to validate the results of the study.

In this study, the outcome was measured using students' perceptions. Further studies may examine multiple methods, including objective evaluation tools and exams, and self reflection to determine the impact of a traditional and a project-based peer teaching method. Students can self-assess their changes in attitude with methods such as audio recordings of their thoughts about socially responsible business practices at the beginning of the project and then play them back after completion of the project.

Despite these limitations, the results of this study supported project-based peer teaching as an effective learning strategy and the current study is applicable for related topics of social responsibility. In today's market environment, understanding the broader issue of social responsibility becomes essential. By using an effective teaching method, students will be more equipped to affect people and the environment and be prepared for critical decision-making in ever challenging global market environments.

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