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TEACHING & LEARNING

The Constructivist Approach to Learning

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The Teaching & Learning section of the *Organization Management Journal* has been open to many approaches to classroom innovation. The common thread has always been to find interesting ideas that might provoke new ideas and new techniques that interest our students. The two articles presented in this issue do that in interesting and unusual ways. The first of these articles is "Using the Three Stooges to Illustrate the Scientific Method," by Steven M. Dunphy and Joe Dobson. Regarding the use of the Three Stooges as a bridge to the scientific method, you are probably thinking, "Well sure, who doesn't do that?" But don't be hasty in your judgment. Dunphy and Dobson have a thoroughly engaging article on teaching a subject that is famously cut-and-dried in its presentation. The second article is "You Want Me to Trust You? Using Adventure Learning to Teach Millennials About Trust," by Kathleen J. Barnes, George E. Smith, and Madeline Constantine. A quote from the authors of our second article actually helps to frame the use of the Stooges as a teaching tool for today's students: "Foremost among [our] challenges is finding teaching approaches and methods that hold the potential to compel this cohort to question their existing models and beliefs about what they already believe to be real, unchangeable, and immovable in their lives and life experience" (p. 255). The need to question models and beliefs is exactly what will make both these articles interesting to *OMJ* readers. In explaining student engaged education, the website of the University of California (UC)–Davis Center for Experiential Learning has this to say about the topic:

> If your goal is to have the person understand the concept at a level that they can generalize and apply the understanding to new situations, or combine the understanding with other concepts they have learned, experiential education is probably the best way to develop that level of mastery. (UC–Davis, 2012)

We can approach this goal in a traditional classroom setting by doing something unexpected, such as using a classic comedy to illustrate social science experimentation and the scientific method. Dunphy, Dobson, Larry, Curly, and Moe offer a way of introducing research methods and the critical examination of research findings to students who are often are better at finding data than assessing the credibility of the data they have found.

Barnes, Smith, and Constantine use adventure learning as a way to work toward the same goal of increased understanding but with a very different approach. In so doing, they create the possibility for learning practical knowledge about a subject even less understood than the scientific method. The concept of trust in organizational behavior is subject to personal interpretation and at the whim of personal experience of each student. As the authors point out, members of the cohort known as the millennial generation have a "desire to be actively involved in their own learning and . . . to receive immediate feedback regarding the practical implications of their course material" (p. 255). This is in keeping with previous research that finds that generation to be "empowered and free from hierarchy, jealous about personal time, keen on relationships and trust, inquisitive about values and ethics, with the power of the web to change their perceptions of time and distance and organizations and government" (J. P. Rangaswami, February 28, 2006, in Park, 2006). It may be that traditional-age college students want to trust, but understanding how trust is engendered in the workplace is a continuing challenge for their instructors that may be aided by the design of this adaptation of adventure learning.

In both cases, these articles look for ways to reach students in unusual ways and create integrative thinking from experience. The experiential education experts tell us that this model is "constructivist." That is, learning and understanding come from a process of inquiry and reflection. However, it seems that all deep learning is the same and that inquiry and reflection can be designed for all topics if the intention is there to do so. Both of the articles in this Teaching & Learning section are in that mode and have thought-provoking ideas for all of us who aspire to transformational learning in our teaching.

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