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# IMPLEMENTING COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH IN THE PROCESS OF TEACHING HORTICULTURE VOCABULARY IN ENGLISH

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**Annotation**
What is Horticulture?
Horticulture, from Latin hortus meaning garden and colere meaning to cultivate, focuses on the use of small plots, in contrast to agronomy which involves intensive crop farming and large-scale field crop production of grains and forages or foresty involving forest trees and products derived from them. It deals with garden crops such as ornamental plants grown for their appearance, fruits and vegetable and spices grown for their food value, and medicinal plants.

**Keywords.** Curriculum content, “clone”; “clonal material”; “epigenesist”, slides.

## Introduction.

Numerous studies and commissions have called for undergraduate education reform. While many criticize the system, few horticulture or agricultural education have documented attempts at classroom experimentation with the dominant university teaching paradigm. This qualitative case study provided teacher/researchers a way to explore their students' and their own reactions to an interdisciplinary course based on experiential learning principles. Student focus group interviews, teacher debriefings, and classroom ethnographic techniques were used to gather data that provided a novel perspective on student/teacher interactions and perceptions of the experimental course. Students initially reported apprehension about the course's structure, but over time reacted favorably to experientially-based learning activities. They reported group activities requiring the acquisition of information and skills to be used for a productive purpose (e.g., teaching others, guiding tours) were the most effective in their learning. Students expressed concern with the shallow treatment of horticultural content and were confused by the professor(s) role as guide in the teaching/learning process. From the practitioner perspective, teacher/researchers believed the process of critical reflection on their own practice provided a mechanism to systematically analyze the merits of the experimental course.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Student learning in this module was assessed using a combination of assessment techniques, namely, two continuous assessment examinations, individual field trip reports (not graded) and a final end of semester written examination. Students always received feedback on their continuous assessment examinations. The following changes to module delivery and assessment were made. Active learning within the module was increased by reappraising the curriculum content. The element of the curriculum dealing with vegetative plant propagation was selected. The class was randomly divided into five groups of two students. Each group selected a different aspect of propagation and the members were required to work together to research it over a period of four weeks. They were required to prepare a PowerPoint slide presentation containing 12–15 slides for delivery to the class.

The students were given the objectives of the exercise and some reading materials. In addition, they were required to extend their literature search through scientific research publications. Each group was required to make a formal presentation to the class on an appointed date and were also required to peer assess each presentation. Additionally, academic staff members in attendance also assessed the presentations from a predetermined rubric. At the end of the five presentations a comprehensive discussion took place between the academic staff and the students, after which an agreed mark was awarded for each group presentation. This discussion also included feedback on their efforts and feed forward to enhance future learning. Changes were also made to the in class continuous assessments. Precise marks awarded for each question was documented on the question paper to facilitate self-correction in class under the stewardship of the lecturer. During the correction process feed forward was given. The class was brought on a field trip to a nursery specialising in container and field production. The primary function of the trip was to relate their classroom learning to a range of day to day nursery issues. The class was asked to reflect on the study trip as a group and to provide one group report evaluating their learning experiences surrounding many aspects of the nursery enterprises. Marks' allocation was changed from 25% each for two continuous assessment exams and 50% for the final written exam to 20% each for the two continuous assessment exams, 20% for the in-class group presentations, 10% for the field trip report and 30% for the final written element. The questions asked on the latter were aligned with the module outcomes and contained verbs such as "analyse", "assess", "evaluate", "consider", and "suggest" to prompt critical thinking paralleling Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive processes.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In general, the students questioned the concept of studying in groups. They raised the issue that people have different learning styles thus sub-consciously verbalising the report of Honey and Mumford (1996), Fleming and Bauma (2006), Hawk and Shah (2007). They disclosed that while making the presentation was a team effort, the research undertaken was not necessarily the case. This contrasts with the findings of Gokhale (1995). This suggests that group formation should be randomised as suggested by Jennings (2013a) or that the minimum number in the group should be at least three. Some considered the team/group aspect difficult as partners were not very enthusiastic and were reluctant to meet for discussions. Some stated that they preferred to work alone. Despite this, they noted that presenting researched information and speaking in front of their peer's greatly enhanced learning, understanding and meaning both from their classmates' presentations and their own. They also suggested that the learning experience of researching a topic and having to prepare a PowerPoint presentation was a much more valuable learning experience than simply reading notes. This concurs with the ethos put forward by Bonwell and Eison (1991). Increased in-class interaction between students themselves and students and academic staff to ascertain the meaning or significance of an experience aligns with the report of Carlile and Jordan (2005). For many in the class, this was their first experience in preparing and delivering a PowerPoint presentation. They considered that being able to present and improve their communication skills was very important as it enhanced their confidence. Although, some found speaking in front of the class difficult, they welcomed the opportunity. In agreement with Higgs and McCarthy (2008), the role of the lecturer changed from lecturing to learning facilitator by providing scaffolding as described by Carlile and

Jordan (2005). The students reported that the exercise encouraged deeper learning and that their knowledge, interest and understanding of the subject area was greatly improved thereby reflecting some of the principles outlined by Chickering and Gamson (1987) and Thaman et al. (2013). The group report on the field trip was designed to prevent re gurgitation of facts; rather to encourage the students to reflect and brainstorm one another on their experience and on the reasons why various operations and management protocols were used paralleling the report of Jennings (2013b). For instance, they learned that tree lifting using a dedicated machine should not be viewed simply as the best method for harvesting trees; rather that it is a major investment and has major implications for tree quality. Similarly, they discovered the importance of using correct nomenclature; of faithfully preserving the phenotype; the potential of epigenetic variation, the significance of obtaining plant breeders rights and royalty collection for plants through the introduction of new plants. These types of discovery concur with the findings of (George and Sri Gayathridevi, 2013). The group report was also intended to stimulate greater student interaction and the exchange of ideas so that they discussed and reflected on their individual learning experiences and shared them together to increase their understanding concurring with the findings of Gokhale (1995) and Thaman et al. (2013). In relation to the continuous assessments, the class found it very beneficial to selfassess their own work. They also stated that they retained the information better. This finding concurs with the report of Kember (1997). They also found the immediate feedback/feedforward extremely beneficial and stated that it was best to analyse the answers immediately after an assignment was undertaken in comparison to receiving a mark at a later date. This response concurs with the work of Gibbs and Simpson (2004), Crisp (2012) and Jennings et al. (2013), and also reflects the information espoused by Shute (2008). In agreement with Boud and Falchikov (2006), it allowed the students to assess their own learning against set standards and indicated knowledge gaps in their learning. Immediate feedback in relation to the module showed them the significance of terms such as “clone”; “clonal material”; “epigenesist”, “genetic characteristics of vegetative propagation”, and what this means for the progressive nurseryman. They disliked the concept of peer assessment even if it could be undertaken anonymously, contrasting with that reported (Carroll, 1994).

## CONCLUSIONS

In this module, the relative ratio of active to passive learning has been adjusted to better reflect student learning, knowledge creation, learning experience, communication skill and achievement. Furthermore, the greater use of formative assessment, which now accounts for 70% as opposed to 50% previously of assessment strategy coupled with timely feedback, is a major improvement. It aligns with the theory espoused by Brown (2004). I consider that the changes implemented have enhanced academic student interactions and transformed the lecture room environment into one where active learning occurs reflecting the work of Higgs and McCarthy (2008). The changes have also ensured that the concept of backwash as described by Biggs (1999) is minimised. The indications to date suggest that student performance has improved and better reflects higher order learning, long term learning and subsequent work performance and success compared to reliance on summative assessment. Judging by the positive student comments arising from the module changes, they considered that it was now a very interesting, enjoyable and beneficial module which enhanced their

learning of the subject. I consider they fulfil many of the aspirations of teaching and learning enunciated by Gibbs and Simpson (2004) and Juhah et al. (2004).

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