

Contextual Teaching and Learning: Case Study of Susan, a Marketing Education Student Teacher

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Implementing Contextual Teaching and Learning:
Case Study of Susan, a High School Marketing Novice Teacher

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine how contextual teaching and learning (CTL) influenced Susan, a student teacher in marketing education. This study is based on observations of two of Susan's classes: fashion merchandising and entrepreneurship over one semester of student teaching, review of classroom materials and other artifacts provided by the student teacher and her supervisor, and follow-up interviews.

Susan showed a clear dedication to the real-world emphasis of CTL. She would often use print and television ads for students to study and critically review. Also, when a field trip to jewelry stores could not be arranged, she videotaped interviews at several stores and used these for both classes. Student engagement was evident in many of Susan's projects which included developing a business plan, preparing a video sales presentation, and presenting a fashion show. Each project also gave students the lead role in their own learning as they had to develop alternatives and make decisions on their own. If there was a weakness in Susan's teaching, it was her focus on project-based learning to the exclusion of other CTL tools. For example, students were rarely required to connect projects to the more general knowledge and skills; the focus was on "what" they were doing, but not on "why" they were doing it. Despite this limitation and Susan's decision not to immediately enter teaching (though she still plans to teach eventually), she remains a strong advocate for CTL, and plans to use it as much as possible in her current career.

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Introduction

The contextual teaching and learning (CTL) contract The University of Georgia has with the U.S. Department of Education has brought me to Oconee County High School to work with a marketing education student teacher who has been involved with the CTL project as a major in the Department of Occupational Studies. The concept of CTL is not new to career and technical education. Putting theory into practice is the very cornerstone of effective technical education. However, this contract involved the development of a different model of teacher education, one more intentional regarding grounding education, teacher education specifically, in the various contexts in which learning happens.

The Setting

Oconee County is frequently referred to as a bedroom community to Athens-Clarke County. Primarily because of the school system's reputation, many professionals who work in Athens and at The University of Georgia choose to make their home in Oconee County. Over the last 15 years it has experienced phenomenal growth (48.9% from 1990 to 2000), quickly being transformed from a rural, agricultural community to one filled with burgeoning subdivisions

and new roads, reflective of newly acquired affluence. Located about 65 miles east of Atlanta, some residents even choose to make the commute to Atlanta from Oconee each day. The mean household income in 1997 was \$47,659; 15.6% of the county residents hold a bachelor's degree and 12.8% hold a graduate or professional degree.

Oconee County High School (OCHS) reflects the county's new-found wealth and success. Only 16.6% of Oconee County students are eligible for free and reduced lunches, compared with 58.1% in neighboring Clarke County schools. The gifted program enrolls 20.8% of the student body. The student body is comprised of 7.6% African Americans, 87% Caucasians, 2.9% Hispanics, and 2.5% other. The dropout rate is 2.6%. All Oconee County schools are accredited by the Georgia Accrediting Commission and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Enrollment for OCHS the 2001-02 school year was 1,698. The school operates on two, 18-week terms in a 4x4 block schedule. Advanced placement classes are offered in art, biology, chemistry, calculus, statistics, 12th grade English, and U.S. history. The following data for the SAT and ACT provide evidence of one measure of student achievement.

	<u>SAT 1-Reasoning Test</u>		
	<u>Verbal</u>	<u>Math</u>	<u>Total</u>
Oconee (83% taking test)	525	525	1050
State	491	489	980
National	506	514	1020

ACT-Comprehensive Score

Oconee	21.6
State	19.5
National	20.6

Postsecondary options and joint enrollment programs are offered with The University of Georgia, Gainesville College, Piedmont College, and Athens Technical College. Students may earn the following types of diplomas: College Preparatory, College Preparatory with Distinction, Technology/Career, and a Fine Arts Endorsement. The postgraduate plans of the class of 2002 indicated that 80% planned to pursue an education at a four-year institution, with only 10% choosing technical/vocational school. OCHS has a faculty who believe in lifelong learning as 66% hold graduate degrees. Construction on a second high school is scheduled to begin soon. It is certain to wreak havoc with some, as athletics—a big part of student life at OCHS—obviously will be affected in a significant way.

It is a warm, sunny day in April as I drive onto the campus of Oconee County High School. The campus is familiar—this is my home county—and welcoming. There are lots of well-marked visitor parking spaces. The school itself is a one-story building with a number of wings housing different program areas. As I arrive students are changing classes, but even though the halls are crowded, students are courteous—no shoving. I go directly into the main office, conveniently located across the hall from the front door, to sign in and get a visitor's badge. As I walk through the Commons area, I see the son of friends and greet him. As I approach the door

to the marketing education classroom, two former students, who are OCHS teachers, are in the hall outside their classrooms. We exchange pleasantries, another visible evidence of my being welcome here.

While there is a reasonably strong career and technical education program at OCHS, there is only one marketing education teacher. The marketing education (ME) classroom is warm, with the walls painted a light teal color. There are two bulletin boards, one has DECA information and the other has information about courses in marketing. There is a clothing display in one back corner.

The Student Teacher

I am here to observe Susan, who is a student teacher in marketing education. Susan is a petite, attractive young woman who sometimes seems to lack the self confidence needed to be successful in any career. Actually career and technical education is somewhat of a new interest/calling to Susan, as she “didn’t take any vocational courses [in high school]—my electives were filled with other courses such as social issues, psychology, chorus, and yearbook.” She graduated from a suburban Atlanta high school in a county that prides itself on strong academic achievement. She came into the CTL project somewhat late, taking one of the courses as an elective, “It was a new project at UGA and then once I was in the class I really enjoyed it and that affected my continued involvement.” She took one seminar and one semester-long CTL course. Susan is somewhat ambivalent about pursuing a teaching career after graduating, stating, “I feel that I need more real-world experience in marketing before I could ever successfully teach a

marketing class. I understand how to teach the state-given curriculum; however, as I've experienced in the past five months, there is so much more to it." She really enjoys teaching and the interaction with students, but she would also like to try her hand in marketing for a while to see how that might work for her. Susan also has a more laid-back style than does her supervising teacher, a source of some strife during student teaching. At the time of student teaching, it was not clear whether or not Susan would be a classroom teacher in the fall. Ultimately, Susan chose not to enter the teaching profession after student teaching. Currently she is in a two-year training program as a field marketing representative for Newell Rubbermaid. In this position she manages Rubbermaid products in ten Atlanta stores, where she develops promotions, builds relationships with key accounts, and does various other marketing activities. It appears her CTL experiences at UGA have influenced her work life. Susan stated this about her current job, "It is very hands-on and I've already been asked to assist in training other reps, where I find CTL strategies to be effective." The training program provides the opportunity for her to learn about every aspect of sales and marketing for this corporation. Finally, she said, "So, I plan to teach later on, at which time I hope I have developed into a more mature professional and a better prepared teacher."

I observed two classes Susan taught: fashion merchandising and entrepreneurship. In the fashion merchandising class, it is obvious Susan has an excellent rapport with the students, as she acknowledged that the prom was the next weekend and suggests an agreement, "I will give you time at the end to talk about prom if you give me 110% of your attention during class." They agree! The first activity was a review of the field trip the class had taken the previous week to

the Family and Consumer Sciences Building on the campus of The University of Georgia.

Students saw exhibits on everything from how to make fibers that would be woven into fabric, to a collection of antique clothing. In discussing what they saw, the student teacher asked good, probing questions to get the students to think beyond the knowledge level. The class was then directed to think about promotion and how companies use it. Susan brought in a large number of print ads to reinforce elements of promotion. The students were then directed to develop a print ad for some element from their UGA field trip. A rubric was used to evaluate the ads.

Susan's strong rapport continued to be evident in the entrepreneurship class. This group has a better mix of boys and girls. One girl had brought her prom dress to school and to class with her. Throughout class this student had a need to be recognized—calling out answers, asking questions in a loud voice, claiming she was ignored by her teacher, etc. The student teacher dealt well with these instances. The word “creative” was written vertically on the white board, and students were asked to use each letter to describe creativity as it relates to entrepreneurs. Susan then read aloud about Phil Knight, a famous, successful entrepreneur, who founded Nike. For the remainder of the period, the students were divided into six small groups and moved as a group through each of six stations set up around the room. Each station provided an opportunity to think creatively, to think “outside the box,” a near-requirement for successful entrepreneurs.

The Findings

The six key words developed by a sub-group of the CTL case study faculty will frame the findings. These key words emerged from the four research questions framing the interviews

and the observations in which all participating faculty were involved.

Differences between CTL and “Traditional” Instruction

Even though Susan is a student teacher, I still felt it appropriate to get her perspective on the differences between CTL and traditional instruction, based on her experiences as a high school student. She cited these three qualities of CTL that may be different from typical classroom instruction:

1. The “connectiveness of activities to real world situations.”
2. Bringing in so many real world activities.
3. Students actively engaged vis a vis their pulling information in for class work from sources outside the classroom.

Susan also commented that in her high school experience, as a college prep student, “we rarely had involvement outside of the classroom.” Susan also expressed the idea that CTL allows teachers to be more creative, learning becomes more interesting, and teachers become better teachers. She said, “If I had not had CTL . . . then I think it would have been a different teaching experience for me because I would have much more heavily relied on the LAPS (Learning Activity Packages) that I was provided and the worksheets that I was given.”

In our first interview, Susan provided this clear perspective on the value of CTL for students especially as it relates to student mastery, “Absolutely, I think you would retain the information longer because when you experience it or have something to relate it to yourself, hands-on involvement, you seem to retain it longer for some reason.”

Facilitators to Implementing CTL Strategies

Susan's supervising teacher sees marketing as project-based learning. Susan said, "So that's been easy because I've been able to do lots of projects where they're involving the community or actually creating something themselves."

Barriers to Implementing CTL Strategies

Clearly *the* barrier was being able to go on only one field trip for the whole semester. This, especially for marketing, fashion merchandising, and entrepreneurship classes, severely restricted opportunities for students to actually visit multiple work-based settings.

CTL Strategies Incorporated

Throughout all the classes Susan teaches, students are actively engaged in learning. This was evident in both my observations of her classes, my interview with her, and the artifacts she provided. The following more clearly describes evidence of additional CTL strategies incorporated into Susan's practice as a marketing education student teacher.

Susan's students learn in *multiple settings*. Her fashion merchandising class took a field trip to the College of Family and Consumer Sciences at The University of Georgia. They visited a lab where they saw how fibers that ultimately become fabric are made, a collection of antique clothing, and observed a fashion design class. The students also had lunch in Snelling Hall, one of the campus dining rooms. The fieldtrip not only reinforced in-class learning, it also provided a learning opportunity—seeing how fibers are made—that was simply not possible in their own classroom. Upon returning to school from the field trip, students completed a *field trip reflection*

sheet and then shared, in class, one significant experience they remembered.

A creative way of both learning in *multiple settings* and students seeing how what they are learning is *related to the real world* was incorporated into a videotape Susan made. For a unit on accessories and jewelry in the fashion merchandising class for which there were few resources available, Susan contacted jewelry stores and asked if she could visit them and videotape their places of business. The jewelers, mostly associated with franchises, talked about all aspects of the business. However, one jeweler, an entrepreneur, not only talked about the jewelry business, but also “talked a lot about what it’s like to be an entrepreneur, what it’s like to start a business, purchasing, inventory, advertising, went into all these details. So they paid great attention . . .” This is an example of where students are “taken” to a different setting via videotape. While the original intent was to use the videotape for the fashion merchandising class, the conversation by Meg, the entrepreneur, was appropriate for the entrepreneurship class, so it was included there too.

The most significant evidence of a blending of *project-based learning*, *student engagement*, and *student mastery* surfaced in three ways: the development of business plans in the entrepreneurship class; the video sales presentation in the entrepreneurship class; and the fashion show put together by the fashion merchandising class. For the business plan assignment, students in groups began by deciding on what type of business to start and then had to develop the marketing mix, identifying the four p’s of marketing: product, place, promotion, and price. A handout provided a topical outline, but it was entirely up to the students to be as creative as they

would like in the project. Once the marketing mix was completed, students then progressed to develop their business plan. Two of the business plans developed by the students also provide clear evidence of *critical thinking*, as these students chose clever store names, developed logos, considered management organization and philosophies, and projected a needed revenue stream. For the video sales presentation assignment, each team of students had to choose a product to sell to the class and then create a video sales presentation. Not only was this an excellent example of project-based learning, it also provided students with a real-world example of using a persuasive argument in marketing. The entire class voted on whether or not they would buy the product. A rubric was provided showing how the video would be graded. While the rubric established the basis for evaluation, it also provided the students a useful guide in developing the project. Finally, the fashion merchandising class coordinated all the activities required for the annual school fashion show. The class was responsible for everything: developing print ads to be distributed around school; selecting models and clothing apparel; and developing a script.

Susan used a variety of ways to *relate learning to the real world*. In her entrepreneurship class, she reads one section of the book Radicals and Visionaries each day, like a set induction. The book is a collection of stories about real entrepreneurs, and provided students with a clear idea of the struggles and successes of those who choose to open their own businesses. Susan used the television and print ads to *connect learning to the real world* in her fashion merchandising class, when her assignments included having students review national and private apparel with regard to projected image. These students also watched Levis jeans ads on

television and had to “list reasons why they think this commercial for Levis blue jeans is able to run all over the world.” Another example of *connecting learning to the real world* occurred in the marketing class when they began to study market research. The class was divided into two groups: a survey group and a focus group. The survey group developed a survey and each group member administered the survey to five students throughout the school. The results were tallied for later use. The focus group conducted its activity with classmates, with one member tabulating results. These two groups then switched roles, so everyone would be able to participate in each activity. This enabled every student to see not only two examples of how market research works, but also have the perspective of both the market researcher as well as the provider of data for market research.

Another example of *critical thinking* and *problem solving* occurred in an assignment on social responsibility in the entrepreneurship class. Students had to use their creativity in solving social problems as entrepreneurs. Students, in teams of two, had to develop a plan to develop social responsibility within “their business.” For this assignment, the teams had the following points to guide their research: 1. Find three environmental organizations with which your company will be involved. 2. Find at least two companies you will model your policies after. 3. Find at least three organizations you can get involved with in your local community. 4. Name at least one issue that you foresee may arise that might challenge you to compromise your social responsibility or practice. This is an excellent way not only to provide opportunities for critical thinking and problems solving, but also to help students understand the circle of influence their

actions can have as business people.

An excellent example of *student-led inquiry* occurred in the fashion merchandising class where each student chose a fashion designer to research. The assignment gave the students ideas on topics to cover, questions to answer, and websites to consult. The students developed a research paper, and then each student gave a presentation using PowerPoint slides to teach his/her classmates about the selected designer. Here, too, Susan provided her students with a rubric for their research report. This let the students know her expectations for content and quality of the paper.

Effect on student engagement

Susan's perspective, as is mine, is that CTL has a significant effect on student engagement. She commented, "It's so funny, they [her students] always say to me, 'We do so much stuff in here' and I think they perceived marketing when they registered for the class as an easy elective. And they've even said to me we do more things in here than they do in other academic classes, so they're not just coming to class, sitting there, and receiving information for an hour. They're actually having to create and role play the selling and do all these different things because it's project-based." My observations concur with this assessment—for a large part of each class session students were *actively engaged* in learning. CTL strategies, as evidenced in this student teacher's classroom, provide opportunities for students to come up with their own ideas as a result of what they know.

Effect on student mastery

To separate student engagement from student mastery is difficult. However, through engagement, *student mastery* was evident. The students' understanding and knowledge of subject matter was demonstrated through project-based learning in a variety of ways: the business plan, the sales video, and the fashion show. It was also evident in student assessment. For a test in one class, Susan gave her students a blank concept chart and they had to list the steps of the sales process, including all the characteristics of each. There were "lots of terms to remember" but they had literally acted out many through role-play, and "I think that helped them to remember. And they all did really well with it [the test]." She also believes students remember more from projects; "I saw that on the test that they did better." She continues with an example from the fashion merchandising class and the fashion designer research project, which every one of her twenty-six students completed. She said, "And when they took their test, they knew every fashion designer, where they were born, what kind of clothes they design, what type of designer, I mean a lot of information about a lot of different designers. They paid attention really well and retained information well that was presented to them from other students."

Additional evidence emerged as a result of the field trip to The University of Georgia, where they saw "professionals who worked in the fashion industry, seeing the Clothes Closet, seeing that there's more—there are sciences to it and it's not just 'let's put on some pretty clothes and walk down an aisle'."

Discussion

The purpose of this case study, as part of the larger contextual teaching and learning

project, was to determine how CTL influences instruction and student achievement. My conversations and observations of one marketing education student teacher provide evidence of the inclusion of a variety of CTL strategies and concomitant benefits.

Susan's perspective on differences between CTL and traditional instruction really centered around bringing information/sources into the classroom from the "real world" and then incorporating that information/sources into project-based learning. This was very different from her high school classes that obviously were taught in a very traditional manner. This practice of incorporating CTL theory would also differ markedly from other, more traditionally-trained student teachers. Marketing, the subject area she taught, lends itself well to project-based learning, making it much easier to incorporate CTL strategies. However, Susan's focus appeared on projects alone. This seemed to be a narrow interpretation of "incorporating CTL strategies." As Medrich, Calderon, and Hoachlander (2002, draft) state,

One important feature of CTL, therefore, is its emphasis on concrete applications. . . .
But if concrete application or illustration is a necessary feature of CTL, it is not sufficient. CTL, therefore, as a curriculum strategy requires not only attention to concrete application but also to 'contexts' that have meaning and can engage particular students" (p. 4).

While Susan did provide any number of concrete applications with a clear CTL foundation, the link to contexts with clear meaning for students was less obvious.

However, a variety of CTL strategies surfaced in Susan's classes: *learning in multiple*

settings, students learning from one another through reflection and teamwork, learning being related to the real world, critical thinking, and problem solving. The collective impact of these on student engagement and mastery was also evident. Student artifacts in the form of business plans provide but one example. My observations of Susan's classes also led me to believe that the assignments and in-class activities also caused her students to look at everyday situations in different ways. Many of her assignments required students to figure out what they did not know, and then figure out how to construct/acquire that knowledge.

While the aforementioned evidences of CTL inclusion were relatively obvious, they appeared greater in breadth than depth. The student teacher did an excellent job of developing a variety of creative activities for her classes; however, what appeared to be lacking was **specific** conversations with her students to be sure they understood the rationale behind the projects as a different way of learning rather than doing "stuff" to take up class time. It seemed this also was a reflection of the way the student teacher viewed/understood CTL. I was not convinced she had a deep understanding of either the theory or practice. Her perception, to me at least, appeared that CTL was activity- or project-driven. While clearly, project-based learning is an important CTL strategy, as previously stated, it is not the keystone of successful CTL integration into classroom learning and instruction.

I do believe the effect of Susan being involved in the CTL project on her practice, as a student teacher, was significant. Without that experience, she may well have relied on a very traditional means of instruction, one that is significantly more teacher-centered than student-

centered. For this student teacher and her students, contextual teaching and learning, as understood and communicated by the student teacher, is inextricably intertwined with instruction and achievement.