Learntertainment: Evaluation of an Alternative Instructional and Assessment Tool for Tourism and Hospitality

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Abstract

Traditionally, tourism and hospitality educators have relied on lectures in their classrooms; while there has been a gradual shift from teacher-centered (lectures) to student-centered processes for instruction, assessment processes still remain teacher-centered. Testing continues to be the dominant form of assessment. The purpose of this paper is to describe an approach called learntertainment, and how it can be used as an effective, combined teaching-learning and assessment tool in a tourism and hospitality classroom environment. Through a series of semi-structured interviews of college and university faculty, it was found that the subjects believed learntertainment assessment aids the identification of topics that students do not understand, facilitates grading, eliminates subjectivity in evaluation, provides on-the-spot feedback, allows educators to identify students needing further assistance, and identifies tactics for corrective action. Generally, the findings revealed that the methods were effective, stimulating, and challenged students to think and/or question themselves. This study concludes that learntertainment tactics and strategies can be used both as an effective classroom instruction and an alternative form of assessment, and can be used to eliminate some of the stresses and problems associated with classroom tests and examinations, while at the same time improving students' learning.

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Introduction

Universities are shifting from education processes that are too often seen by students as boring and teacher-centered to processes that are exciting and student-centered (Haugen, 1998; Slater *et al.*, 2004). Such a shift is very important in light of demands on higher education institutions: (i) to promote the development of critical thinking and problem solving skills among students; (ii) to open the curriculum to more than students' listening and regurgitating information; and (iii) to analyze and evaluate student learning (Armoo & Garrick, 2006).

The transformation of teaching and learning processes demands that educators and administrators re-examine current assessment practices. For the teaching and learning process to be effective, new forms of assessment need to be explored. According to Wolf, Bixby, Glenn III, and Gardner (1991), "the irony of social inventions is that one-time innovations turn to habit". Consequently, assessment strategies of the 20th century perceived as innovations have become habitual and unquestioned. Students' learning styles differ, and as a result of technological advancements, new educational approaches are needed.

Learntertainment, according to Armoo & Garrick (2006), involves "the process of weaving and implementing elements of fun and entertainment into every learning experience, thereby ensuring that learning comes to life for everyone involved in the teaching-learning process"(p. 6). This strategy has the potential to become an effective teaching approach as well as improved assessment tool. Authors such as Ernest Boyer, Alexander Astin, and Sylvia Grider have highlighted the need for instructional improvement in higher education in recent years (Kher, 1996).

In order to meet their goals, educators should provide students with learning experiences that are exciting, authentic, and practical; students are bombarded everyday by entertainment in their personal lives and recreational experiences such as video games, BET, YTV, and much music to name a few. The Internet and a variety of new communication technologies (iPhones, iPADS, Blackberries), visualization (DVDs, video games,), and simulation technologies (Wii) are attractive to students and readily capture their attention. In addition, university faculty and administrators are acutely aware of the increasing pressures and distractions students today bring to the campus: inordinate work commitments, lack of parental social support, guidance and college familiarity, family obligations requiring their attention. These all require new educational strategies.

Roughly 40% of all students in higher education today are considered non-traditional, averaging 25 years or older. (DiFiore, 2003; US Census Bureau October 1996). These students usually work part-time, returning from the workforce for a second degree, or are complementing their business skills through professional development programs. They bring diverse perspectives to the classroom.

In addition, there is greater diversity in cultures and the student population due to immigration (Seurkamp, 2007). Thus, the traditional learning environment needs to adapt to a more complex social environment. Academics using traditional methods will need to adjust to be able to teach from a learntertainment perspective and to enable them to handle the multicultural challenges faced and to facilitate the anticipated gains of increased student motivation, mastery, and autonomy as students develop their capacity to monitor and plan their own process.

Problem Statement

Many students' best learning experiences come when they are engaged in activities that they enjoy. Moreover, assessment techniques can shape the experience of students and influence their behavior even more than the teaching they receive (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004, p.5). Well-designed assessment sets clear expectations, establishes a reasonable workload (one that does not push students into routine/rote learning), and provides opportunities for students to self-monitor, rehearse, practice, and re-

ceive feedback. Brown, Bull & Pendlebury (1997) describe trends in the assessment paradigm (Table 1).

Table 1. Paradigm shifting in assessment

From	Towards
Written examinations	Coursework
Tutor-led assessment	Student-led assessment
Implicit criteria	Explicit criteria
Competition	Collaboration
Product assessment	Process assessment
Objectives	Outcomes
Content	Competences

(Source: Brown, Bull & Pendlebury, 1997)

Reigeluth & Squire (1998) and Barr & Tagg (1995) point out that the classical approach, relying heavily on psychometric tools, is insufficient to assess students learning, especially in the current social environment.

Purpose of the Study

Given that education may be described as a planned teaching and learning experience, educators must understand the reality of such an experience. Hence, the purpose of this study is to examine faculty experiences who have utilized a learntertainment assessment strategy within tourism and hospitality settings. It is hoped that the findings of this study will promote future research on the conceptual underpinnings and empirical outcomes of learntertainment teaching strategies.

Review of Literature

Learntertainment

Findings from research on students' learning indicate that pedagogical techniques influence how well students learn to apply concepts (Michlitsch & Sidle, 2002). To meet the goals of unambiguous expectations, authentic tasks, choice, and flexibility, educators should provide students with learning ex-

periences that are exciting and practical. This involves making every learning experience interactive, practical, and entertaining, while not slacking in content. At the same time, revisions in assessment tools are needed. It has long been asserted that some in-class exams, such as multiple-choice tests encourage guesswork and reduce independent thinking (Monahan, 1998).

Furthermore, many students are susceptible to stress, and thereby, become nervous under examination conditions, leading to forgetting large components of studied material (Huerta-Macias, 1995). In addition, in the case of standardized tests, some educators provide "coaching" geared at assisting students to significantly raise their test scores, without actually increasing their general intelligence or knowledge significantly (Huerta-Macias, 1995). Despite these and many other limitations, testing can be a valuable tool for evaluating student learning. Tests can function as diagnostic tools to establish what students already know, how well they are learning, provide students with feedback, and help educators to improve their instruction. Testing also allows educators to build and pace the curriculum and balance students needs with standards.

Despite these applications of traditional tests, educators will have to change their *modus operandi* so that students can better learn the skills and competencies needed to succeed. Industry's demand for employees with critical thinking and problem-solving skills, effective communication, and good human relations skills, has necessitated changes in the teaching-leaning process.

Although the phrase "active learning" aptly describes learntertainment and is frequently heard in educational circles, perhaps the best way to think of learntertainment or active learning in the classroom is to focus on learning *processes* rather than on learning *products*. Learning processes focuses on what happens when the learning takes place. It can be thought of as a process by which there is a change in attitude or behavior as a result of experience. Ac-

tive learning redefines classroom practice from a static view in which knowledge is poured into the passive, empty minds of students by lecturers to a more dynamic view where, through project-based, collaborative, and problem-based activities and assessments, students play a more active role in creating new knowledge to be applied to other professional and academic contexts.

Student Learning Assessment

Alternative assessment strategies, such as learntertainment, can be defined as those that are not discrete point tests. The advantages of alternative assessment focus on "how well," rather than "how many" (Gripps, 1994) and the individual achievement relative to self. The other advantage of alternative assessment is the emphasis on competence rather than intelligence or in other words, how well students know the material for the test. In the best case, students are not worried by standardization, but instead focus on how to improve rather than to prove.

Consequently, alternative assessment strategies such as learning journals, course biographies, portfolios, and games have been widely advocated by educators lobbying for change (*e.g.*, see Brookhart, Andolina, Zuza, & Furman, 2004; Clarke, 1997; Hargreaves, Earl, & Schmidt, 2002; Kulm, 1994). Together with new developments, assessment is seen more as an integrated part of the teaching and learning process. As noted by Pegg and Panizzon (2007/2008), "[t]he emphasis on embedding assessment into the teaching and learning process is identifiable globally". Alternative assessment methods such as learntertainment, in addition to being fun and in the "language" of today's students', work well in learner-centered classrooms because they are based on the idea that students can evaluate their own learning and learn from the evaluation process. This method gives students opportunities to reflect on both their course development and their learning processes (what helps them learn and what might help them learn better). Alternative

assessment thus gives instructors a way to connect assessment with review of learning strategies.

Assessment programs must be combined with high performance standards and should encourage learning, not just measure it. Knowledge gained from assessment should drive improvement and growth, for programs as well as for the students. Assessment should be clearly and thoughtfully built into instruction. It should be part of learning rather than the conclusion or the means to end the learning process. It must also be fair and equitable as well as valid and reliable. Assessment must have a clear, precise connection with the expected learning outcome, provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate performance and must adopt alternatives for determining whether learning has been achieved. This calls for a distinction between *assessment of learning* (*i.e.*, assessment with the intent of grading and reporting with its own established procedures) and *assessment for learning* (*i.e.*, assessment with the intent of enabling students, through effective feedback, to fully understand their own learning and the goals for which they are aiming; Elwood & Klendowski, 2002).

Educators, as they increasingly involve students in the teaching-learning process, need to build in many opportunities to include students in the assessment process and then use the information obtained through assessment to improve the teaching-learning process. Studies have shown that students who understand the learning objectives and assessment criteria and have opportunities to reflect on their own work show greater improvement than those who do not (Frederikson & White, 1997). In learntertainment assessments, students understand what criteria will be used to evaluate their performance. The problem of interpretation differences that result when performance requirements are ambiguous can devalue and discredit an assessment program. In an effort to assess higher-order cognitive skills and complex problem solving, educators should develop assessments that have no single right

answer and in which students' interpretation of information or evidence is key in defending their solution. Educators should also make sure students know if the content, rather than enunciation, punctuation, and or grammar, is the criterion on which performance will be judged. This poses a challenge for many educators, especially those who are creative educators, when they operate in an educational environment where there is no correlation between the instructional environment, communication devices, and the methods used.

Several learntertainment techniques can be effectively used as assessment strategies. Through role play, students are able to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. As an assessment tool, the students are given an opportunity to undertake activities that require them to move away from established, normal, and standard ways of doing things (Armoo & Garrick, 2006). Such exercises can be used by an educator to assess how creative students can be at finding solutions to problems.

"Circle of minds" involves students being put in groups with each group required to come up with the best solution to a problem. The members of a group sit in a circle and take turns to suggest possible solutions (Armoo & Garrick, 2006). The group analyzes each suggestion and selects their best solution. Through this method, the students learn how to debate their points and the basis of decision-making as well as display an application and analysis of issues and concepts. Class/group discussions are a good means of evaluating the general understanding of students. Adult students bring to the college classroom a variety of experiences, knowledge, and skills, class/group discussion are an avenue for them to share and learn from one another. The breadth and depth of their input in the discussion is ample to determine the extent of their knowledge.

While these approaches are fun for students, they also require students to think and be analytical. Puzzles are effective tools to evaluate how well students remember key words and definitions. Creative summaries involve the use of key concepts covered in a unit in a creative format to produce poems, songs, rap, or skits (Armoo & Garrick, 2006). Group presentations involve students presenting topics to the class. In order for it to become an effective assessment strategy, group presentations should be designed to inquire into students' competences. Evaluation should assess how students analyze, apply, assess, explain, and articulate their points during the presentation, and also during the question-and-answer session that follows each presentation.

With each of these learntertainment strategies, adequate instructions in the application of the methods must be given. Students must clearly understand, prior to the activities, what criteria will be used to assess their performance. Students are graded on their responses, actions, or the prepared portion of the presentation. In addition, points are given for:

1. Effective identification of concepts and definition of the key words
2. Portrayal of adequate knowledge of the topic(s)
3. Ability to stay with the topic(s) or problem under review
4. Organized presentation
5. Familiarity with and knowledge of basic information

In addition, the flexibility with which questions, comments, and enquiries are encouraged and entertained from the audience is also assessed.

Methods

The conceptual approach in this study is constructivism. As such, meaning is understood as generated through the researcher's interaction with data. Results drawn from studies done from a constructivist approach are intended to be relevant in particular to the setting under study and to the research question (Liu & Matthews, 2005). Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is the method used. IPA allows for an exploration of subjective experiences and, more specifically, social cogni-

tions. IPA's conceptual underpinnings grew from the phenomenology that began with Husserl's attempts to build a philosophical understanding of consciousness, with hermeneutics (the theory of interpretation) and with symbolic interactionism that posits that the meanings an individual ascribes to events are of central concern but are only accessible through an interpretative process (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Consequently, IPA acknowledges that the researcher's understanding of the participant's words is necessarily based on subjective interpretation. IPA also assumes an epistemological stance whereby, through careful and explicit interpretative procedures, it becomes possible to access an individual's cognitive world. An interpretive researcher steps back from searching for a prescriptive answer, and instead, approaches the issue with the aim of better understanding the nature of interaction in a learntertainment environment, and the impact of this upon participants (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Given that this study seeks to explore the lived experiences of faculty using learntertainment strategies, a phenomenological methodology was chosen as the best means for this type of study as indicated by Davidson (2000), Jones (2001), and Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (2002).

Research Design

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. In the constructivist approach used here, according to Hycner (1999, p. 156), "the phenomenon dictates the method (not vice-versa) including even the type of participants". To access the faculty, no single sampling method was employed, but rather a combination of criterion sampling (Atkinson & Flint 2001) and purposive sampling (Guba & Lincoln 1981). Both techniques are acceptable within interpretive approaches to research and conceptual development (Guba & Lincoln 1981; Strauss & Corbin 1998). The sample was selected based on judgment and the purpose of the research (Babbie, 2007; Greig & Taylor, 1999; Schwandt, 1997), looking for

those who "have had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched" (Kruger, 1988 p. 150).

Purposive sampling is considered by Welman and Kruger (1999) as the most important type of non-probability sampling. It is especially useful in interpretive research in cases where the researcher has some personal contact or is involved within the field of study. It entails the researcher actively looking for people who meet the aims of the inquiry and who can offer "information-rich cases for study in depth" (Patton 1990, p. 169). As a sub-set of purposeful sampling, criterion sampling entails selecting the cases that meet a (set of) particular criterion (Wengraf, 2001).

The four criteria applied in this study were that the participants needed to be: (a) actively teaching at the tertiary level; and (b) at the time of interviewing a full time employee at one of the four institutions teaching tourism and hospitality. In addition, the participants needed to be: (c) teaching courses within tourism and hospitality degrees using learntertainment strategies at the time of interviewing. The participants, finally, needed to have (d) some exposure to learntertainment teaching and assessment strategies either as a participant in or attended one or both workshops or conferences on learntertainment.

Participants for this study were drawn from four institutions. The sample of six interviewees originated from (1) a community college in Kingston, Jamaica, (2) a private college in the U.S., and (3) two universities in the U.S. (one a land-grant, the other private). Initial contact was made by e-mail outlining the purpose and scope of the research, asking faculty for their agreement to participate. Of the ten faculty members initially approached to participate, six agreed. Once their agreement was obtained, a formal letter was then sent to the selected faculty asking that contact be made by email and a suitable meeting place arranged. For the most part, inter-

views took place in the offices of the faculty and lasted an hour.

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview comprised of five open-ended questions.

1. What were your experiences using learntertainment strategies as teaching and assessment tools?
2. What concerns and or constraints did you experience using learntertainment strategy?
3. What strategies did you use to facilitate active learning?
4. What does this mean for you now, will you continue using it?
5. What value, if any, has been derived from using the learntertainment teaching and assessment strategies?

The interviewees were asked these open-ended questions about their experiences to explore their perceptions and to provide a better understanding of their experiences, feelings, beliefs, and convictions about learntertainment instructional and assessment strategies.

Research Limitations

Beyond the obvious limitation of a very small sample size, an interpretivist researcher can never be completely neutral because she/he will carry her/his background and beliefs into the research situation. In this study, the author worked as faculty member of institutions in Jamaica and the US and, up to fall of 2009, was a doctoral student employing learntertainment as a teaching and assessment strategy in a Midwest U.S. university. In addition, along with a colleague, the author developed the learntertainment teaching strategy and, as such, brought this experience to the analysis. Further, the constructivist approach carries the risk of confirmation bias (unintentionally missing contradictory evidence that would mediate against conclusions and the narrative fallacy) – the tendency of human beings to impute stories in any set of data regardless of whether the stories are valid.

Faculty Profile

Three faculty members taught in tourism and hospitality departments and had several years of teaching experience across various years. Two faculty members taught both in Jamaica and the US, also across various years. Of the other three, one was in a business school with less than a year of teaching experience and taught only first-year students and the other two had twenty-five years experience in a business school. All three taught courses in tourism and hospitality.

Class Size and Room Setup

With the exception of the community college in Jamaica, which had tablet arm chairs joined in blocks of three or four, the other college and universities in the US used a room set up comprising one large conference table or several tables configured together into one large seating area, or lecture/theatre rooms with fixed seating and a well-defined "front" or main lecture area in the front of the room. The college and universities in the US were also equipped with new audio-visual technologies: overhead projectors, multimedia projectors, computers, and DVD and video players. In contrast, the college in Jamaica, though not equipped with the technology, offered the potential to access limited equipment for use. The class size at the community college in Jamaica was approximately 45 students, whereas in the U.S., class sizes were between 20 and 30.

Data Analysis

The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded. Each interview was assigned a code, for example "faculty 1, Ms A. June 20 2007". In the case where more than one interview was done on a specific date, the interviews were identified in a similar fashion; however a superscript numeric value was assigned such as (Faculty 2, Mr.-B, August 18, 2007[1] and Mrs. C. August 18 2007[2]) after which the researcher listened to the recording and made notes. The assigned interviews were coded using a color scheme. These notes were then documented in a

journal. From these statements, meaning units were derived, and clustered in themes after the removal of repetitive and overlapping statements. Textual descriptions of the participants' experiences were developed from the clustered themes and meaning units.

Findings

Overcoming tension between frustration with existing systems and visions of new possibilities was the overarching theme identified. This theme is structured around several other themes: experiencing frustration with existing systems and visions of new possibilities, plus sub-themes: bureaucratic padlock and metamorphosis of assessment. The frustration experienced can be viewed as those factors (real or perceived) that hinder or caused faculty to feel restricted in implementing a learntertainment strategy.

Frustration with Existing Systems

Increased work load, time-consumption, lack of resources, fear of the unknown, lack of autonomy, lack of recognition, feeling disempowered, lack of incentives, blockage of information flow, and disenchantment with decision-makers and the decision-making process are common concerns invoked by all interviewees. Phrases such as "red tape", "inflexible", "organizational politics", "insensitivity", "self-doubt", and "frustration with the status quo" were frequently used. The structure of the institutions themselves contributed to the frustration experienced due to the complexity of their systems. Intense feelings were generated from the frustrations and challenges experienced by faculty based on their perceptions of being hindered by bureaucratic padlock. Faculty indicated that the bulk of the work had to be done prior to the activities and, as a result of the bureaucratic padlock, it took a very long time to obtain material that was needed.

"It is very time consuming but enjoyable at the same time because you feel like you need to constantly be up to date with technology,

the latest lingo, music, what's new on BET. It is a 24/7 format. When preparing for games for example, I have to prepare all questions, props, etc. before the class activity. This I have found to be very time consuming for myself as well as to other faculty members who also use the strategy. We already have too much work to do".

The faculty were constantly apprehensive about, and frustrated by, their efforts to obtain material needed to facilitate the learntertainment strategy. It affected their ability to structure and use time effectively. They waged a constant battle to get the material needed, to get over-time approved, to find the time and energy needed for the amount of work that they had to do. The tasks associated with learntertainment were time consuming. They felt that they needed to learn how to use their time and limited material effectively. Target dates and deadlines made them anxious and they felt that they were forced to neglect some activities in favor of other demands on their time. The limited time available in which to complete the various tasks also made it difficult to work alone, and drained their energy. However, by team teaching and including students in the process, interaction among faculty and between faculty and students was strengthened, thus allowing both to feel empowered. Students were more motivated, had more confidence and felt valued.

"The students were motivated by the change, the fun associated with learntertainment as did myself and the token given as incentives further sweeten the pot. But girl, I could not afford it and you and I know about all the red tape one has to go through to get… to get requisition, more so you have to be in the right place at the right time to get your needs to the principal's ear or to get in to see her to discuss material need. That was the most frustrating part and at

times I was tempted to scrap the whole thing."

The attempt to employ learntertainment was experienced as stressful. Learntertainment was experienced as frustrating, demanding, and daunting. Faculty became irritated, frustrated, disillusioned and pessimistic, especially when they felt that there was no satisfactory progress in their work because organizational politics was at play, administration inflexible and insensitive. However, once the problem of material was addressed, they were more motivated, and positive about continuing, and more relaxed. Initially they had seen learntertainment as something that would not be taken seriously, extra work not worthy of their time and effort, and they had therefore been apprehensive and afraid of getting caught up or hooked on this strategy.

". . . however, a major concern I had was that it would not be taken seriously as a form of assessment by the powers that be even if it worked, our management system is not receptive to change plus it will remove people from their comfort zone. We are often asked to be creative, use our initiative, get students more involved, challenge them, get them thinking, not just regurgitate and to do more to motivate them to learn. That's a lot of responsibility but where is the authority to go with it. In terms of being innovative, we are held on a tight leash. We have no autonomy, not in the true sense of the word. . . Quite frankly I was quite skeptical and thought it was a joke. I feared that management was just humoring us and that it would not ever be considered an acceptable assessment strategy no matter how effective it is."

However, as they became more involved and interested, and as they saw the results, they also became positive.

". . . The fun that is experienced by both the students and faculty provides positive experiences. Many students have a phobia for some forms of assessment (e.g. exams) so when they are given an opportunity to have fun while they are being assessed, they tend to enjoy it. Their pleasure can in itself provide instructors with a sense of pleasure too."

Visions of New Possibilities

Negative feelings were replaced by hope and personal vindication as the strategy's effectiveness became evident. Faculty members commented on their recognition of needed adjustments in the assessment process and pointed out that learntertainment strategies were an effective assessment method that allows students to convey the concepts they had learned. These strategies also demanded attention to the social and public nature of understanding. Consequently, faculty became innovative, interest in their jobs increased, they became more focused, and they not only incorporated fun but also students in the teaching and assessment process. This, they pointed out, made teaching less tedious and facilitated greater teacher/student interactions.

"I felt vindicated, my faith in my abilities as a lecturer was renewed. I had begun to doubt my capability as a teacher in light of the well banded statement 'the teacher did not teach if the students do not learn'. I feel good, there seems to be a light at the end of the tunnel."

Some faculty initially harbored unrealistic expectations of what this novel instructional strategy entailed. They were either over-confident and opti-

mistic, because they perceived the event as relatively simple, straightforward, juvenile and believed that they knew what was expected of them, while others felt unsure, unable, and unwilling to become involved and doubted their ability to shoulder the responsibilities of a novel teaching strategy all on their own. They felt that they needed more support from their supervisors and from university/college administration. They were disillusioned when the added support that they anticipated did not materialize, but very grateful when they did receive some support. However, their perceptions changed as the learntertainment strategy progressed. When they were forced to make their own decisions and to use their own initiative, they experienced it as a personal revelation.

They discovered hidden qualities and strengths in themselves, and they experienced personal growth. In the end they felt stronger and surer of themselves. Learntertainment demanded long hours from them, but they were proud of their achievements and derived great pleasure and satisfaction from their students' accomplishments. They felt that they were rewarded for their hard work. They realized that learntertainment demands tenacity, determination and commitment. As they discovered these characteristics in themselves they felt more confident in handling the challenges of the learntertainment teaching and assessment strategy.

The feedback from faculty indicated that learntertainment assessment aids the identification of topics/areas that students do not understand. In addition, educators were able to provide on-the-spot feedback to students, which allowed students to know how well they did or did not perform. It also helped educators identify weak students and make arrangements for corrective action. Some faculty members were visibly surprised at how much fun they had, and also, at information (sometimes new to the faculty member) that students brought to the fore through their presentations, suggestions, and solutions to problems.

"I thoroughly enjoyed it. It made grading much, much, easier particularly considering the size of our classes. What can I say about my experience uuumh! It was an 'ah ahh' moment for me. I could see the light of understanding evidenced in the eyes of students (pause) eyes that were once dull and blank. Students visibly came to life; they were more responsive, readily offered suggestions and shared ideas as to other types of learntertainment strategy."

One recurring point that is worthy of mention was that although faculty thought the approach was cutting edge and they would like to continue to explore its use, some faculty expressed concern about the indecisiveness of management and getting their hopes up that learntertainment strategy would be adopted for use in collaboration with already existing traditional methods of assessment.

"A major concern though, for me as well as the others is the indecisiveness of management. We fear getting our hopes up that "learntertainment' strategy would be adopted for use in collaboration with already existing traditional methods of assessment only to have them unceremoniously dashed. Management is known to be fickle like that."

Research about the learning process has demonstrated that learning occurs when students are actively engaged, has opportunities for interaction with others, is presented with challenging situations or questions that require critical thinking skills, and are surrounded by a nurturing fun environment (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; McKeachie et al., 1986.). Furthermore research has suggested that to achieve these goals faculty need to be knowledgeable of alternative techniques and strategies for questioning and discussion (Hyman 1980) and need to create a

supportive intellectual and emotional environment that encourages students to take risks (Lowman 1984).

Faculty indicated that the learntertainment techniques provide opportunities for higher order *thinking* as opposed to passive listening. The techniques they pointed out reinforce listening to others and provide opportunity for immediate feedback and adjustment of thought.

"However, Change is inevitable and a part of life. This change however is welcomed, it is positive and I feel honored to be a part of what might be a possible breakthrough in non-standardized assessment. I believe that it is a step in the right direction; learntertainment is a positive change towards becoming an accepted viable working strategy learning and assessment."

Learntertainment strategy also promotes greater student-faculty and student-student interaction. In so doing, problems or misunderstandings can quickly be addressed. In addition, learntertainment strategies also:

1. Contribute to increases in student retention and reduced anxiety among students. Students are not overloaded with information and their grades are not dependent solely on traditional assessment. Thus, students actually get time to think about, to talk about, and process information.

2. Provide opportunities for students to connect the content to real life. Students who are shy or who are often hesitant to speak up and offer opinions, especially in very large classes find it easier to share. No answer/response is perceived as wrong and there is value added by every point made thereby affording students opportunities to provide real life examples of the content being discussed, thus increasing the relevancy of the learning.

3. Builds self-esteem in students. Students tend to understand the information better because they must articulate the content to each other. Greater satisfaction with the learning experience occurs as students make personal connections to the content. Enjoyment of learning often leads to greater retention. Interaction often promotes a more positive attitude toward the subject matter or course.

4. Encourages alternative forms of assessment. Faculty members perceived that they had greater opportunities to observe the actual processing of information, seeing the results of group or individual projects/ presentations. The applied projects/presentations they believe indicates true knowledge (Bean, 1996; Bonwell, & James, 1991; Fink, 2003; Foyle, 1995)

Conclusion

As the calls for the teaching and learning process to become more interactive, collaborative, and learntertaining increase, the call for assessment to move away from traditional testing to alternative assessment, should also pick up momentum. This paper has discussed the experiences of faculty using the technique rather than simply opinions. Therefore, in this study, the experiences of interest to the researcher are not necessarily the experiences of the present, but the participants' reflections on their experiences in teaching in a learntertainment environment.

The study further highlights the dynamics of learntertainment, and how it can be used as an effective teaching, learning, and assessment tool in a tourism and hospitality classroom environment. It also discusses how learntertainment tactics and strategies can also be used as assessment tools, thereby, making learntertainment an all-round teaching-learning tool. The strategies that have been discussed can be fun for tourism and hospitality students and faculty and can effectively serve as alternative methods of assessing of students learning.

Findings indicated that learntertainment resulted in faculty experiencing visions of new possibilities. Negative feelings regarding existing assessment and teaching strategies were replaced by hope and personal vindication as the strategy's effectiveness became evident. This essence accounted for a large segment of how participants perceived the effectiveness of the strategy, how they experienced it, their move towards acceptance, and what it meant for their work lives.

By using the information learned about learntertainment, faculty become aware of alternative instructional styles which can encourage the same level of participation and inclusion by all students. These observed differences in learntertainment strategy suggest that the inclusion of students and the incorporation of fun activities in the learning process may be helpful in creating successful learning opportunities for all students. The purpose of using learntertainment teaching strategies is to help students think about material presented during class. Faculty need to know what students don't understand before the students leave class. The use of learntertainment teaching strategies can help faculty find student misunderstandings and allow faculty to give students needed information during class. In addition, learntertainment facilitated easier grading, eliminated subjectivity, provided on the spot feedback, allowed educators to identify weak students and identify tactics for corrective action.

Despite there being certain concerns and constraints experienced by the faculty, many also had a good number of positive experiences when teaching in a learntertainment environment. Although the faculty expressed great concern about personal time pressure, inadequacy of material and equipment, or worry about the validity and acceptability of the assessment strategy for students, these concerns did not preclude them from experiencing some very positive aspects of their use of learntertainment teaching and assessment strategies. In conclusion, educators are encouraged to rethink the present situation of using tests/exams as the main, and in some cases, the only form of assessment, and instead adopt a new approach that is a combination of testing and alternative assessment strategies such as learntertainment assessment.

Learntertainment teaching can enhance the traditional approach to learning; however, educators must understand how to adopt and maximize this new mode of instruction. Based on the results, the researcher offers the following recommendations for preparing and assisting faculty who will be using the learntertainment strategy.

1. The practice of learntertainment teaching must transparently demonstrate mutuality, respect, and trust to foster a transformative learning environment. No relationship can exist without caring for and understanding the learner.

2. All stakeholders involved in learntertainment must work collaboratively to define and establish new landmarks and transitions into new techniques.

3. Along with an orientation program, administrators must consider providing the necessary tools and or equipment for a smooth transition to the learntertainment environment.

4. In order for 'Learntertainment' assessment to be effective, there must be an agreement between course objectives and assessment. The assessment must flow in tandem with high performance standards as stated in the learning outcomes and goals, and must encourage and lead to learning; not just measure what has been learned, but what is valued; not just those skills that are quick and easy to measure.

5. Classroom assessment can be embedded into a 'Learntertainment' instructional environment; however it has to be carefully and thoughtfully done. It should be a part of the learning process rather than a conclusion to

the learning process. 'Learntertainment' assessment must be fair, equitable, valid and reliable in order to effectively assess how students do research, evaluate situations, apply knowledge, think critically and present findings.

Finally, this study was exploratory in nature and the results may be limited only to the faculty who participated in the investigation. Thus, only general suggestions for future research can be offered. One possibility is to explore the experiences of learners who have been taught using learntertainment strategies. Other possibilities are to examine students' perceptions of learntertainment effectiveness as an instructional method and the comparative effects of learntertainment versus traditional teaching methods on tourism and hospitality undergraduate students.

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