**The experiential learning process on the small enterprise marketing/logistics and supply chain management interface – a conceptual model for the practical classroom**

**Abstract**

This paper reports on an exercise that has been built into a marketing and entrepreneurship module that addresses the MLSCMI concept as taught with final year, full time, undergraduate business and management/business studies students. This is applied in the context of the smaller enterprise in which certain option students are involved. The paper seeks to show how the development of critical thinking can lead to knowledge transfer and understanding using critical incidents as effective learning episodes. The purpose of the paper is to provide illumination of the teaching and learning process with such students and to develop a conceptual model of this particular process with a view to testing it further. The methodological approach taken combines the practical and theoretical teaching approach taken to the managerial subject of the MLSCMI with a pedagogical approach to learning that brings into play experiential learning that is based on, but challenges, Kolb’s (1984) Learning Cycle. These approaches were used with a small cohort (17 in total) of students who elected to be on a module that deals with entrepreneurship and marketing planning. The approach taken in the study is essentially social constructivist in nature where social enactment takes place. This paper underlines the importance of critical and social (collective) reflection to skills and competency development that are an essential part of learning to learn and metacognition. The paper is of value to those involved with marketing (and logistics and supply chain management) and entrepreneurship/small enterprise education and training. It should also be of value to those involved with the running of small enterprises and in particular student small enterprises, whether this be the students as learners themselves or development/support entities or functions within relevant organisations.

**Keywords**: Classroom practice; experiential learning; critical incidents and thinking critically; social interaction and enactment; entrepreneurship; small enterprise; the MLSCMI.

1. **Introduction**

The concept of a marketing/logistics and supply chain management interface (MLSCMI) is not a new one. It is more than 40 years since Schary and Becker (1973) had their article on the concept of the marketing/logistics interface published. Rather like other models or concepts in marketing such as the marketing mix there is usually an accompanying history that stretches back into at least the 1940s and 1950s. Examples are contributions to the marketing mix from Converse (1954) or the well-travelled AIDA (awareness, interest, desire, action) step-model that has its origins in the late19th century. The article by Schary and Becker (1973) discusses early definitions of marketing and logistics and develops a conceptual, interactive model of marketing/logistics placed in the context of marketing strategy and demand stimulation. Scary and Becker’s work is, therefore, a relatively early attempt to reduce barriers between the two disciplines and foster cooperation. Integration continued to be crucial to organisational performance whereby inter-functional integration regarding planning, coordinating and implementing strategic initiatives came to be seen as being directly related to competitiveness and profitability (Stank, Daugherty and Ellinger, 1999). Central to the MLSCMI concept now is the development of the shift from a market to network focus, with suppliers and manufacturers in a network economy for collective success. Such success comes with cost reduction and increased customer service, achieved through quickened response times and flexibility in what is always a fluid and dynamic business environment. For example, there might be opportunities around agility, outsourcing, inventory control management and interconnected information systems that can lead to competitive advantage in a demand-driven market. Key to this is the internet and other digital technologies. What can be a rather vague term – customer service – becomes more concrete when the customer/consumer dichotomy is explained regarding the customer in a supply chain engaging in marketing as networking. At the same time, the consumer is brought into the equation by the employment of a combination of traditional and digital media.

Such movements have led to definitions of the functions containing common elements. Marketing definitions talk about delivery, exchange, and value to all customers. For example, it has been argued that customer value can be created by interdependence between the two functions (Lynch and Wicker, 2008). Definitions of logistics talk about coordination and collaboration with channel partners. Supply chain management involves marketing to partners in the chain so that, in one scenario at least, manufacturers market to wholesalers who in turn market to retailers, i.e., their customers. There is a strong argument for organisations to foster a symbiotic relationship between the two functions of marketing and logistics that brings with it an added dimension. For example, efficient logistics can lead to lower prices and competitive advantage, stock can be moved from market to market involving reverse logistics, and channel conflict can be reduced. As Schramm-Klein and Morschett (2006) have pointed out, such conflict can manifest itself in short term objectives of the those involved, and there is a need for effective coordination between such players. Regarding smaller enterprise contexts, the relationship between marketing and logistics and supply chain management is no less important. While less attention has been paid to this relationship in the smaller enterprise context, there is nonetheless a range of studies to draw on.

The movement of learning from being classroom-situated to the real world has long been considered in management education. For example, Bilimoria (1998, 265) argues that this is a diasporic shift or movement of learning “beyond the spatial and temporal walls of the management education classroom” in postmodern times. In this way of thinking, modernist management education with knowledge imparted in the classroom is replaced by postmodern realities that “spur the disintegration of the classroom boundaries and encourage a reconceptualization of the nature of learning”. The reality since Bilimoria’s (Editor’s Corner) piece in the Journal of Management Education in the late 1990s, however, is somewhat different twenty years on. Classroom-based experiential learning is recognised by Bilimoria as a choice of techniques such as role-play, games or simulations. The use of such techniques attempt to simulate real-world issues and situations but have no real relationships or consequences in Bilamoria’s view. However, to do more than this would be to take learning outside of the classroom and into activities such as placements/internships or mentoring by managers. Not everything, by any means, is done using such activities. On the contrary, much of what is delivered in business and management higher education is done so through traditional, classroom-based lecturers and seminars. Various forms of electronic learning platforms or management systems and related tools and techniques now, of course, support these. In addition to the resilience of the classroom and the continued use of classroom-based experiential learning, there is a tension between teaching practical aspects of entrepreneurship, marketing and small enterprise management when teaching and learning is delivered in the context of an academic degree. Although there are exceptions, most business and management studies-type degrees are delivered, in accordance with academic requirements, with assessments in the form of assignments or examinations attached. Many such assessments tend to be in the form of reports of one sort or another. One of the Learning Objectives of the module that is the focus of this paper (Entrepreneurship: Creativity, Marketing and Planning) is to ‘Evaluate entrepreneurial marketing activities and apply this to the design of a marketing strategy and plan’. A necessary part of this is consideration of distribution as part of the marketing mix. A logical extension of distribution is to explore the MLSCMI.

This paper reports on an exercise that has been built into the aforementioned module that addresses the MLSCMI. This exercise has been conducted for a number of years and involves two consecutive weeks (two, two-hour workshops with final year, full time, undergraduate business and management/business studies students). The particular focus of these workshops is the MLSCMI concept as applied in the context of the smaller enterprise in which certain option students are involved. There is an assumption that there is a requirement to go beyond the ‘nuts and bolts’ of learning by doing and to achieve higher order, integrated learning that includes the social aspect of learning. The paper seeks to explain critical concepts and show how the development of critical thinking can lead to knowledge transfer and understanding using critical incidents as effective learning episodes. The delivery of learning and the idea of learning styles in the development of competencies are important in the practices of small enterprise managers. ‘Learning to learn' and metacognition development are therefore important in the context of this paper. The purpose of the paper is to provide illumination of the teaching and learning process with such students and to develop a conceptual model of this particular process with a view to testing it further.

**Literature review**

The MLSCMI

Put quite simply and in practical terms, ‘marketing logistics’ (Christopher, 1997; Christopher & Peck, 2003) is extant and a necessity for any organisation involved with the delivery of physical goods. The planning and control of delivering such goods is at the heart of marketing and logistics and supply chain management practice. In order to deliver (profitably) consumer demand and satisfaction, there is a need for effective planning and control. While the logistics and supply chain management function is to do with handling and delivering products, marketing is both a creative and analytical discipline. Logistics and supply chain management deals with activities involving the supply chain, warehousing, production and control while marketing uses various forms of marketing communication, pricing strategies and other marketing mix elements in order to stimulate and manage demand effectively. Viewed from this perspective, the MLSCMI becomes clearer. For example if there is a successful drive to increase sales then the logistics and supply chain management function has to be able to handle the impact on sales volumes. Similarly, if there is excess product then it is up to the logistics and supply chain management function to implement a form of reverse logistics in order to deal with returns or destock parts of the supply chain such as retailers or wholesalers. An effective logistics and supply chain system is a marketing tool in the sense that pricing, speed of delivery, customer service and other aspects of marketing are positively affected, leading to competitive advantage – but of course an ineffective one would be likely to lead to the opposite.

Over the last few decades, the concept of a MLSCMI has been established in the academic literature as well as in practice. By the 1990s, the concept was firmly in place in terms of textbooks and journals. Christopher (1997) promoted the idea of ‘marketing logistics’ in part as recognition of the difficulties marketing writers had with the distribution element of the ‘4Ps’ model of the marketing mix. The original 4Ps model of product, place (i.e. distribution), price and promotion (Borden, 1965) had been challenged by the 1980s (for example Booms & Bitner, 1981), eventually being replaced by a 7P framework that included the original 4Ps but added people (or participants), processes and physical evidence. This was widely accepted in the services marketing literature (Rafiq & Ahmed, 1995), largely because of dissatisfaction with the 4P framework. Rafiq and Ahmed acknowledge that there appears to be less support for the physical evidence element outside of services marketing, physical evidence having more meaning when dealing with physical products. The rise of relationship marketing and the idea of personalisation (linked with segmentation and the individual as a segment) as a marketing mix element (Goldsmith, 1999) has some weight but can be subsumed into the existing ‘people’ element. The call for an 8P framework (by the addition of personalisation to the other seven elements) by Goldsmith and others promoting ‘P’ extensions has not taken hold. Other attempts to re-work the marketing mix using different acronyms such as the 4Cs (for example Consumer wants and needs, Cost to satisfy, Convenience to buy and Communication, Lauterborn, 1990) have failed to replace the ‘P’ model. While there are still attempts to re-configure the marketing mix in certain contexts (for example Gordon, 2012), the 7P framework has been gradually applied across other areas and has remained as the model of controllable variables that make up the marketing mix in all sectors for many organisations, professional bodies included (for example CIM, 2015). It is generally acknowledged, however, that the advent of e-commerce, the internet and the phenomenal developments in digital technology have led to more personalised marketing approaches.

The ‘place’ element of the marketing mix was often dismissed as merely ‘being in the right place at the right time’ with the obvious actors in the channels of distribution such as retailers, wholesalers and perhaps franchises being accounted for. Over time, it has been realised that the power of the big manufacturer brands has waned in favour of own label and other substitutes whereby the product itself has less of a contribution to competitive advantage. In this case, service can provide differentiation in a technology-driven world and so customer expectations shift. Other marketing mix factors such as price or image have come to the fore but so too has supply, availability and concepts such as just-in-time or logistics capability. For example, Kakouris and Finos (2012) proposed a customer centric service model that included performance metrics (emphasising the need for measurement of service delivery) in the context of the marketing logistics interface. In strategic terms, the argument is that it can be customer service that decides whether an order is won or lost (Christopher, 2016). If customer loyalty does exist, such loyalty could be overridden by availability of a good or service – or lack of it.

There is a need to create demand levels that can be handled within the logistics and supply chain capability, so that a joint effort to satisfy demand at the same time as minimising costs becomes part of demand optimisation levels that can be met profitably. It is perhaps understandable that functions within companies lead to factions, even within a function like logistics and supply chain management, with consequent friction or conflict, as with, for example, procurement and supply. The same could be said of marketing and sales. More broadly, there is a need for sales, marketing and operations integration that would require cooperation between marketing and operations management, not conflict. Part of the solution lies in strategic planning for logistics and supply chain management and marketing together and not in silos that would avoid myopic thinking and action. This involves changing attitudes with both academicians and practitioners as ‘change agents’ (Stock, 2002). Putting a strategic framework in place is not a simple process, this having been recognised for some time in terms of cooperation between and integration of business functions. For example, Murphy and Poist (1994) reported on the marketer perspective on the marketing and logistics interface and pointed to the need for marketers to recognise that the logistics function can add to competitive advantage if there is cooperation between logistics and marketing. To achieve cooperation, according to Murphy and Poist, three things are required; top management support, information sharing and a philosophy of cooperation. Such an approach is in opposition to the historical conflict and disagreement between the two functions. Stank, Daugherty and Ellinger (1999) suggest that the integration of marketing and logistics is essential for effective performance of the firm, interfunctional integration being linked directly to competitiveness and profitability. For these authors, integrative behaviours were found in the areas of informally working together, sharing ideas, sharing information and other resources and working together as a team. The suggestion by these authors is that the development of such behaviours will not be easy but might well lead to being able to conduct joint planning to resolve operational problems and achieve goals collectively. They also suggest that developing mutual understanding of responsibilities and making joint decisions about ways to improve cost efficiencies could improve as integration improves in the four stated areas.

Acknowledging that little was known about intrafirm behaviours and the positive effect collaborative marketing/logistics integration might have, Ellinger (2000) was interested in distribution service performance. Ellinger’s study suggests that there are performance benefits to be had by implementing an appropriate evaluation and rewards system that recognises teamwork and cooperation as significant catalysts. The implications for management include potentially improved customer service through mutual understanding of responsibilities, sharing ideas, information and resources and the resolution of operational problems through teamwork. Schramm-Klein and Morschett (2006) see effective coordination of the marketing and logistics functions as an important factor in retailing at both inter and intra organisational levels in terms of the firm’s performance. In this study logistics performance impacts on marketing performance in terms of satisfaction and loyalty. This suggests that logistics is much more than a fulfilment or cost-reduction activity but is of rather more strategic importance. This has implications for integration of the functions at a strategic level. If the organisation is to achieve cross-functional excellence there is a need for better business processes to be developed across the business functions so that a holistic view that will allow better supply chain solutions to be found in joint goals, planning and multi-functional success criteria (Lynch & Whicker, 2008).

Taking the notion of integration further, Juttner, Christopher and Godsell (2010) suggest that the management of four levels of integration is required: corporate; strategic customer; strategic supplier; and marketing and supply pipeline strategy. There is further qualification made by these authors as to what integration between the two functions means in terms of managerial implications. They suggest that the interaction of marketing and supply chain strategies is the important factor that infuses and energises action in three ways. First, there is a challenge to the traditional notion of the importance of the integration of the two functions per se, the interaction between strategies being of critical importance. Second, the interactive nature of and interplay between the two functions of marketing and logistics and supply chain management challenges the traditional view of the sequential nature of demand creation and fulfilment respectively. Third, linking the integration achieved to value creation appeals to corporate management, thereby elevating both functions’ capabilities.

In an example of process development, in terms of integration of marketing with supply chain management, Pero and Lamberti (2012) highlight the problems and potential counter-productivity of marketing-supply chain management integration. These authors look at new product development processes and conclude that there are a number of contingencies to consider, the supply chain management-marketing interface being variable in nature. The interface may be ‘pooled’, in which case the two functions remain distinct, or it may be integrated with “reciprocally-interdependent functions continuously exchanging information and knowledge, passing through situations in which one of the functions provides information to the other, hence interdependence is unidirectional” (Pero & Lamberti, 236). The choice of interface will depend upon contingencies that have an effect at the level of the firm such as intrafirm trust, absorptive capacity or market orientation. At the new product development project level, these could be phase or uncertainty. These authors observe that a third party such as R&D may manage the interface, integration may not be the best solution depending on the level of integration and that a possible hierarchy of impact of contingency variables on interdependence could happen in practice. More generally, there is a question over the idea of integration being ‘a must’ and that interface flexibility can be a relevant competence, especially in this case for new product development. The implications of this deeper approach with a focus on integration on the MLSCMI means changing previously held perceptions of both marketing and logistics and supply chain management.

The MLSCMI and smaller enterprises

The relationship between marketing and logistics and supply chain management is no less important in smaller enterprise contexts than in larger ones. While less attention has been paid to this relationship in the literature, there is clearly a need to address such issues in this context. There is no doubting the importance of SMEs/smaller enterprises to economies around the world in terms of economic development and employment. They are also possess dynamism, innovation and flexibility (Chin, Hamid, Rasli & Bahrun, 2012). In order to develop competitive advantage for their small business, owner-managers need to realise that an important factor in this endeavour is the logistics and supply chain management function and how this interfaces with the marketing function. Competition can be found in supply chain networks and not individual firms per se. The benefits of integration and cooperation (as discussed above) apply to small firms as well as large – perhaps even more so given that the complexity of markets, technologies and suppliers (Chin, Hamid, Rasli & Bahrun, 2012). The benefits to smaller firms of an effective supply chain include not just cost-reduction but also things such as increased customer service and communication, reduced risk, inventory and production lead times and increased flexibility.

The challenges that smaller enterprises face are mitigated to an extent by the nature and character of small enterprises that enable them to meet challenges and cope with change. There are many facets recognised in the literature that are attributed to small firms (including those of owner-managers and entrepreneurs) such as creativity, innovativeness, flexibility, agility, goal-orientation and speed of decision-making (for example Covin & Slevin, 1989). In a study of Merseyside (UK) SMEs, Meehan and Muir (2008) found that SMEs that centre on supply chain management improve their customer responsiveness and are able to exploit the benefits of new working relationships. Barriers to this were found to reside on the three levels of the individual (for example, lack of skilled personnel), relational (for example lack of power/power imbalance and trust) and organisational (for example competing initiatives). To overcome such barriers, multifaceted change is required.

Janczewska (2015) suggests that those SMEs seeking to become more competitive through the integration of marketing and logistics require the application of an innovative approach to strategy. For example, it has been argued that with many family-owned small firms in wholesaling, there is a lack of marketing skills and logistics infrastructure. This hampers marketing distribution systems. Logistics networks are also affected, whereby these players are more concerned with day-to-day issues such as credit collection and not so with performance. Company performance could be enhanced by marketing activities within supplier services to such players (Rawwas and Iyer, 2013). The choice of distribution channel is a key part of the decision-making of smaller enterprises. A study of distribution channel choices of new entrepreneurial ventures (Brettel, Engelen, Mueller and Schilke, 2011) found that channel decisions were not made in an erratic way. Rather, nine factors or drivers that influence choice were identified that represent a broad set of transaction cost (e.g. degree of volume uncertainty), product (e.g. cooperation through customisation), strategy (e.g. the management of customer retention) and competition-related (e.g. differentiation through service support) factors that potentially impact on performance.

Another dimension represented in the literature suggests that SMEs, when they are seeking to ‘go international’, become involved with outbound logistics. In this case, international marketing can benefit from the concept of ‘collaborative networked organisations’ (Jansson and Rarvonen, 2014). The concept has been used in traditional supply chain, inbound networks and business ecosystems and can inform the outbound logistics context. There is interest here in the activities of SMEs, expanding from local to international markets on limited financial and human resources. Market entry is an obvious first consideration followed by the question of how to build a distribution network, including identifying and securing collaborative partners. Small firms are increasingly engaging with international markets with great speed. Choice of markets and geographic scope are of crucial importance. This is where an international value chain approach can provide new depth and insights into small firm activities. A firm may change its value chain for different markets, in some cases opting to outsource activities and in effect de-internationalise or chose to exit markets, perhaps at the same speed at which they entered the market in the first place (Oyston, 2011).

### Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle

1. There is a subtle interaction between teaching and learning (Entwistle, 1984). The simulation of reality using real live problems in the classroom with a set of individuals as collective learners in problem solving can be the basis of the teaching and learning process. The use of such problems can help visualise and apply theoretical information (McGuigan and Weil, 2007). Kolb and Fry (1975) suggested that experiential learning means that experience is the source of learning and development. The Kolb Experiential Learning Cycle has been used and applied to many situations where it becomes the means to providing a framework for a student’s learning style. The Kolb cycle is displayed below:
2. Source: Kolb (1984). The Experiential Learning Cycle.
3. Pedagogically, there is a tension present when teaching practical aspects of entrepreneurship and small enterprise management because teaching and learning is delivered in the context of an academic degree. The basis of this learning is the transformation of experience whereby learning is seen as a process, not an end in itself or outcome and is driven from experience. Learning occurs through problem solving or conflict resolution and is an integrative, holistic view based as it is on interaction with the environment. This kind of learning creates knowledge.
4. The start of any such process is to present an issue/problem – the challenge. Each member of a small team has the opportunity to discuss and comment on the challenge with others in the team. This simulates concrete experience (learning event). After reflection and observation comes learning and conclusion drawing (theoretical base acquired for new or modified ideas) that is then applied to experience and developed into a group exercise with others. The next occurrence is constructed (active experimentation within the learning event). In the cycle, the concrete experience is returned to where insights are acquired and new knowledge can then be integrated into the individual’s practice. During the process, the team members can question and challenge views, perceptions, assumptions and understanding that others might hold and this is shared. After taking and trying such knowledge in the world, the results can be brought back to reflect again on what works or did not work and reasons why established. Through the process, there will be insight and new understanding, the generation of ideas and direction on action to take. This can then be carried forward to a new world or workspace.

Learning styles

The learning styles that follow the elements of the cycle are seen in terms of a continuum. Teams would ideally be made up of learners that cover the required styles across the whole of the process. However, students should learn from each stage of the Kolb process and should go through the whole of it but can join it at any stage. Learners therefore will either already have, or could develop, the necessary styles. If not then they could still contribute to part of the process.

Concrete experience (feeling) is linked directly to abstract conceptualisation (thinking) in terms of the learner’s perception. Reflective observation (observing) is linked directly to active experimentation (doing) in terms of processing. These are position on the Kolb cycle diagram as below:

1

4

3

2

The four styles are:

1. Diverging - learners observe rather than do. They can use imagination to solve problems from information gathered. They view concrete situations through ideas generation. They should be imaginative, emotive and receptive to team member opinions and working in a team in order to listen with an open mind. Personal feedback should be welcomed.
2. Assimilating - learners should be concise and logical, where ideas or concepts are the focus with a view to theory not practice leading to understanding. Learners prefer reading, lectures and thinking.
3. Converging - learners find solutions to problems and making decisions without interpersonal interaction, experiment with new ideas, use simulations and work with practical applications.
4. Accommodating - learners are hands-on whereby intuition not logic leads to the practical and experiential. They are attracted to new challenges and experiences, like to carry out plans and rely on others for analysis or information.

The small enterprise context - beyond Kolb

The reconceptualization of Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle has occurred over the years in many contexts. It has been recognized that this constructivist view of learning has been hugely influential in terms of individual development through reflection. There is interest, however, in environmental interaction in terms of multidimensional experience and the process that allows for experience to be infused with the learning environment and the topic that is being taught (Mughal & Zafar, 2011). While the basis of experiential learning is that a learner can manage learning by reflecting on experience and “thereby be in control of self-development….there are other aspects of experiential learning that remain unexpressed” (Vince, 1998, 306) in the Kolb model. The problem of power relations is not addressed since Kolb’s learning cycle is ‘apolitical’. It represents a reaction to rigid and directive attempts to generate and impart knowledge. It also misses the here and now immediacy of the social context – mirroring – able to take behaviour from the safety of the learning environment into workplace situations. Also, Kolb assumes people are open to experience and not defensive. However, people in groups are not always thoughtful and respectful of each other there being fear of conflict that is anxiety producing (Vince, 1998). Another view with some commonality is that of Fenwick (2001) who proposed four alternate conceptions to the constructivist view of learning that deal with aspects lacking in the Kolb cycle. The first, psychoanalytic, deals with inner thought processes relating to desires and resistance in the unconscious whereby the emotional experience of the learner produces both anxiety and desire. Self-motivation of the learner can help reduce anxiety therefore the here and now/immediate experience is important. The second, enactivist, deals with ecological systems, human action, organisations and culture. This links cognition with the environment and its varied meanings in the individual and collective contexts. Learning is affected when cognitive abilities are challenged. The third, situative, concerns the individual learner and their community of practice(s). The fourth, critical cultural, concerns power, inequality and social transformation. Knowledge is created through such power relations that impact on the learner’s ability and may be influenced by societal programming.

Two environments have been proposed based on these kinds of issues i.e. internal, for example the unconscious self, the here and now and external, for example power relations, unequal relations (Vince, 1998, Mughal & Zafar, 2011). A recent study on entrepreneurial learning, regenerative failure and attribution (Walsh and Cunningham, 2017) suggests that internal failure factors are affective while external factors are behavioural. An additional issue as proposed by Vince (1998) is that of metaprocesses and gaining insight through critical reflective thinking that is similar to that of Nisbet and Shucksmith (1984), concerned with a ‘seventh sense’ or ‘metacognition’ i.e. the learner’s awareness of his/her own mental processes through reflection on learning that can capture and retain experiences and strengthen memory. Tackling problems systematically provides a framework in which to work and take some control over learning.

In a study on learning styles in SMEs by Copley (2011), three aspects that deal with both the internal and external environment were proposed. First, there is a need for skills development to manage networks and learning in a dynamic external environment. The skills to manage social networks are innate but, depending upon the nature of the learner in terms of maturity, and ability and willingness to self-reflect, will develop as the learner develops (Deacons and Wyper (2006). The learner has to learn about the environment, networks and the nature and management of relationships, including learning from natural crises (Cope, 2005) but this can be too prescriptive over what is an adaptive and active process (Elliott and Macpherson, 2010). Critical incidents, the dynamic learning perspective of entrepreneurship, continued learning, the ways entrepreneurs learn in terms of skills acquisition, the negotiation of the management and growth of businesses are all more important aspects than are the characterises of entrepreneurs which is a rather static approach. Higher level learning can be achieved through critical learning events and the ‘school of hard knocks’ allowing for ‘thinker and doer’ learning if combined with lower level, routinized learning (Cope, 2005). This can happen naturally and might not be planned in terms of experiences that may not be expected, wanted or pleasant (Larsen, 2004). This may include primary and secondary experiences that can be equally as valid in learning experientially. Second, social learning as a component of experiential learning delivery is part of the social construction of knowledge (Clarke et al, 2006, Cope, 2005) key and is seen as such within the Kolb cycle whereby learners can learn from each other in a social process, including conflict resolution. This is in opposition to one way flows of information. The notion of community of practice cannot be ignored since social interaction is a critical component of scheduled (and unscheduled) learning but requires collaboration (Clarke et al, 2006) and co-participation (Taylor and Thorpe, 2004) that depends on socio-cultural/historical factors whereby reflecting, theorising, experiencing and action are viewed as different aspects of the same process, but not as steps in a process. (Deakins & Wyper, 2006). Seeing social learning in terms of creating cognitive social capital, Lee and Jones (2008) suggest that effective entrepreneurs are those who use networking to compensate for lack of financial and human capital. Since the entrepreneur is conditioned by the social background s/he is immersed in and is not a solitary creature, the enterprise is socially situated and entrepreneurship is socially enacted. Learning is one of many social outcomes (Korsgaard and Anderson, 2011). Similarly, Taylor and Thorpe’s (2004) social and conversational model of experiential learning sees learning as a negotiated process that challenges the view that the learner is an ‘intellectual Robinson Crusoe’. Reflection has a social character in a social context of networks and personal relationships where decisions are made and problems solved – hence the need to develop networking capabilities. Third, critical reflection and thinking critically are necessary to counter the over-emphasis on practice in marketing education programmes and the consequent narrow vocationalsim on business degree programmes. Horizons are not extended when vocational orientation in curriculum design is demanded or practiced by stakeholders (students, employers, lecturers, trainers). In the marketing field, most programmes are still designed with general, orthodox marketing in mind where the desire for functional and technical skills crowds out any critical perspective (Brennan, 2000) where there is an over-emphasis on practice and perceived lack of managerial relevance. For Burton (2005) there is a requirement for critical approaches and for rigour and relevance not rigour versus relevance. Thinking critically can reflect the real life working situations and create novel solutions (Brownlie, 1997) Critical reflection is at the heart of adult learning where meaning of experience guides subsequent understanding and action (Jones, 2009). This allows for experiences to be thought about in the wider social contexts but requires is a transformative approach to teaching and learning. The task is to incorporate critical reflection into the (marketing) curriculum, not just to add it on which would allow students to debate their experiences within larger social systems and studies (Catterall, Maclaran & Stevens, 1999).

**Approach and methodology**

1. The paper combines the practical and theoretical teaching approach taken to the managerial subject of the MLSCMI with a pedagogical approach to learning that brings into play experiential learning that is based on, but challenges, Kolb’s (1984) Learning Cycle. These approaches were used with a small cohort of students who elected to be on a module that deals with entrepreneurship and marketing planning (Entrepreneurship: Creativity, Marketing and Planning).
2. This combined approach was taken over several years. Each year between twelve and twenty final year business studies/administration students choose this module as an option in their diet of studies. All of these students take the University’s Graduate Enterprise module, a pan-university module designed to operate in a cross-faculty way, placing students into teams who then endeavor to start and run a small enterprise. The students on the marketing and entrepreneurship module were tasked in their assessed work to choose a small enterprise idea (this choice could involve a smaller business, smaller charitable organisations, smaller divisions of larger companies or specific functions within the public sector including, for example, local government, development agencies or universities). The focus for this paper is the most recent cohort of students that consisted of 17 in number. All students completed the marketing and entrepreneurship module successfully.

Social constructivist social enactment

The approach taken in the study is essentially social constructivist in nature where social enactment takes place. The tutors and students involved are conscious of relationships. They are constantly and routinely in the process of self-formation that is random rather than strategic. Emphasis is placed here on learner as sense-maker (active maker of meaning) in terms of thinking, reflection, interaction with the environment that is ever-present. The learner is stretched in terms of social engagement and interaction with others (after Lev Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development) in order to achieve cognitive development). This is linked to Kolb and making sense of concrete experiences, learning styles and the development of competencies. The view here is that entrepreneurship is socially constructed. It involves organic rather than mechanistic processes that are rich and ambiguous in nature. This study seeks insights following the idea that “concepts, methodology and outcomes of entrepreneurial research are linked to hidden and taken-for-granted views of reality, knowledge and ideology” (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2009, 34-35).

A socially constructed arena and social enactment

In taking the opportunity to create this study from inputs into a particular module, I effectively took a place at the table in the socially constructed arena (the workshops) with another tutor and the participants (the students). The role of the tutor is, therefore, seen in a social constructivist way. From social encounters and enactment meaning and understanding are part of learning that involves reflective activity. Taking a qualitative, subjective and social constructive approach allowed me to see a more rounded version of the students. In such a social arena, perceptions of MLSCMI phenomena involved the sharing of socio-cultural artefacts in terms of small enterprise creation and operation.

The Learning Cycle model produced in this paper is based on observations of the students at work and the results of the module’s assessment. This was a mutually supporting activity for the two tutors involved in a scenario created to deliver aspects of the MLSCMI in the entrepreneurship and small enterprise context. This educational delivery was practice beyond the subject group to which the module and one of the tutors belongs i.e. this was an exercise with a member of another subject group within the Department of Business and Management, Newcastle Business School. These workshops were delivered in an interactive ‘double act’ way. The two players interacted with each other as well as interacting with the students. The interaction between the two players was deliberately spontaneous and necessarily was unrehearsed. This was achievable because both players have a good deal of experience in practice, in different industries as well as much experience of teaching and training in higher education and industry. Therefore, the spontaneity achieved was active and fresh.

Workshop delivery

In the first of the two workshops, a first aim was to deliver two interactive and shorter than normal lectures – one from each of two co-presenters (respectively a marketer and a logistician). The first lecture (on distribution and the marketing/logistics interface) was followed by the second (on suppliers and distributors). A second aim of the second half of this workshop was to facilitate student participation via a small number of professional magazine articles on a variety of relevant, topical issues in distribution, logistics and supply chain. This activity included teamwork on analysis and involved a presentation on issues that enabled exploration on the MLSCMI in the context of entrepreneurship and small enterprises. The second workshop had the aim of providing the students with a practical exercise with specific tasks on the marketing/logistics interface that they could tackle in teams and present their findings. All of the activity involved critical incidents deliberately situated as learning episodes.

**A conceptual model of experiential learning for (student) small enterprise**

This paper has developed a conceptual model of the experiential learning process involved with the MLSCMI in student small enterprises. The paper builds on the literature that suggests an experiential learning, learning styles and development approach to learning is appropriate in the chosen context of this study. In particular, the model addresses skills and competency development and learning styles, social interaction and thinking critically in the chosen context.

Team members share and critically assess the material provided. Each member has the opportunity to discuss and comment on the challenge with others in the team

Accommodating learning style –the learner draws conclusions and integrates new knowledge into practice.

Insight and new development and diverging learning style understanding – generation of ideas on taking action - skills and competency

Insight and new understanding – generation of ideas on taking action based on what works and why - skills and competency development and converging learning style

Take new understanding/ideas to case study discussions

Skills and competency development and assimilating learning style

Social interaction and enactment along with critical reflection and thinking can be place at the various points of the model where indicated. This framework encourages learners to debate their experiences within a larger social system. Learning and influence are part of an ongoing negotiated process. This challenges the view that the learner learns in isolation whereby thinking has real social character. Networks are clearly important for, amongst other things, problem solving, knowledge development and transfer. Learning is therefore a process of co-participation, depends on socio-cultural and historical factors, and is part of a social constructivist and activity theory perspective and in this sense it is a departure from (or development of) the Kolb approach. It involves the social characteristics of entrepreneurial learning and development. Higher level learning can be achieved through critical learning events and the ‘school of hard knocks’ combined with lower level, routinised, adaptive learning. This provides both a ‘thinker and doer’ learning journey. In short, critical reflection can be added to Kolb’s model resulting in critically reflective practice moving marketing forward as a discipline within the enterprise.

**Conclusions**

This paper reports on an exercise that has been built into a marketing and entrepreneurship module that addresses the MLSCMI concept as taught with final year, full time, undergraduate business and management/business studies students. This is applied in the context of the smaller enterprise in which certain option students are involved. The paper seeks to show how the development of critical thinking can lead to knowledge transfer and understanding using critical incidents as effective learning episodes. The purpose of the paper is to provide illumination of the teaching and learning process with such students and to develop a conceptual model of this particular process with a view to testing it further.

The paper builds on the literature in both the subject (the MLSCMI) and pedagogical concerns. The results from this paper suggest that there are key challenges for teaching with the use of experiential learning even though some aspects have not changed in principle. The paper used basic observation and assessment outcomes to draw tentative conclusions about teaching and learning on the MLSCMI and the use of critical and social approaches to experiential learning. The results show that real-world outcomes is a specific area of business can be achieved and can be part of the learning outcomes of a module as part of an academic degree.

The experiential approach to teaching the MLSCMI for smaller enterprises necessarily incorporated theoretical issues from marketing, logistics and supply chain management and the MLSCMI. The key aim of this module is to provide critical leadership and management in this area of study rather than have passivity or passengers. The results of the paper underline the notion that learners that continue to express ideas from the past are not learning and that programmes of study need to go beyond providing learners with learning that keeps them proficient in the techniques of the past when they really need to project forward in order to embrace new challenges and opportunities.

In order to turn theory into practice and go beyond the ‘nuts and bolts’ of learning by facilitating thinking critically where higher order skills are required, the students were encouraged to challenge and imagine issues. Both formal and informal approaches were used in an integrated way to allow social aspects of learning as well as the use of critical incidents within an experiential learning cycle. Critical aspects are important to be able to grasp concepts and to get excited about learning, not just deal in the basics, and there is a need to avoid narrowness and dilution of subjects like marketing without becoming irrelevant to the business context. This study suggests that both the social character of learning and the ability to think critically have an impact on the learning styles required to be developed in the learner. Social enactment and the use of critical incidents in an experiential learning framework can be used together to bring about the successful delivery of higher order skills and competencies that are requirements within the entrepreneurship and small enterprise context.

**Implications and value**

1. The paper is of value to those involved with marketing (and logistics and supply chain management) and entrepreneurship/small enterprise education and training. It should also be of value to those involved with the running of small enterprises and in particular student small enterprises, whether this be the students as learners themselves or development/support entities or functions within relevant organisations. This paper underlines the importance of critical and social (collective) reflection to skills and competency development that is an essential part of learning to learn and metacognition. Used in conjunction with experiential learning techniques within an appropriate framework, this approach has potential for trainers/developers and their clients and for more mainstream academics who wish to understand and improve approaches to learning, training and development for the (student) smaller enterprise.

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