

2012-2013 Seminar Participants

"An examination of the role of narrative discourse in organizational behavior teaching"

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A common problem of teaching Organizational Behavior (a course I teach at Stonehill) is a failure to use an explicit method by which important concepts (e.g., satisfaction, turnover, transformational leadership) are interconnected as cause-and-effect models by students. In the vernacular of Díaz and Pace (2011), it is often possible to 'decode the discipline' by taking an assimilated and forgotten explicit approach and resurrecting it for the benefit of students. Unfortunately, causal modeling within Organizational Behavior doctoral programs is taught as a craft-like experience and there is no formal approach to causal modeling that awaits explication.

Against this backdrop, in the summer of 2011, I participated in a S.U.R.E. project that was focused upon developing the 'beginnings' of a formal methodology to develop, test, and use organizational behavior cause-and-effect models in the classroom. Drawing upon narrative theory, our narrative approach to organizational behavior equated stories (cause-and-effect events) in narrative theory with the cause-and-effect relationship between variables in organizational behavior (e.g., satisfaction --> turnover intention) and narrative discourse in narrative theory was related to the telling or use of organizational behavior models by students.

The narrative approach to organizational behavior was successfully integrated into my two sections of Organizational Behavior fall of 2011. For example, in a mid-semester assessment by Stacy Grooters, the majority of students rated several narrative pedagogical teaching approaches to be effective. Additionally, a paper based largely upon my new narrative approach to Organizational Behavior has been accepted for presentation at a national teaching conference at Virginia Tech University.

In addition to the benefits of narrative theory as evidenced by mid-term evaluations and acceptance of a paper at a national pedagogical conference, there remain several opportunities to further introduce narrative theory into Organizational Behavior. Specifically, in my classroom this fall (2011), I was very surprised that the majority of the students had difficulty with the narrative discourse of organizational behavior models. In other words, they intellectually understood what abstract organizational behavior variables were (e.g., job satisfaction) and how they interrelated to form causal models, but they struggled at identifying specific examples of narrative discourse that related these abstract variables to their lives and the lives of others, despite widespread agreement among my students that these variables were important to causal models.

Reflecting upon my aforementioned fall 2011 mid-semester evaluations, although the majority of students rated my narrative methods applied to Organizational Behavior as effective, a significant minority rated the methods as ineffective. I believe this bimodal distribution is related to my failure to

explicate in detail the role of narrative discourse-this level of detail was beyond the scope of my initial research integrating narrative theory and Organizational Behavior. Therefore, I seek to focus my involvement in the TLSS upon a detailed exploration of the role of narrative discourse in Organizational Behavior. In narrative theory, narrative discourse makes the story accessible to the reader (Chatman, 1978). In a similar respect, it is my belief that a narrative discourse approach toward organizational behavior models will make my class more accessible to students. For example, narrative discourse approaches such as authority through realistic details, use of quotations, points of view, character development are but a few promising avenues by which organizational behavior stories may be brought to life for students.

My TLSS inquiry would focus upon the creative nonfiction literature. Specific to my interests, creative nonfiction has focused upon using fiction techniques of narrative discourse to represent "real life" (inclusive of organizational behavior topics). Again, it is my hope that creative nonfiction (as well as other areas yet to be identified) will allow me to develop narrative discourse techniques to improve my organizational behavior course.

Proposed outcomes of my organizational behavior and narrative discourse TLSS project will include the following: First, using narrative discourse pedagogical techniques, my subsequent students will develop a deeper understanding of organizational behavior upon their lives. Second, I believe that narrative discourse will be important to improving the realism of case method approaches I use in my class. Separate from this proposal, summer 2011 I plan on attending a general case method workshop at the University of Washington. Fresh from my summer experience, I look forward to cross-pollinating narrative discourse with case teaching approaches during my TLSS project. Last, I would be amenable to leading a CTL teaching roundtable on narrative discourse in classroom pedagogy broadly defined (note: I have experience previously leading a CTL teaching roundtable) and a workshop for the business department.