

Study on the Practices of Seminar Teaching for the Promotion of the Participation of Graduate Student

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ABSTRACT

Graduate students are the critical human resource for firms to achieve development. Thus, how to teach them to promote their capabilities is of great significance. The seminar teaching is often used in the graduate training. While the effectiveness of seminar teaching depends on the students' participation. This paper aims to propose several suggestions to promote the participation of graduate student in seminar teaching. The proposed suggestions are based on five aspects, which includes the collective practices of seminar teaching, the reciprocal practices of seminar teaching, the supportive practices of seminar teaching, the cumulative practices of seminar teaching and the purposeful practices of seminar teaching. These practices offer a refreshing perspective for how to employ seminar teaching effectively.

Keywords: seminar teaching; students' participation; students' capabilities; graduate students

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, human resources are becoming more and more important in the firm development [1-2]. Graduate students are the critical human resources for firms to achieve development, and thus how to teach them to promote their capabilities is of great significance [3]. There are various ways which teaching can be implemented, such as lecture teaching, seminar teaching, exercise teaching and experiment teaching [4]. Each teaching way is a different approach for teachers to promote graduate students' capabilities. In these teaching ways, the seminar teaching is often used in the graduate training [5]. Seminar teaching is a kind of cooperative learning [6], which requires graduate students actively participate in to discuss a certain topic, for instance an academic problem or of a paper written by someone [7]. The content and the form of the seminar teaching may vary but the aim is to train the graduate students' critical thinking [8], and the graduate students' critical thinking is one of the main sources of graduate students' capabilities. Therefore, seminar teaching may have close relationship with development of the capabilities of graduate students. It is argued that the effectiveness of seminar teaching depends on the graduate students' participation [9]. Therefore, it is important to address the disengagement of graduate students in the seminar teaching. There are some research have investigated such issue from the perspective of cooperative learning [10-13]. However, few studies have systematically proposed practices of seminar teaching for the promotion of the participation of graduate student. Based on this understanding, this paper proposes several suggestions for

how to promote the participation of graduate student in seminar teaching.

After this introduction, the structure of this paper is arranged as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature of seminar teaching. Section 3 proposes several suggestions to promote the participation of graduate student in seminar teaching from five aspects, including the collective practices of seminar teaching, the reciprocal practices of seminar teaching, the supportive practices of seminar teaching, the cumulative practices of seminar teaching and the purposeful practices of seminar teaching. The final section contains the concluding remarks.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The seminar teaching is a kind of small-group teaching, in which students work in small groups to discuss the assigned questions and issues under the guidance of teachers [14]. The seminar teaching is different from traditional lecture teaching. The traditional lecture teaching is considered as a one-way transfer of knowledge because it is generally to produce compliance [15]. While the seminar teaching, on the other hand, is a kind of group-based teaching method. The seminar teaching lays emphases on multi-directional interaction, including the interaction between teacher and students and the interaction among students [16]. Such interactive approaches can make learning more visible both for teachers and students.

In the process of seminar teaching, students should preview the course content, search answers to questions and issues assigned before course, and share their answers with classmates during the course [17]. These preparations could help students improve their capability of information

collection [18], and the discussion could help students master the learning points more deeply [19]. There are several advantages of seminar teaching, such as it stresses the self-awareness, self-directedness and independence in the learning process, which are important characters for student growth [20]. The seminar teaching can also lead students to access to more underlying content of learning topic rather than simply remember it. However, the seminar teaching also has some disadvantages. For example, the seminar teaching has much work to do for students, and thus it may increase the learning burden and taking up too much spare time [21]. Although seminar teaching still has some disadvantages, the comprehensive meta-analysis has demonstrated that the group-based teaching method could lead to higher learning gains, suggesting that seminar teaching is still needed to put greater focus [22].

In order to achieve the intended goals and avoid the associated shortcomings in the meantime, the seminar teaching has to be organized appropriately. Reference [23] has described the essential features of dialogic talk, which can take place in group-based class. It proposed that the dialogic talk should be collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful. These essential features offer important hints about how to conduct the seminar teaching. Therefore, this paper develops the practices of seminar teaching for the promotion of the participation of graduate student from these five aspects.

3. THE PRACTICES OF SEMINAR TEACHING FOR the PROMOTION OF STUDENTS' CAPABILITY

3.1. The collective practices of seminar teaching

The collective practices of seminar teaching aim to help teachers and graduate students address the learning topic together. The learning topic is at the core of seminar teaching, which provides graduate students with the target what they will learn [24]. It has been argued that one of the most important reason that why seminar teaching has been regarded as a difficult teaching method is the difficulty of getting graduate students to prepare and the difficulty of getting graduate students to discuss the learning topic [25]. In order to overcome these difficulties, teacher and graduate students should address the learning topic together to make it clearer. There are several practices can be employed. For instance, the teachers should have expertise in the selected learning topic, and their expertise should be shared with students to guide them to prepare. It is also recommended that teachers should provide examples to clarify the learning topic if necessary. In addition, teachers can provide some clear standards and directions for graduate students to collect materials for the

purpose of stimulating them to participate in the discussion of the learning topic.

3.2. The reciprocal practices of seminar teaching

The reciprocal practices of seminar teaching aim to help graduate students share diverse ideas and consider alternative viewpoints. One of the most common problems of seminar teaching is the difficulty of getting graduate students to engage in discussions [26]. In order to solve such a difficulty, teachers should first ensure the graduate students involved in seminar all have a high motivation for discussion. Therefore, the graduate students involved in seminar teaching should be incorporated through careful selection. There are several criterions for teachers to select the graduate students involved in seminar teaching, such as graduate students should be interested in the learning topic and are willing to know more by collaborating with other graduate students.

After selecting the appropriate graduate students, they should know they are encouraged to discuss during the seminar teaching. For teachers, they are suggested to address graduate students by name because students are more attentive when they feel they are not anonymous [27]. Teachers can also develop an instruction manual for graduate students to help them know each other. In addition, teachers can use some incentives to stimulate graduate students to take part in. While for these passive graduate students, they should not be rewarded.

3.3. The supportive practices of seminar teaching

The supportive practices of seminar teaching aim to help graduate students express their ideas freely without the worry of "wrong" answers and support each other to form a common understanding. The supportive practices can be done from two aspects. For one thing, teacher should control the group size, which is helpful to build positive relationships among graduate students [28]. Generally speaking, the smaller group would mean there has more time on the same topic. Thus, there will be more teaching time for graduate students to know each other, which is important for developing an in-depth discussion.

On the other thing, teachers should also pay attention to create a non-threatening atmosphere within group. In such atmosphere, graduate students could feel safer, and thus they are more willing to participate in discussions. Then, graduate students are more able to understand each other. The non-threatening atmosphere can be created by giving graduate students more freedom in the classroom. For example, they can ask teacher questions and defend with teachers.

3.4. The cumulative practices of seminar teaching

The cumulative practices of seminar teaching aim to help teachers to make the seminar teaching to be more coherent. In the seminar teaching, teacher should ensure that the topic is in line with the aim of improving students' capabilities [29]. Therefore, in the early stages of selecting the topic, teacher should develop a clear connection between seminar topic and teaching goals. Then, at the start of a seminar, the teaching goals should be explained to the graduate students and at the end of a seminar, the teaching goals should be checked for completion or not. It should be noticed that the teaching goals should increase in difficulty with the development of course.

At the same time, the seminar teaching can be optimized if teachers could organize several seminars for one topic or organize sequential seminars for one course. That would enable teachers to show students how different topics and different course contents are connected, which is beneficial for graduate students to generate consistent lines of thinking. In order to do so, the curriculum mapping can be used, in which teachers and graduate students can easily observe the connections among different seminars

3.5. The purposeful practices of seminar teaching

The purposeful practices of seminar teaching aim to help teachers organize seminar teaching with teaching goals in mind. The seminar teaching has several goals, and one of the important goals is to develop graduate students' critical thinking. Other goals of seminar teaching can be developing the capability of dealing with problem-solving and presentation skills. For the purpose of achieving these goals, teachers should place particular attentions to the amount and quality of seminar questions [30]. The proposed seminar questions should be relevant to the goals, which are challenging and clear. There are two criteria can be used for teachers to find appropriate seminar questions. Firstly, the proposed seminar questions should have no single correct answer. Secondly, the challenge produced by the seminar questions should require graduate students to go beyond their current knowledge domain, but it should also not be so large or so broad that there is little chance for graduate students to accomplish it.

In the meantime, teachers should help graduate students develop a deeper understanding about the seminar questions so that students can apply the knowledge they had learned in reality. To this end, teachers should guide graduate students to participate in discussion actively. Through the intense discussions, graduate students are given different opinions about the same questions, and then they can integrate to form a complete solution. In this case, graduate students can learn from trying to recognize the possible weaknesses in their own thinking.

4. CONCLUSION

The seminar teaching is effective teaching method, which offers graduate students opportunities to present their ideas toward to the learning topics, to learn how to solve problems from each other, and to reflect themselves. The seminar teaching requires graduate students to actively involve in the discussion whereby graduate students develop their critical thinking. Therefore, it is important to know how to promote the participation of graduate student in seminar teaching. This paper provides several suggestions from five aspects, including the collective practices of seminar teaching, the reciprocal practices of seminar teaching, the supportive practices of seminar teaching, the cumulative practices of seminar teaching and the purposeful practices of seminar teaching.

Although this paper draws some important points regarding how to promote the participation of graduate student in seminar teaching, it also has some limitations need to be extended. Firstly, the practices provided by this paper should be tested by empirical research, such as questionnaire survey or case study, in order to investigate the effect or the mechanism. Secondly, this paper only focuses on seminar teaching itself, and does not take external environmental factors into consideration. But the proposed seminar teaching practices can be affected by the external environment. Future research is needed to advance in optimizing the seminar teaching practices from external perspective.

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