



Marketing Education Digest

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I. Welcome

Welcome to the first edition of the **HEA Marketing Education Digest**. Our purpose is to keep you informed of work we are doing to support teaching and learning in Marketing while also stimulating debate and discussion about key themes, ideas, and issues affecting your work and pedagogical research. Each issue will include a main article or 'think piece' and we are fortunate to have Dr Ross Brennan as our main author for the next few issues. You will also find a list of upcoming HEA events of interest, current work being undertaken by the HEA for marketing educators, interviews with marketing lecturers, as well as recent publications of note and a review or two. We want the publication to be of interest to you so welcome your feedback, suggestions and input.

2. Monthly Article

Educating marketing professionals?

-by Ross Brennan

Keywords: student-customer, Bernard Cova, co-creation of value, professional education, vocational education.

The renowned consumer behaviour expert [Bernard Cova](#) (of Euromed, Marseilles and the Bocconi School in Milan) visited the UK during March. I was fortunate enough to attend his fascinating presentation at the University of Hertfordshire on the action research that he undertook with [Alfa Romeo](#) on the topic of value co-creation. This involved recruiting thousands of Alfa enthusiasts (known as Alfisti) from around Europe, and then organizing an event at which senior representatives from the company interacted with the enthusiasts to reflect on the future of the company, its designs and its product lines. The purpose? To engage these 'expert customers' in the process of enhancing the products and increasing brand equity.

After all, in many cases the Alfa enthusiasts are more knowledgeable about the brand than the professionals. Alfa were persuaded that it was worth spending some fairly serious time and money to engage in an organised 'value co-creation event', to try to extract some of this invaluable customer expertise and put it to work for the company. Bernard explained that although the event was judged a success, it is doubtful that Alfa will repeat it soon, since a sense emerged that they had got just a little bit too close to their customers for comfort. There is, perhaps, a limit to how much gritty customer reality the average manager, or marketer, can endure. Even when you are selling something as desirable as an Alfa Romeo.

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Commentators with no discernible knowledge of marketing get away with presenting simple-minded definitions of “customer”

Cova’s presentation, based on a substantial programme of research which was clearly considered highly relevant by the industry partners, was very *educational*. At the end of the session I had a far better understanding of what the process of co-creation of value means; in fact, I think I had a subtly altered understanding of what the terms “customer” and “marketing” can mean. The session exemplified, for me, an important aspect of what marketing education should be about. There was engagement with some fairly subtle theoretical ideas (service-dominant logic, co-creation of value, the sociology of work), it incorporated important practical concerns (how should Alfa Romeo develop their brand?), and it resulted in changed and enhanced conceptual thinking—let’s call that learning—in at least one member of the audience (me).

Different people will no doubt respond differently to this anecdote. Maybe this is what happens in all of your marketing classes every day, in which case I envy your students. Maybe this is an ideal to be striven for, but it cannot be achieved because of various constraints (suggest your own favourites, perhaps class sizes, student prior learning, mixed-ability classes, excessive teaching loads will figure here). Perhaps, like me, you doubt whether you have the same charisma (or charming French/Italian accent) as Cova, and so doubt your ability to engage an audience so completely. All these, and others, are expected and reasonable responses. However, what about another possible response to the anecdote? This is the response that says that economic times are tough, students are customers, the customers want knowledge and skills that will give them an advantage in the job market, they cannot see how the described kind of learning will facilitate this (“a subtly altered understanding of what ‘customer’ means” – how is that going to put bread on the table?), so we should not even be trying to teach this way. Is this stereotype of the student-customer so far-fetched that we can dismiss this kind of thinking out of hand? I don’t think so.

Here is an example from an article by Philip Davies in the [Times Higher](#):

- **student**, *n.* someone who had to apply themselves to study in order to learn. Now obsolete (see student customer).
- **student customer**, *n.* one who, without doing anything else, can get what they want by paying an appropriate fee.”

This is an amusing article, and one assumes that Davies intended irony, but the irony would have no bite if this way of thinking seemed entirely outlandish.

What is particularly galling, in the student-as-customer debate, is that commentators with no discernible knowledge of marketing get away with presenting simple-minded definitions of “customer” and of the relationship between the supplier and the customer as though they were state-of-the-art. It is as though the development of marketing thinking had failed to advance since [P. T. Barnum](#) (1810-1891). Such ignorance, if writing about many other fields, would be considered laughable. But my impression is that, for some reason, marketing

scholars are less inclined to defend their conceptual domains against the abuses of journalistic commentators than scholars in most other fields.

By contrast, these days the public debate on a number of fairly sophisticated economic concepts is generally conducted at a fairly high level: terms such as public-sector debt, GDP and even quantitative easing seem to be used at least reasonably accurately. But when it comes to the term “customer” and the relationship between buyers and sellers, it seems that something like Davies’ definition is usually intended: the elementary, anonymous exchange of money for a good or service. It’s as though decades of research in the fields of relationship marketing, services marketing and consumer behaviour had never happened.

What concerns me is that if we were to adopt a simple-minded definition of the student-customer, and then respond straightforwardly to what this student-customer wants, then the likely outcome would be a marketing curriculum lacking engagement with underlying social scientific principles and concentrating on the latest glitzy communications techniques (such as Facebook and Twitter). At the extreme, this would mean marketing “education” reduced to the process of showing students where to point and click in whatever happen to be the most fashionable Web 2.0 applications. This would be vocationalism, pure and simple.

All of this put me in mind of what I would describe as one of the recent classics of the marketing education literature: “A Professional School Approach to Marketing Education”, by John Schibrowsky, James Peltier, and Thomas Boyt ([Journal of Marketing Education, 24\[1\]: 43-55](#)). Published ten years ago now, the article delineates a spectrum of approaches to marketing education anchored by the liberal arts model at one extreme and the vocational school model at the other. In the liberal arts model students are taught *about* marketing with a strong theoretical focus and an emphasis on analytical techniques; in the vocational education model students are taught specific skills to complete specific tasks and perform specific jobs. Schibrowsky and colleagues advocate neither of the extreme approaches, preferring the middle way of the “professional education model”. They suggest that this implies a curriculum focusing on theory *and* practice, on strategic thinking, human skills, leadership and teamwork, and on synthesising information to deal with complex issues requiring informed judgment. My own preference remains for this professional education model.

Marketing educators have a far better understanding of the subtleties of customer relationships than most people. They appreciate that one version of this relationship—an anonymous and once-off transaction where a good or service is exchanged for money—is extreme and very unusual. They know that in high-involvement service industries concerned with the delivery of complex, multi-faceted products that cannot be simplistically pre-specified and which necessitate an involved, enduring and evolving supplier-customer relationship, the anonymous transaction notion of a customer relationship is manifestly counter-productive. They are, therefore, uniquely placed to correct misapprehensions among the general public about naive definitions of “customer”, and



to resist pressure from poorly-informed managers about how to understand and respond to student-customer requirements in higher education.

Dr Ross Brennan is a Reader at the University of Hertfordshire and has published extensively on teaching and learning issues in Marketing. His marketing textbooks include Cases in Marketing Management, Business-to-Business Marketing and Contemporary Issues in Strategic Marketing. He has also co-authored the European edition of Philip Kotler and Gary Armstrong's Marketing an Introduction, the second edition of which will be available this summer. Ross has also produced over 50 articles on themes in Business-to-Business Marketing, Strategic Marketing, and Marketing Communications, among others.

3. References to Articles on the 'Student as Customer' debate

The Student as Customer debate is now well into its second decade. Most articles in academic journals are highly critical of this viewpoint. Some of the key articles are listed below.

Brennan, L. & Bennington, L. (2000) "Concepts in conflict: Students as customers – An Australian perspective", *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* 9(2): 19-40.

Clayson, D. & Haley, D.A. (2005) "Marketing models in Education: Students as customers, products or partners" *Marketing Education Review*, 15(1): 2-11.

Eagle, L. & Brennan, R. (2007) "Are students customers? TQM and Marketing perspectives", *Quality Assurance in Education* 15(1): 44-80.

Emery, C., Kramer, T. & Tian, R. (2001) "Customers vs. Products: Adopting an effective approach to business students", *Quality Assurance in Education*, 9(2): 110-115.

Lomas, L. (2007) Are students customers? Perceptions of Academic Staff", *Quality in Higher Education*, 13(1): 31-34.

Obermiller, C., Fleenor, P. & Raven, P. (2005) Students as customers or products: Perceptions of faculty and students, *Marketing Education Review*, 15(2): 27-36.

Stafford, T.F. (1994) "Consumption values and the choice of Marketing electives: Treating students like customers", *Journal of Marketing Education*, 16: 26-33.

Svennson, G. & Wood, G. (2007) "Are University students really customers? When illusion may lead to delusion for all!", *International Journal of Educational Management*, 21(1): 17-28.

For an interesting debate on the issue of Student as Customer, please see the three articles published in *The International Journal of Management Education*, 9(3), August 2011:

<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/IJME/vol9/vol9no3>

Please contact [Lynn Vos](#) for more information or to book on events. Or you can visit www.heacademy.ac.uk/events for information, to book, or for other events of interest.

4. Publications of Interest

From the HEA

- I. [Pedagogy for employability](#)
This guide, produced by the HEA, constitutes a revised and updated version of the Pedagogy for Employability publication first published in 2006. This publication has been updated with the practitioner in mind and includes both guidelines and case studies of good practice.
- II. [International student lifecycle resources bank](#)
This publication looks at the ways that lecturers can improve the quality of teaching and learning for international students. The lifecycle resources bank provides ideas and guidance for each stage of the international student's journey, from induction, through classroom teaching and learning experiences, to building relationships
- III. [Enhancing the learning experience of students in higher education: Key findings from the National Student Survey \(2008-2010\) for University Business Schools](#)
Initially commissioned by BMAF, this excellent publication by Dr Aftab Dean provides some interesting findings on what really contributes to student satisfaction

Other Publications

- I. [Wilson Report – A Review of business-university collaboration](#)
The Wilson Report makes a range of recommendations teaching that goes beyond 'large company' contexts and staff placements in industry
- II. [Enterprise and entrepreneurship education – Guidelines for UK higher education providers \(February 2012\)- QAA](#)

5. Upcoming Events in May

WORKSHOPS (all free of charge)

May 1 Using Markstrat and Simventure Simulations in Marketing – Southampton Solent

May 2 The role of assessment feedback in the student experience - Canterbury Christchurch University

May 4 London 2012: Sport in Business & Marketing Education – Middlesex University

May 4 Implementing large scale changes to assessment and feedback – University of Leeds

May 9 Implementing current feedback research to improve practice – University of Staffordshire

May 10 HEA/QAA External examiners conference – New policies and practice – Birmingham

May 10 Enhancing institutional employment strategies -HEA York

May 10 Supporting international students – University of Derby

May 17 Students as enquirers – University of Hertfordshire

May 18 Learning and teaching conference – Goldsmiths

May 21 Assessment and feedback in the digital age – University College London

May 24 – New to teaching workshop - Newcastle

CONFERENCES

May 28-29 Social Sciences Cluster Conference – Ways of knowing, ways of learning

6. Teaching Corner



Interview: “Experiencing the world of work when placements and internships are not an option”

Sukhbinder Barn, senior lecturer in Marketing at Middlesex University is a champion of experiential and action learning approaches. For the past decade he has been running two 8 day **residential** programmes per year for students on Master’s programmes in Marketing.

What is the post-graduate marketing residential and how did you get started?

The impetus for the residential came from the need to provide students with some real world marketing experiences in what is a very short and intensive programme of study (the Master’s programmes are now taught in one year, including the dissertation). Various constraints meant that it was not practical to provide internships or work experience opportunities for students, so in order to give them an exposure to real-world marketing issues, we developed the week long intensive residential where students visit and engage with practitioners at up to 9 different organisations in a regional city sufficiently distant from London and the University campus.

The residential has been running since 2002 and now takes place twice a year for students on all three of our post-graduate Marketing-related masters (approximately 120 students in total). We continue to get excellent feedback from the students on the benefits of the residential, so we hope to continue running it for years to come.

Why do you choose to go to other cities in the UK for the residential?

Locating the residential programme in a UK provincial city was both an academically and pragmatically influenced decision. We felt that due to the high number of international students on our programmes, the residential would need to take place in the UK because of the risk factors associated with international travel and problems of arranging visas. We also felt that UK provincial cities offered significant potential for learning about marketing. Many of the cities where the residential has taken place (Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester, Edinburgh and Newcastle) offer wonderful opportunities for students to understand the significance of regeneration and the development of business and tourism offerings- all of which are also important in the students’ home countries.

What happens during the residential?

Generally we take the train to our destination city on a Saturday morning, check into the hotel and then get started with a visit to a key tourist destination where

the marketing manager or a key individual will make a presentation. After the presentation – in fact, after all presentations - we have a debriefing and discussion session. During the week, students will be up by 8:30 and are required to dress professionally for the two or three presentations, discussions with managers and follow-up group discussions during the day. In many cases, the students will go on to visit the site after the presentation and are encouraged to gather as much information as possible so they can be prepared for upcoming assessments.

As an example, during our trip to Edinburgh, students had presentations from the CEO of Marketing Edinburgh, the Director of the Scottish Storytelling Centre, the Corporate Affairs Manager for Event Scotland, the marketing manager of Leigh Docks, and the Head of Communications and Visitor Services at the Royal Botanical Gardens, among others.

With the early daily start and the full schedule, we are seeking to replicate a “working week” for the most part. However, we also build in some free time and activities that allow the students to bond and make friends. This helps them to improve their working, academic and social relationships for the rest of their time on the programme. One key activity is the evening meal – we arrange it so that each night students experience a different international cuisine that is representative of some of the heritage of some of their current classmates.

How does the residential fit into the student’s overall programme?

In order for students to get the most out of the residential experience and in order to assess their learning from the week-long event, we link it directly with the learning outcomes and assessment of two taught modules on the Master’s programmes – Strategic Marketing Management (MKT 4001) and Managing and Marketing Events (MKT 4004). Up to 30% of the assessment in each module is based on linking theory with aspects of the presentations and students experiences on the residential

So, we can say that the Residential acts to link the modules on the programme together and to give the overall programme a “real-world” element. We are also developing students’ graduate and employability skills.

Are there challenges associated with running such a large event and how have you overcome them?

Planning for the event can be quite time consuming and if you cannot go to the destination beforehand to meet with prospective speakers and check out the facilities you may be in for some unpleasant surprises. We used to do it all ourselves, but now we use an event organiser – Paul Mullins from Destination Learning - to arrange the accommodation, meals, and the speakers. We have been working with Paul for a number of years and he checks out everything beforehand and arranges all the presentations and activities based on a brief that

we discuss with him. The brief includes a theme for the residential. Given the destination city, our theme might be “sporting and tourism” or “arts, culture and heritage”, for example. He then identifies key organisations/businesses who are marketing those events or services, and arranges for one of their marketing managers or other key personnel to speak to the students on their strategy as well as marketing challenges they face.

In the past we also had trouble ensuring that we met the meal requirements of students from different cultures, so now we make sure that there is at least a vegetarian option at every restaurant, and also try to cover the various cultural groups through a different cuisine each night.

Also, we found that the best way to ensure full attendance is to build the residential fee into the cost of tuition of the programme. For seven nights and eight days of meals, events, accommodation and travel, the cost is around £1000 per student. We are careful to market the benefits of the residential to prospective students, so all students who come to Middlesex for a post graduate marketing programme know what they are signing up for and see it as a unique and differentiating factor between our and other University programmes

How do the students respond to the residential?

The feedback is overwhelmingly positive. For example, from our most recent residential to Edinburgh, here are some comments from the student’s video logs:

-it was great to see how marketing was used in different ways and be able (sic) to connect this to what we learn in the classroom. Suddenly some things make sense and it is amazing how much I learned in just one week.

-I really enjoyed getting the opportunity to get to know my classmates on a very personal level and this has made group work so much more fun

-the residential gave me a real life experience of how marketing works in practice

-the residential was great for Blending theoretical know-how to practical, making friends, discussions with faculty, seeing a new country, team work, and acquiring more knowledge

The most evident benefit is in the students working relationships – after the residential they are much more positive about group work and we see a real bond between them. However, because the video logs are part of their assessment, we are mindful that students may be giving only the positive side of their experience, so this year we are doing some additional research to determine whether some students are benefiting more from experiential learning than others and if so, what accounts for these differences. We will be giving a presentation on our findings at the upcoming [HEA Social Sciences Cluster Conference](#) in Liverpool at the end of May.

If you would like to know more about the Middlesex Residential or how to go about setting one up, please contact Sukhbinder at s.barn@mdx.ac.uk

7. HEA Marketing Workshop Series

The HEA offers funding to Marketing departments that would like to hold a workshop or seminar to share ideas and good practice. Last month, Dr Heather Skinner and colleagues at the University of Glamorgan shared the work they are doing to build enterprising and entrepreneurial marketing graduates.

The Land of Make Believe: Creating the Enterprising Marketing Graduate with Distinctive Skills and Attributes (University of Glamorgan, April 19, 2012)



The marketing subject group at Glamorgan Business School hosted a Higher Education Academy workshop yesterday about 'The Land of Make Believe: Creating the Enterprising Marketing Graduate with Distinctive Skills and Attributes'. Speakers included Dr Heather Skinner, National Teaching Fellow and leader of the subject group, Dr Paul Jones, Reader in Enterprise and Business Development and Henry Enos, GlamGift Champion for the Faculty of Business and Society. Delegates from a range of HEIs attended this event that presented a number of evidence-based approaches employed across the Business School and university towards fostering entrepreneurial skills in our marketing students. Delegates also heard about the University's Ideas Factory and Experience Works initiatives, and met students from the Glamorgan Marketing Chapter and colleagues from the Centre for Enterprise, including Christine Atkinson, Head of Women's Entrepreneurship Hub, who presented a poster on the activities of the Networking Entrepreneurial Women initiative NEW@GLAM. In the participatory session of the event, delegates explored the challenges of embedding entrepreneurial skills in the curriculum and fostering entrepreneurial behaviour towards discovering what makes distinctive entrepreneurial marketing graduates.

‘Encouraging enterprising student behaviour’ is part of the mission of Glamorgan Business School and all students on business and marketing programmes take part in one or more initiatives that develop not only their employability skills but also their abilities to set up and run a business.

Dr Paul Jones, Deputy Head of Glamorgan Business School and Reader in Business and Enterprise told participants that entrepreneurship is particularly important in Wales where over 99.8% of businesses are SME’s.

‘We have more SME’s than any other part of the UK but, unfortunately, many of those businesses fail to grow or fail altogether – in fact, 1 in 3 fails within 3 years. So not only do we need to provide our students with more options for employment in a world where jobs are hard to get, we need to develop skills in how to make businesses grow and thrive’

All first year students take an enterprise module that gets them thinking about what it means to be enterprising and what skills they need to run a business. In addition, up to 95% of all business students take part in a Glamorgan-specific initiative that gives them hands on experience of setting up and running a money generating project. For example, in their second year, students take part in the ‘Making an Impact’ competition. They work in small groups to come up with a product concept, develop a brand name, create the promotional materials and run the business over one or two weeks. To make the concept more real, each student is given a nominal amount of money (£10 per head) and is expected to increase that amount while also covering all costs associated with the venture. Teams are provided with a business mentor from among the staff and prizes are awarded for the most effective venture.

Other initiatives include GlamGift, Experience Works Week, The Ideas Factory, the Ignite Project, and the Student Marketing Chapter. Glamgift is run by Henry Enos, Senior lecturer in Marketing and programme leader for MSc International Fashion Marketing and MSc Public Relations. The initiative is about students and staff undertaking charitable works and volunteering activities. Students develop a range of skills from these activities which also provide them with an understanding of social entrepreneurship. Since Glamgift has been running, the University has raised over £28,000 for both local and international charities. Students have contributed a library and two rescue boats to an Oxfam supported school in Africa, have raised over £1700 for a local girl in need of a life changing operation, and have made significant contributions to Breast Cancer Care, the Terrence Higgins Trust, The Marie Curie Cancer Care and MacMillan Cancer Support, among others.



Dr Skinner noted that creating not just enterprising students, but an enterprising University requires a core curriculum where enterprise education is embedded in core modules on all programmes; University staff from across the spectrum act as enablers and supporters of the initiatives; faculty members engage in enterprise and entrepreneurship research; local businesses and the local community are invited to participate; and resource support is provided by University management.

Glamorgan University has indeed put many support mechanisms in place. All kinds of templates for creating tickets, newsletters, and promotional material are available on Blackboard, a photographer is available to take photos at events, and the online event promotion tool Event Bright is used to publicise events to students and social media sites. Social media is also a big part of the success of the events – each event has its own Facebook page and all events are sent out via the University twitter feed.

Dr Skinner gave some guidelines for building student engagement with the enterprise initiatives:

- Ensure that each initiative is built into the assessment on one or more modules in the students programme;
- Reward involvement with certificates of participation and awards for performance that students can add to their c.v.'s and discuss in interviews;
- Bring in lots of interesting and successful entrepreneurs as guest speakers and as mentors where possible to show students the possibilities and the rewards of running your own business;
- Get as much publicity for each event as possible so students can see the interest their projects are generating; and
- Have students continually reflect on what they have learned, the skills they have developed and how far they have come.

In addition, Dr Skinner and her colleagues gave some top tips:

- At most Universities all kinds of small charitable projects are going on all the time with both staff and students involved in trying to raise money for

charities they are involved with. Use these as a starting point for setting up enterprising activities and initiatives.

- Students can get very excited about what they have learned and the new possibilities for employment opened to them, so capture this excitement and energy by setting up an “Ideas Factory”. Glamorgan students who have really enjoyed the entrepreneurial experiences and want to do more, act as mentors to others students who come to them with ideas they want to discuss or who need some support in building their confidence to take an idea forward. The Glamorgan ‘Ideas Factory’ has dedicated space in the Students Union Building, is opened daily, and is staffed by the student mentors.
- Money earned through the initiatives can be used to bring in guest speakers from farther afield.
- Students use their Facebook and Linked In sites to promote their event at the University and these social media links can act as a means to stay in touch with students well into the future for alumni purposes and for tracking employment.

Clearly all students have an opportunity to benefit from the initiatives on offer, but Dr Paul Jones noted the characteristics of marketing students that make them particularly well placed to gain from the activities:

“ Entrepreneurial activity is a smaller leap of faith for marketing students...they tend to be creative and ideas focussed.”

If you would like to run a workshop or seminar on a teaching and learning project that you have been working on, please contact [Lynn Vos](#) or go to <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/funding#seminars>

8. HEA Projects for Marketing

A number of projects are in development that will provide ideas and guidance for marketing academics in managing some of the key challenges that we all face. We also hope they will stimulate thinking and discussion and act as catalysts for new ideas and further development. The outcomes of these projects will be made available by September 2012 or earlier.

I. Research report and best practice guideline document on **curriculum design and development in Marketing.**

Whether a review or a validation, the processes involved in curriculum development offer significant opportunities to update the teaching, learning and assessment methods used in the programme(s); enhance the graduate and employability skills development potential; update the content of individual modules based on current research; talk to students and alumni about their experiences, satisfaction and career outcomes; engage with external bodies and enhance the learning outcomes for all students. **June Dennis** (University of Wolverhampton) who is undertaking the project, is investigating current practice in Marketing programme review and validation processes in the UK, with the aim of identifying good practice that can be shared across the sector. She is also developing a guideline document to help marketing department teams plan, organise, and undertake curriculum development and/or redesign systematically and effectively.

II. Report and best practice guideline document on **Managing, supervising and assessing postgraduate Marketing dissertations**

Dr Kate Armstrong (University of Greenwich) is investigating the challenges facing postgraduate marketing dissertation supervisors and their students in the UK as well as examples of good practice in managing, supervising and assessing dissertations. Her research will be used to develop a guideline document to help both new and seasoned supervisors prepare students for the dissertation process, set expectations and marking criteria, and supervise and manage what is often a growing number of students per supervisor. She is also developing a set of useful resources to help both supervisors and students.

III. Publication: **Enhancing education for sustainable development (ESD)**

Patsy Kemp, who written and edited a number of publications for BMAF is editing a work on ESD with case studies of ideas and good practice for use by educators across the range of business disciplines.

IV. Guideline document on **Enhancing the experiences and outcomes of international students on final year projects and dissertations**

Our international students often struggle with undertaking the research for and writing major projects in Marketing. Evidence shows that they tend to achieve at least one grade point lower on this work than home students. We felt that a more focussed project was needed to investigate the specific challenges faced by international students in particular on these major written projects.

Professor Yin Fan (University of Northampton) is investigating the range of issues faced by international students during this process. His research will provide the foundations for a guideline document that he will prepare to help project and dissertation supervisors identify and manage these challenges so as to improve international students' experiences and outcomes.

V. Five year review of key themes and outcomes in pedagogical research in Marketing

Dr Ross Brennan is undertaking a major review of pedagogical research in marketing over the past five years, both within and outside the UK. He will investigate and report on key research themes, evolving methodological approaches, as well as major projects, events, and findings. His report will provide both new and published researchers with insights into how the field is developing, ideas for future research and an overview of which projects have had the greatest impacts.

9. Review

Coffield, F., Mosely, D., Hall, E. & Ecclestone, K. (2004). *Learning styles and pedagogy in post-16 learning: A systematic review*, London: Learning and Skills Research Centre.



Learning styles research continues to be popular in marketing pedagogical studies. In a review of one well-known educational journal (*The Journal of Marketing Education*), over 100 articles published in the past 10 years have investigated learning styles models and their role in marketing teaching and learning.

Perhaps if some researchers had read the 2004, 182 page review of the learning styles literature by Coffield, Mosely, Hall and Ecclestone, they may have paused for thought.

The authors of “Learning styles and Pedagogy in post-16 learning” investigated 71 learning models before undertaking a comprehensive critical review of 13 of the most influential, including Kolb’s Learning Style Inventory, the Myers-Brigg Type Indicator, the Dunn and Dunn model, and Honey and Mumford’s Learning Styles Questionnaire in order to assess authors’ claims for reliability and validity, and the claims made for their pedagogical implications. They conclude that “there are real dangers in commending detailed strategies to practitioners, because the theories and instruments are not equally useful and because there is no consensus about the recommendations for practice. There is a need to be highly selective” (pg. 127)

After providing a detailed description of each of the 13 learning style approaches or models, the study investigates both the creator’s claims about the value of their approach and studies of reliability and validity undertaken by others. Their purpose is to point out any claims that cannot be supported about the potential

for many approaches to improve the learning outcomes for students or to enhance their engagement with learning.

The authors of this study are not immune from a measure of acerbity in their analysis. In describing the conclusion that one learning styles creator made about his own field of research, the authors point out an incongruity:

Sternberg concluded (2001, 250) as follows: ‘The result is a kind of balkanisation of research groups, and balkanisation has always led to division and, arguably, death by a thousand cuts’. It is also arguable that Sternberg has himself contributed to such balkanisation and that the answer to his own question – do we need another theory of learning styles? – is probably best answered in the negative.” (pg. 116)

In addition to pointing out the weaknesses and, in some cases the value of different learning styles approaches, Coffield et al, provide readers with a better understanding of the wide spectrum of theoretical and practical positions that makes up this field of research. They identify five main ‘families’ or schools of thought within the research, ranging from those that claim that learning styles are quite fixed in the individual (e.g.: Dunn & Dunn), to those that can better be described as learning approaches, strategies, orientations or conceptions of learning (e.g.: Biggs) (see Figure 4, page 10). Great variation exists amongst these schools of thought not only in terms of their purpose (some are mainly theoretical and others purely commercial) but also in terms of their views on how students learn and how the research should be applied in the classroom.

The idea that students have different learning styles or different approaches to learning is compelling to teachers and researchers. We are all seeking to understand the clearly multi-faceted nature of learning and learning styles research does offer a window into this complex and often inscrutable process. What more recent studies from cognitive psychology have shown is that people do indeed have a preference for learning in a particular way (e.g.: more visual vs. more auditory) but that they actually learn *better* when they move beyond their preferences and are exposed to multimodal approaches (Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer & Bjork, 2008)*. It is likely, therefore, that as the emerging sub-disciplines of psychology and neuroscience offer new clues and understandings of cognition and how people learn, we may look back on learning styles research as having provided useful, if often flawed, theoretical and conceptual foundations.

In the meantime we may proceed with caution in the minefield of learning styles research and its applicability to our teaching. In this scholarly and prodigious critical study, the authors ask us to at least be aware of the critiques and criticisms of the various learning styles instruments and to use them selectively. Rather than use them to categorize learners and to tailor our teaching, they suggest we use them

“as a tool to encourage self-development [in students], not only by diagnosing how people [may] learn, but by showing them how to *enhance* their learning. As Garner (2000) has argued, self-development is more likely to result from increasing learners’ knowledge of the relative advantages and weaknesses of different models, than from learners being assigned a particular learning style.” (pg. 132)

* Pashler, H., McDaniel, M., Rohrer, D., & Bjork, R. (2008) “Learning Styles: Concepts and Evidence.” *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 9: 106–119.

The report can be accessed by clicking on this link: [Learning Styles and Pedagogy in post-16 education](#)
-Lynn Vos

10. HEA Academy of Marketing Education Special Interest Group

The HEA has joined with the Academy of Marketing to support the Marketing Education Special Interest Group (SIG). The first meeting will be held at the [Academy of Marketing Conference at Southampton Management School, July 2-5, 2012](#).

Our objectives are to promote research on teaching and learning issues in marketing education by providing small research grants, encouraging collaboration, supporting pedagogic workshops, and by holding two annual events where outcomes from research can be shared. We are planning a Symposium in November, 2012 in London. More information will be available soon.

11. Your views

We welcome your views on this month's main article "Educating marketing professionals?" In the future we will be adding a discussion forum to the online version of the digest, but in the meantime, please send any comments to lynn.vos@heacademy.ac.uk for posting in the next edition of Marketing Education Digest.

If you would like to make any comments on the current Digest, make suggestions for future articles or tell us what you would like to see in the HEA Marketing resource pages, please also feel free to email [Lynn](#).











