4-2008

Time Magazine Education Program (38 Pedagogical Articles/Worksheets in a Year; Samples Uploaded)

Siow Heng ONG  
Singapore Management University, shong@smu.edu.sg

Follow this and additional works at: http://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/lkcsb_research
Part of the Business Commons, and the Curriculum and Instruction Commons

Citation
http://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/lkcsb_research/984

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Lee Kong Chian School of Business at Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Research Collection Lee Kong Chian School of Business (Open Access) by an authorized administrator of Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University. For more information, please email libIR@smu.edu.sg.
28/04/2008 issue

“Nudge” (p. 61)

Analytical Thinking

This article is a review of a book called “Nudge” by about how people can be “nudged” or persuaded to make a certain decision simply by the way choices are presented to them. Read the article and answer the questions below.

1. “If you want people to use less energy, you could make it very expensive – or you could just let them know how much they use in comparison with their neighbours.” (Para 1)

   (a) What does the writer mean when he says, “If you want people to use less energy, you could make it very expensive”? **Answer:** He means that drastically raising the price of energy resources such as electricity and petrol or gasoline would cause people in the community to use less of it.

   (b) “…or you could just let them know how much they use in comparison with their neighbours”. What is the implication of the word “just” in this context? **Answer:** The writer is implying that revealing relative usage of electricity or energy is simpler and easier than all the complications associated with raising the price of gasoline.

2. Critically evaluate the information in the second sentence in Paragraph 1. What further information is required before we can conclude that revealing how much the neighbours are using will result in a lowering of electricity consumption? **Answer:** The writer should also tell us whether moderate and frugal consumers were emboldened to then increase their electricity consumptions. If one set of people can be “nudged” in one direction, is there a possibility that the “nudge” may have unexpected results in the opposite direction?

3. (a) The writer says that policymakers should “give people choices but also invisibly coax them away from bad ones”. (Para 2) Explain this in your own words. **Answer:** Policymakers should arrange the options available in such a way that people are likely to choose the option that the policymakers want them to.

   (b) What example does the writer give of “invisible coaxing”? (Para 2) Do you detect any flaw or limitation to the invisible coaxing or “nudging” in this
particular example? **Answer:** People in the cafeteria may react according to the policymakers’ plan the first few times, but after they get used to the arrangement, they would know the layout of the cafeteria and simply wait to fill their trays with the junk food further down the line.

4. (a) Based on information in paragraph 3, explain “libertarian” and “paternalism” as used by Thaler and Sunstein. **Answer:** By “libertarian”, they mean giving people options and choices to exercise their free will. By “paternalism” they mean acting to protect the individual from making choices that may harm the individual, much as a father or parent would act to protect a child.

(b) Do you think the writer is correct to refer to “libertarian paternalism” as an oxymoron? **Note to student:** An oxymoron puts together two opposing or incongruous concepts to create a new meaning. **Answer:** Obviously, students should say “yes”. If students say “No” invite them to explain and argue their case; use the opportunity to reinforce what an oxymoron is.

(c) Which of the following expressions are oxymora? Which ones do not fulfil some aspect of the definition of an oxymoron? **Note:** The correct plural of oxymoron is oxymora. **Note to Teacher:** Allow students’ opinions to differ. The comments in parentheses are only suggestions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The expression</th>
<th>Is it an oxymoron?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>(Is it a juxtaposition of opposing terms to create new meaning?)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. unbiased opinion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. genuine imitation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. jumbo shrimp</td>
<td>merely a description of large prawns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. honest politician / lawyer</td>
<td>not an oxymoron, just sarcasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. school food</td>
<td>more sarcasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. sweet sorrow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. (a) In paragraph 4 the writer gives an example of how people’s tendency to simply not make a choice, even when it is for their own good, can be used by policymakers to “nudge” people in the desired direction. How is this concept expressed, in “the language of *Nudge*”? **Answer:** “Opt in” and “opt out”.

(b) Give examples of policies in your country that your lawmakers have framed in terms of “opt out”. Has the use of the “opt out” method been successful in increasing the number of people making the desired choice?
6. (a) The final paragraph suggests that America should use the “opt out” method of “nudging” people to make a decision regarding organ donation to achieve an outcome that policymakers want. Suggest why you think American lawmakers have not yet used this method to increase availability of organs for transplant, whereas many other countries have already done so. Note to Teacher: Accept any plausible answer, e.g. Americans may feel that an opt-out scheme presumes that a person consents to having the state make decisions regarding the individual’s body. The concept of personal liberty is highly valued in America so the “opt out” scheme for organ donation may seem to be an infringement of personal liberty.

(b) What is the policy regarding organ donation in your country? Do you agree with the policy? Would you recommend a change or improvement to the method?

7. The assumption made by the authors of “Nudge” is that an opt-out scheme will necessarily increase the number of organs available for transplant. They make this assumption based on their research experiment (cited in the final paragraph). Can you think of any hitches that may limit the number of organs made available for transplant despite a successful opt out exercise? As you think about this, read the following information about successful opt out schemes and their various outcomes:

The **UK does not have an opt-out scheme and has one of the lowest organ donation rates among developed countries. As expected, some European countries with opt-out systems have higher donation rates than the UK. However there is no clear evidence that the opt-out scheme is the sole factor. The fact that Sweden has an opt-out law has not influenced the actual donation rate, which is interestingly lower than that of the**
UK. In fact, within almost all countries, local variations in donation rates exist in different districts.

In most opt-out schemes regarding organ donation, there still has to be final consent granted by the next-of-kin of the deceased. Few countries have an opt-out scheme for organ donation where organs can be taken by doctors against the wishes of the surviving closest relative. Austria is one of these exceptions - the views of close relatives are not taken into account. Yet even here, the donor rate is higher than in the UK. Spain has an acclaimed opt-out scheme that results in high rates of available organs for transplant. Studies show that the single most important factor so far identified is ensuring that the relatives of potential organ donors are always approached, and approached by someone specifically trained for the purpose, as happens in Spain.

When Belgium switched to a similar scheme, there was an increase in donations at the hospitals that introduced it, but no increase at those hospitals that remained on the old scheme.

Different cultural attitudes to the disposal of bodies, greater provision of intensive care beds, more pro-active donation programmes and the numbers of road deaths, each play their part.

Information obtained from:
http://www.uktransplant.org.uk/ukt/newsroom/statements_and_stances/statements/opt_in_or_out.jsp

8. For an interesting real-life case that resulted in much heartache and more people opting out of organ donation in Singapore, see the following website:
http://www.cancerstory.com/servlets/sharing_hota.jsp

This is the case of a family that felt bullied into consenting to the donation of a deceased relative’s organs because the deceased had not opted out. The bad publicity generated by the case resulted in an increased number of people in Singapore actively opting out of organ donation soon after.
Critical Thinking:

The term “tipping point” became popular with the publication in 2000 of Malcolm Gladwell’s bestseller, *The Tipping Point. How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. The term “tipping point” is from the world of disease epidemics. It originally referred to the concept that small changes will have little or no effect on a system until a critical mass is reached. After that, even a small change “tips” the system and a large effect is observed. For an example of how the expression is used in non-scientific contexts, see the 7th April 2008 issue of TIME (“The Clean Energy Scam”, pp. 28-33). The article mentioned that deforestation in South America was “approaching a tipping point.” It was used to indicate that deforestation is reaching an extent when it may be too late to manage the enormous environmental harm that would result.

Do you think, just as “tipping point”, popularized by a bestseller, is now used commonly, the term “nudge” will also become a common and popular way to refer to the art of persuasion?

**Note to Teacher:** Accept any reasonable opinion. The aim here is to encourage students to predict intelligently based on current information and their knowledge and opinion of how trends begin and catch on.

---

**SPECIAL REPORT (pp. 31-52)**

**Critical Thinking**

1. Read the three articles that comprise this special report. What metaphors are the editors of TIME trying to establish through their choice of pictures that accompany this report? **Possible Answers:** Correcting global warming is a war/battle (cover picture); it is an act of patriotism (pp. 31, 33, 36, 38, 42); it is a gift to the next generation (p. 33); it should be America’s legacy (p. 34). **Note:** the leaf on p. 36 is in the shape of the American map.

2. The writers refer to the need to improve the environment as a “battle” and “war” that requires everyone to be mobilized. Why do you think they chose such a martial or military metaphor? **Note to Teacher:** Encourage a variety of reasoned answers.
3. In small groups, imagine that you are policymakers at the UN or in a regional organization of countries (such as ASEAN) or even on a government team in your country. Your group has been asked to design some policies to arrest or slow down environmental degradation. If possible, you are also required to design policies to encourage a healthy environment in terms of clean air. To accomplish this, your group has to do the following:

(a) Draw up a practical list of practical things that you think countries and individuals can do to save the environment.

(b) Suggest changes to existing policies or suggest new laws and measures or campaigns to ensure that your list of suggestions in (a) is carried out.

(c) Use ideas from the writers of “Nudge” (p. 61) to help coax people or countries into making the decisions you want them to make.

“Migratory Patterns” (p.62); “A Life on Stage” (p. 68)

Imaginative & Creative Thinking

These two articles both touch on Asians in a foreign setting and the attempt to use literary forms to express certain aspects of the experience of living with Asian values in changing modern times. Some of the aspects of life touched on include the clash of values of young people and the values of their parents. There is also the question of whether parents should view their children as their possessions.

(a) Read these two articles and explain whether the two articles touch on the difficulties of life faced by people in your own country. Describe the cultural contexts in which these difficulties arise. For example are certain practices more common among new immigrants, or a particular religion or race or social background?

(b) Working in pairs or small groups or individually, select a particular difficulty in life faced by a specific group of people in your society. Decide whether you would like to present this difficulty in the form of a short play or story or poem. Write a scene for your play or story that captures an important mood and feeling.

(c) Create a special online site for your class and post your poem or the scene from your play or story. The class may then view each other’s offerings and post encouraging comments.

Ong Siow Heng, PhD