TEACHING STUDENTS TO "MIND THEIR OWN BUSINESS"

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From the time of my first introduction to computers in the classroom in the early eighties, I wished to use the technology in my accountancy classes. But the typical problems of not knowing how to apply the technology, not having any idea of where to find an appropriate program, if there was one, and the age old problem of not having enough computers to seat my classes in front of, were all against me. I dabbled a little with a very simple payroll package on our only Apple 11e and used our Pulsar system with Multiplan and Business Manager. However this was really only a token effort. Although I had a few programs, I still lacked the time to learn how to use them, and anyway, **I could not find any package that the average year 11 student--let alone the teachers, could understand.** Thus the computer aspect of the course was relegated to a unit at the tail end of year 11 entitled "Computer Accounting".

In 1989 I left teaching to run a computer business with my husband. My role was to handle all of the administration, including the accounting, of course. This was a wonderful experience. I put into practice all of the things I had been teaching my students for the previous 18 years. I discovered that accounting really was the vital aspect of business management that I had been parroting to my students for years.

I would find myself thinking how I would change my approach to a particular topic or which particular aspects really needed more emphasis. But above all, I more fully appreciated the vital role of computers in the accounting process.

During this time I was introduced to MYOB. I was using a very cumbersome accounting program, and became very excited about the possibilities of MYOB. It had the dual aspects of ease of use and the availability of all the accounting functions that the average small business would require. If it was relevant in the "real world", I began thinking, is it the program that I had been longing for all of those teaching years?

I believe it is. It has many attributes. Firstly, and very importantly, it is straight forward enough for any accountancy teacher to gain an adequate mastery of, over a relatively short period. Study over a Christmas break, or a term holiday would be ideal. The manual is excellent and the sample program supplied assists by allowing the user to test run all aspects of the package.

Another plus as far as teaching is concerned is that , although the user does not require a knowledge of double entry, the debit/credit effect is available in the background for the user to study. This would be a boon when teaching the posting rules.

Another wonderful plus is the availability of a Profit or Loss and/or Balance Sheet at the flick of the proverbial "button". This could be used in the introductory lessons when teaching the accounting equation, and again

later when teaching the double entry rules. No matter which way you wish to proceed in your teaching of the bookkeeping process, MYOB can provide the avenue. As indicated, double-entry does not have to be understood to use MYOB, although I feel that an appreciation is most useful to allow a user who is to run the program unsupervised, to detect an inappropriate entry. Thus it can be used if you wish to teach single entry.

Cheques, purchases and sales invoices and cash receipts are very easy to enter. Credit notes are more complex and may need to be delayed. MYOB compiles the journals from the entry of the original transactions. Bank Recs are actually fun when arithmetic errors are eliminated by the computer. Users still need to understand the concepts of unpresented cheques and uncredited deposits but if the account does not reconcile, MYOB gives directions as to the possible cause of the discrepancy eg a cheque incorrectly marked as presented.

Considerable flexibility is possible in the set up of the chart of accounts. This allows the user to set up any type of classification of accounts that is considered appropriate--a most desirable feature when discussing the importance of classification. If teaching cash accounting, it is posssible to ignore the credit aspects of MYOB. I would suggest setting up two files--one produced using the cash basis of accounting and the other using accrual accounting. Consider the possibilities that the speed of computer generated reports provide - enter the same transactions in both files and get immediate comparisons by producing screen copies of fincancial reports.

Either perpetual or physical inventory can be used. It is simply a matter of deciding which approach you wish to use and set up the appropriate linked accounts. If the perpetual method is chosen MYOB automatically transfers the cost every time a transaction occurs. As was mentioned previously, the

"Recap Transaction" feature enables a most useful insight for students into the workings of this process. Once again you could also set up dual sample files for comparison.

I am currently teaching MYOB in to people who intend to use it to run their businesses, but I strongly believe that it can be used as a vehicle to teach accounting itself at a secondary or tertiary level. **The use of computers in the accounting process must not be left to a topic at the end of the course.** The ideal approach would be to have the students commence on day one in front of a computer with a simple business already set up. This simple skeleton could be used to teach the basic concepts. Soon after, students would create their own business and this could be used as the basis for much of the rest of the course. In an ideal world this would require that your class have access to the computers for all of their accounting lessons - who knows what you can achieve if you harass the time-tabler sufficiently!

From my experience, the vast majority of students who commence accounting/bookkeeping studies at the secondary level will not continue on to become accountants, but rather, if they have any contact at all with accounting, it will be through the data entry of simple daily transactions. Many businesses now have computers and most use them for accounting purposes. If we don't recognize this, and change our courses to suit, we risk the danger of becoming irrelevant.

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