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PARTICIPATION EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS IN EXPERIENTIAL SETTINGS

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ABSTRACT

Learning in an experiential setting provides the sincere and involved participant an opportunity to internalize the information in that course. The new information becomes "owned" because the messages are emotionally sensed as well as intellectually absorbed. Faculty members often sense that students are eager and ready for this kind of learning environment. But, - what are the expectations and operating expectations of our students?

To attempt to answer this question The Experiential Socialization Index (ESI) developed by Sanders and Yanouzas (1983) was used at the first class meeting and at the end of the experientially designed course. This study found that there was no statistically significant difference in the response patterns of the pre and post test surveys. The data was subjected to multivariate analysis of variance used in the SAS program package. A further conclusion is that the power of an educational system that is largely rule-dependent seems quite evident.

EXPECTATIONS AND GOALS IN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Experiential learning is certainly not the same as the performing of experiments, but there is some relationship between these two learning designs. Simon (1968, P. vii) has stated:

> A major problem in teaching the behavioral sciences effectively - and a major problem for the student learning them - is to provide an effective counterpart to the (natural science) laboratory. we can use (our own) experience as one part of our behavioral science laboratory, to test our abstract concepts, and to exercise skills of living with others. First-hand experience in particular kinds of social institutions - especially organizations - is harder to come by.

Leaning in an experiential setting provides the participant, - and sincere participation is crucial for optimum success in this design - an opportunity to internalize the information. It becomes "owned" because the message is emotionally sensed as well as intellectually absorbed. Thus, the stress of the approach is more an affective than a cognitive leaning. Student (participants) may be ready (even eager) for this kind of laboratory approach. In fact, one large state university has made this observation:

> Today's students reject passive acceptance in favor of a more vital involvement in the learning process, and they are not shy about expressing their opinions on the quality of the teaching offered them. (LSU Outlook, 1971).

Those who design and work with the experiential approach have largely convinced themselves that this approach recognizes that people have various learning/ problem-solving styles. They also are generally convinced that this leaning design produces more personalized and more enduring leaning for the participant. Quite clearly, this design is more action-oriented and thus, has the potential for creating behavioral and attitudinal changes.

A major part of the appeal of the experiential approach is the perceived emphasis on the pragmatic or applied aspects of the information. People have always sought to practice "cosmology" -- the attempt to make sense out of one's environment (McGregor, 1967). Participants, especially more experienced ones, such as evening MBA students have increasingly commented that they gave high priority to the application of theory rather than dealing only with theoretical material. Instructors also appear to find that this approach is very satisfying because it is here-and-now oriented and results change slightly with each new group of participants. The reinforcement of short-run results (or, at least the promise of such results) is very satisfying to educator and leaner alike. Thus, one can easily visualize that his/her own goals are being met and that real progress is being made.

One area that Kolb's model (Ward, 1983), or others like it, does not treat is the concept of multiple intelligences. The work of Gardner (1983) serves as a foundation for the idea that people have focus of intelligence beyond those of linguistic and logical- mathematical intelligences. Most of our testing devices measure only these two areas of thought. Gardner points out that at least five other kinds of intelligence have been identified: spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. He suggests that none of these should have priority over the others. The relative importance of these seven areas has shifted over time, and they also vary from culture to culture. To the extent schools are challenged to alleviate rather than perpetuate economic and social inequalities, it is predicted that the linguistic and logical-mathematical forms will not always be dominant.

It would seem that the laboratory design in experiential learning provides the variety of structured and semi-structured exercises wherein participants can utilize various intelligences and develop liberated consciousnesses. In fact, the linguistic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences are important in the laboratory design and should be improved by sincere involvement in experiential leaning. Indeed, one of the benefits cited by instructors is the participant's improvement in predicting the reactions and behavior of others (Dutton, 1975). Likewise, real involvement in the laboratory exercises can provide a liberating effect by creating opportunities for serious introspection.

The exercises that make up the experiential course are not free-form devices; they do have structure, just as work assignments in an organization have structure. This structure, therefore, has some potentially repressive qualities for the participant. However, the instructor has an excellent opportunity to provide a guiding structure for the process of dealing with the exercise without controlling the results of the exercise. One of the continuing concerns with those involved in experiential learning is the matter of manipulation of the participants. If, in the handling

of the exercises, the participants perceive that this is a series of experiments designed to produce research data for the instructor, the participant's involvement is repressed and/or reduced.

In an earlier study, Sanders and Yanouzas (1983) tried to identify which participant roles are vital to the laboratory design and which are useful but peripheral. In this project, help was sought from a number of experienced faculty in the area of experiential leaning. These persons were members of the Association of Business Simulation and Experiential Leaning (ABSEL). The members were surveyed using a basic Delphi technique. The final panel of participants numbered approximately thirty, and from this group there emerged a list of eighteen survey items. Half of these items (nine) were identified as peripheral to successful participation in an experiential course and appear to correspond to an obedience fact or. The remaining nine items were identified as being pivotal or essential, for such success and appear to correspond to sincere involvement in the goals of liberating experiential leaning.

MEASURING PERCEPTIONS IN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

The functional definition assigned by the panel of experts to a pivotal role was that of a role central to effective understanding or the exercise and successful completion in the laboratory setting. A peripheral role was one that was relevant, but not crucial to successful participation in the laboratory setting. It will be recalled that these definitions were assigned by the experts prior to exposure of these items to any laboratory participants.

For real commitment to the exercise, internalization of the results, and proactive introspection, the participant must accept most of the elements which are pivotal to the task. Since time and energy are scarce resources, the wisest and most efficient situation would occur when participants focus all or most of their energies on pivotal roles. Peripheral role acceptance may not be damaging, per se, to exercise success; however it diverts attention away from the more crucial issues and reinforces submissive or rule-oriented forms of consciousness.

Recognition of a particular role is not equivalent to acceptance of that role. Yet, instructors or experiential courses often assume that recognition is tantamount of acceptance of a role. It is probably more realistic to presume that the instructor is more involved with the pivotal roles than are the participants. Likewise, it would also appear to be realistic to visualize an increasingly smaller number of involved participants as we move from role recognition to acceptance, and from acceptance to enactment of behavior to match the role.

For the participant to act on the role, he/she must see rewards which outweigh the costs of such behavior. Costs or risks of behaving in a certain way include one's own reactions to the role in action, and the reactions of others in the setting. Tile social control process functions in the classroom in as real a way as it does in any other organizational setting (Schein, 1979). The participant will consider likely responses from peers as well as anticipated reactions from the instructor and react accordingly.

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

The sample was composed of undergraduate and graduate (master's level) students enrolled in management courses. The students were surveyed during 1983 and 198k at a large state university in Florida. Three course sections were involved totaling 53 participants. It may be noteworthy that these were elective rather than required courses. Further, these courses were unique in that they were not part of a sequence of courses. For the vast majority of participants this was the first such (experiential) course they had taken. While no precise gender data was gathered, it is estimated that about 1~ percent of the participants were female at the graduate level, while approximately 30 percent were female at the undergraduate level,

The age grouping of those participants tend to be higher than the typical residential university. That is, the undergraduate participants are usually seniors with an average age of 22-33. The graduate participants' average age was approximately 32-33. Most participants at both levels have work experience from part or full-time jobs. Presumably this should make the connection easier between the experiential exercises and the reality of organizational assignments for the participants.

The flow of topics in typical experiential courses follow some rather predictable patterns. For example, one sequence is a focus on: Individuals (expectations and perception, understanding and motivation, inference versus observation: Small Groups (supervision-subordinate relations, communication, conformity-deviation); Group Interaction (group allegiance and personal influence, leadership styles, in-basket problem solving); Organizational Change and Risk-Taking (impact of organizational change, trust and risk, personal feedback). Another sequence (using broad unit-headings only) is: Developing the leaning environment; Small group skills and dynamics, Motivation, perception and communications; Integrating individual, team and organizational effectiveness Therefore, one can see that the topics of interest are quite typical of organizational behavior texts and courses. However, the use of the exercise, rather than heavy reading assignments and content discussions, become the vehicle for learning.

The administration of the eighteen-item survey was done at the start and at the close of the courses. While participants were aware of their general standing at the end of the course, none knew the instructor's personal evaluation of their efforts or the final grades.

The survey was administered with the request to complete it as honestly as possible. Participants were also asked not to identify themselves in any way and to mark their responses to the Likert scale directly on the survey form. The instruction at the top of the survey form was repeated to the survey takers as the forms were being distributed,

> You are asked to indicate how much you agree with several statements describing student's behavior and beliefs related to leaning in classroom activities. Please respond to all items individually.

The administrator of the survey then positioned himself in the room so that participants had the most freedom possible to answer anonymously. Completed surveys were passed in (gathered together) to the administrator.

Measure

The Experiential Socialization Index (ESI) was used to assess the manner in which participants perceived their roles in the experiential learning settings. This eighteen-item, Likert-type instrument was developed by Sanders and Yanouzas (1983) to assess participant receptivity to experiential learning methods. The authors state that the ESI contains nine items which measure pivotal norm acceptance and nine items which measure peripheral norm acceptance. Scores on each factor are combined to profile participants in two-dimensional space as rebellious (reject both norms), and game players (accept peripheral, reject pivotal).

Although the instrument was proposed as a measure of receptivity to experiential learning methods and acceptance of norms, if participants read the preface and the items literally, they will be describing the role sent to them in the setting, but they will be describing the role sent to them in the setting, but not their degree of role acceptance, or actual role behavior. Furthermore, it appears that the items are a combination which measure participants' perceptions of beliefs, intentions and behaviors appropriate to the learning setting and are interpreted with this in mind.

RESULTS

The ESI survey form used is shown in Exhibit 1. The original panel of experts from ABSEL selected the first set of items (1-9) as pivotal to success results in an experiential course. The second set of items (10-18) were regarded as peripheral by the same panel.

Exhibit 2 shows the means and the standard deviations for each of the eighteen items in the pre and post survey. The mean value of pretest pivotal set means was 6.09, the corresponding value of the post test set was 6.14. The respective mean standard deviations were .77 and .88. These data indicate a slight apparent increase in means at the end of the course for these pivotal items. However, we note that standard deviation values also increased.

Also shown in Exhibit 2 are the comparative values for the peripheral items. The mean value for pretest peripheral set means was 5.47, and the corresponding value of the post test set was 5.18. The respective mean standard deviations were 1.07 and 1.37. These results indicate no significant difference in the pivotal and peripheral item responses. Here we see that the mean response has decreased. Advocates and instructors of experiential type courses would applaud such a change. However, the standard deviation value has clearly increased at the end of the course.

The ultimate question in the present study is, of course, - "Is there a significant difference in the responses of the participating students comparing starting with the ending surveys (pre/post tests)?" The data was subjected to the MANOVA (Multivariate Analysis of Variance contained in the SAS program package. The two basic statistics were the Hotelling T and the multivariate F. However, other statistics were compared (Including Wilk's Criterion) to verify the original Hotellings T result. The answer to our ultimate question is shown by multivariate analysis which produced an F value of l.1U (F18,70). The associated probability was p.33.

Therefore, there is no statistically significant difference in the response patterns of the pre and post test surveys. While this result is initially disappointing to those of us who labor so lovingly with experientially-designed course, we can learn some things to pique our curiosity and move toward new questions. A related study should be considered prior to considering new questions or new research directions.

DISCUSSION

In an earlier study done with the [8] (Dutton and Jermier, 198~4) means and standard deviations were computed for each item of the ESI to discover which elements of the role definition were most clearly perceived. In addition, the 18 ESI items were factor analyzed and the factor solution was rotated both orthoganally and obliquely. This was done to empirically determine conceptual boundaries in the participants' role definitions. This study used surveys done only at the end of the courses for participants in two large state universities (total N=129). In this study the students perceived the first item of the survey as most descriptive of their role. The item reads; "Accept personal responsibility for becoming involved in learning experiences." Students perceived item 12 from the ESI ("maintain a formal student/teacher relationship.") as least descriptive of their role in the course. However, the mean of item 12 of 4.34 indicates that the average student did not reject the peripheral role item. Similarly, item 16("contribute to maintaining a structured classroom atmosphere") was viewed as the next least descriptive component of student role definitions, but was not rejected by the average student (m=4.52).

This pattern holds for the pivotal and peripheral sub-scales of the ESI. The average item score for the pivotal subscale is 6.18, indicating general, but not strong, agreement with these items. The average item score for the peripheral subscale is 5.38, indicating mild to general agreement with these items. The standard deviation of the peripheral scale is greater than that of the pivotal scale. Perceptions of the peripheral items to classroom behavior and beliefs are more varied then perceptions relative to the pivotal items. The pivotal and peripheral scales were highly correlated (r=63, p .001).

The foregoing data is presented as comparative statistics for the present study in which the pre and post-test approach is used.

A common finding in both studies is that the pivotal and peripheral scales are highly correlated, and that participants did not reject peripheral items at the start or at the end of the courses. The power of the traditional educational system which is largely rule- dependent and obedience-rewarding seems quite evident.

CONCLUSION

Experiential learning methods were developed as a counterpoint to traditional approaches which usually do not consciously relate the personal concrete experiences of students to abstract concepts (Kolb,

1984). The egalitarian relationships among participants, active involvement in the learning process, and opportunities for personal growth create environments with the potential to challenge the typical student's concept of things such as collaboration, authority, inequality and change. The present study suggests that we are making only insignificant gains. But perhaps more changes are occurring than are shown here. Perhaps we have asked the wrong questions. Perhaps we have poorly worded the right questions!

The author would propose to reconvene a willing panel of thirty ABSEL experientialists to review an expanded group of items. A new opportunity would exist to recast key items as pivotal or peripheral and a new survey would be created and used. The statistical results would be gathered and presented to the ABSEL membership at the next annual conference.

EXHIBIT 1

Below you are asked to indicate how much you agree with several statements describing students' behavior, attitudes and beliefs related to learning in classroom activities. Please respond to all items individually. Use the following scale for reference:

Strongly Disagree (SD)	Disagree (D)	Mildly Disagree (MD)	Neutral (N)	Mildly Agree (MA)	Agree (A)	Strongly Agree (SA)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

(Please circle most suitable number)

As a student in this class, my role is to . . .

	SD	D	MD	N	MA	A	SA
1. Accept personal responsibility for becoming involved in learning experiences.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Be willing to participate actively in classroom analysis of learning activities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Accept affective (feeling) learning as an important source of learning.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Recognize the importance of integrating affective (feeling) and cognitive (thinking) learning.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Be willing to engage in self assessment.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Be willing to learn from one's classmates.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Be willing to make connections between classroom experiences and cognitive content.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Be willing to learn from observing one's own behaviors and the behaviors of others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. Believe that information learned will be useful in the future.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Accept the instructor's authority to conduct the class his/her way.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. Complete assignments and readings prior to class.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. Maintain a formal student/teacher relationship.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Be willing to come to every class on time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. Be willing to do extra work when it is needed.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. Accept the instructor's authority to make decisions about the relevance of course content and assignments.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. Contribute to maintaining a structured classroom atmosphere.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. Believe neatness on assignments is important	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. Be willing to share with others my own personal strengths and weaknesses.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

EXHIBIT 2

Experiential Socialization Index:
Means and Standard Deviations
(N=53)

As a student in this class, my role is to . . .	PRE Mean	PRE Std. Dev.	POST Mean	POST Std. Dev.
1. Accept personal responsibility for becoming involved in learning experiences.	6.19	.60	6.41	.89
2. Be willing to participate actively in classroom analysis of learning activities.	6.14	.61	6.32	.69
3. Accept affective (feeling) learning as an important source of learning.	5.63	1.07	5.91	1.11
4. Recognize the importance of integrating affective (feeling) and cognitive (thinking) learning.	5.93	.98	6.06	.98
5. Be willing to engage in self assessment.	6.07	.91	5.94	.91
6. Be willing to learn from one's classmates.	6.27	.63	6.23	.69
7. Be willing to make connections between classroom experiences and cognitive content.	6.15	.65	6.31	.83
8. Be willing to learn from observing one's own behaviors and the behaviors of others.	6.32	.57	6.29	.77
9. Believe that information learned will be useful in the future.	6.09	.89	5.81	1.08
10. Accept the instructor's authority to conduct the class his/her way.	5.93	.88	5.48	1.22
11. Complete assignments and readings prior to class.	6.02	.72	6.04	1.07
12. Maintain a formal student/teacher relationship.	4.43	1.72	4.31	1.63
13. Be willing to come to every class on time.	6.22	.65	5.77	1.24
14. Be willing to do extra work when it is needed.	5.54	.81	5.42	1.22
15. Accept the instructor's authority to make decisions about the relevance of course content and assignments.	5.66	.96	4.91	1.58
16. Contribute to maintaining a structured classroom atmosphere.	4.73	1.60	4.29	1.59
17. Believe neatness on assignments is important	5.63	1.07	5.31	1.37
18. Be willing to share with others my own personal strengths and weaknesses.	5.07	1.25	5.10	1.42

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