An Empirical Test of "Behavioral Immersion" In Experiential Learning

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a study of the effectiveness of experiential learning of behavioral skills by proposing the concept of "behavioral immersion" or learning intensity as a potential pedagogical asset in experientially based management education. The experiential learning literature, including the collected works published by ABSEL, has little to say specifically about the efficacy of behavioral immersion techniques. Nor does the extant literature offer guidelines as to how to increase experiential learning effectiveness by increasing learning intensity. We tested and found support for our hypothesis of the power of behavioral immersion by assessing improvement on a pre-test, experiential pedagogy, post-test design, such that MBA students in an immersive (summer session) environment displayed greater skill acquisition through assessment center testing than did traditional (fall/spring session) students.

INTRODUCTION & THEORY

ABSEL scholars and researchers have been looking for ways to maximize the impact of experiential learning and business simulation since 1974. Howard, Markulis, Strang and Wixom (2006, p. 100) have observed, however, that "papers appearing during the first 15 years of ABSEL did not differ significantly from ABSEL papers during the past 15 years in terms of research design or their use of an educational learning theory." Gentry and McGinnis (2007) questioned whether experiential teaching leads to experiential learning. To address this on-going concern of ABSEL scholars, we feel that one of the keys to increasing the impact of experiential leaning is through processes that increase the intensity of the experiential setting through a process we label as "behavioral immersion."

In this empirical study utilizing a pre-test/post-test format and a control group, we consider experiential learning as the joint function of three learning components: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral (CEB), operating together interactively and synergistically. We promote the concept of intensity through behavioral immersion to argue that high-intensity learning environments designed to simultaneously activate all three of the CEB dimensions are likely to generate improved behavioral skill acquisition of executive skills. We argue that teaching in a compressed environment such as a summer session with daily four-hour classes increases intensity due to its immersive nature. We then test hypotheses relating learning effectiveness in a traditional semester to observe whether immersion and intensity relate to improved skill acquisition in an experiential learning environment relative to a traditional semester format. Finally, we discuss the contributions our findings make to theory and practice.

LEARNING IN AN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CONTEXT

Our examination of the concept of "behavioral immersion" in skill acquisition and experiential learning is based on an assertion that learning individuals vary in the degree that they are involved in the process of learning. Such involvement can range from detachment (most probably a non-learning scenario) to dimensions of involvement that could be described as encompassing the whole learning person. An early whole person perspective derives from Carl Rogers (1961), who contended that psychotherapy was most effective when it was "person-centered." Rogers felt that a learning person needed to be involved not only cognitively, but also emotionally and behaviorally:

> "At this (experiential) level of knowing, we are in a realm where we cannot simply talk of cognitive and intellectual learnings, which can nearly almost always be rather readily communicated in verbal terms. Instead, we are speaking of something more experiential, something having to do with the whole person, visceral reactions and feelings as well as thoughts and words." (Rogers, 1980, p.6).

Rogers' vision of whole person learning remains a valuable contribution to the field of experiential learning and the challenges associated with skill acquisition. There are many practitioners and approaches to the application of whole person learning, including some very recent and interesting innovations.

Bowen contended that the whole person approach is vital to the American higher education system, stating "education should be directed toward the growth of the whole person through the cultivation of not only the intellectual and of practical competence, but also the affective dimensions" (1977, p.33). An application that is closer to the research described in this paper comes from Boyatzis et al. (1995), who fully integrated whole person learning into their MBA program design at Case Western. However, whole person learning in executive skill acquisition raises the question of how to accomplish the learning person involvement required to complete the learning cycle from cognitive awareness to successful skill demonstration.

LEARNING PERSON INVOLVEMENT IN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

A full understanding of the intellectual/cognitive, emotional/affective, and behavioral dimensions of experiential learning requires an examination of these learning domains as they function individually and as well in interactive combinations. The CEB dimensions should be considered interactively because the learning individual, conscious and therefore perceiving his/her environment, has at least some level of involvement on all three dimensions. Thus, when terms such as emotional learning or skill development are applied, this refers more to a technique or approach than to a complete characterization of the psychological state of the learning individual.

Learning conditions are not a steady state phenomenon. Student interest ebbs and flows over time, as students shift the allocation of their time and energy from task to task. Although our pedagogical designs often assume constancy in student interest, the astute design of a learning system should include ways to both elevate and retain learner interest.

The prime importance of cognition should be recognized in any educational process leading to intellectual insight; cognition and adequate intellectual frameworks are the first steps to behavioral change. This is why an experiential learning system designer always has to insure that the cognitive element is an operational element in any experiential learning exercise or experiential program. A requisite level of a cognitive frame of reference is what changes a random experience into a learning experience with the potential for personal adoption, skill development and lasting change.

Cognitive and behavioral dimensions can be operative without meaningful levels of emotional commitment. In these cases, the learning person is receiving the requisite information and perspective and is practicing the skill as well. However, if the person is: a) unaware and/or unappreciative of the importance of the lesson at hand, or, b) is being more or less forced to sit through the experience, the probability of the person "buying in" and making a meaningful level of emotional commitment is low. Gentry and McGinnis (2008) describe this student interest shortfall as a 'curiosity gap' that seems to persist as an ongoing educational challenge: "we perceive that the more common problem encountered is that students see no reason to alter their preconceptions (and that their curiosity gaps remain too small)" (p. 73).

In other words, when the head is involved (only to the extent that there will probably be an exam) and the body is present (only because roll is taken), but the heart is elsewhere, learning is likely to suffer. High intensity, whole person experiential learning exists when all three dimensions are activated at high levels. We now turn our attention to the important role of behavioral immersion and intensity – the simultaneous presence of high levels of all three learning dimensions.

BEHAVIORAL IMMERSION AS A CRITICAL MASS PHENOMENON

It can be observed that CEB dimensions function in the nature of a critical mass phenomenon, an important construct in our experiential learning intensity model. Maximizing the impact of experiential learning is therefore a challenge of producing behaviors that are as complete as possible backed by an emotional commitment that is as stable as possible and reinforced by an intellectual perspective that is as encompassing as possible. The previous statement is, in essence, the rationale for and the design considerations of the Executive Skills course evaluated in this research paper. Our goal was to create a high intensity learning environment that would trigger the benefits of behavioral immersion learning in an MBA course focusing upon the attainment of behavioral skills.

This critical mass perspective can be expanded to assess the processes and success of MBA programs and graduate business education, for it is all too easy to label cognitive proficiency or behavioral intent as behavioral action. The world is full of 'wanna be' leaders, but only real leaders pass the test of having followers. Similarly, only effective communicators consistently send and receive full and accurate messages. As educators, we too often may stop our processes of individual education and personal change at the 'wanna be' level. The desire to exercise a particular behavior is a necessary first step in engaging in a behavior, but desire and intent are not the behavior.

Applying the above ideas leads to a perspective on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning that transforms the simplistic 'learning by doing' that so many practitioners misapply into a whole person-based definition (Hoover, 1974; Hoover and Whitehead, 1976, Hoover, 2007):

> Experiential learning exists when a personally responsible participant (s) cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally processes knowledge, skills and/or attitudes in a learning situation characterized by a high level of active involvement.

This positive definition ties together the previously introduced concepts, and introduces a prescriptive role for the learning individual – one of autonomy and self-direction. Thus, experiential learning can be associated with the better utilization of the full human potential to learn. As an educational approach, experiential learning may be viewed as follows (Hoover, 1974):

> Experiential learning may be viewed as a methodology of education whereby structure and individual or group experiences are contrived to develop learning and perceptual capacities, to develop and reinforce cognitions, to impact on emotions and attitudes, and, importantly, to function in developing capacities to behave consistently with the insights of these processes and experiences.

Management educators have traditionally focused primarily on the cognitive aspects of learning even when addressing behavioral skill components, and have tended to use traditional methodologies grounded in the lecture format. This paper recognizes the benefits of such an approach, but also labels such methodologies as producing one-dimensional lower intensity learning experiences at best. If MBA programs desire to prepare students for successful careers, then the focus should be upon learning that is more behaviorally immersive. Only learning that is behaviorally immersive can equip our organizational product, students, in all of their intellectual, emotional, and behavioral capacities, to function in the complex and challenging business world of today.

THE LITERATURE ON BEHAVIORAL IMMERSION AND INTENSITY IN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

As background and foundation for this research paper, a large number of books on the topics of experiential learning, adult education and adult learning were scanned for the topic of intensity. Interestingly, not a single reference to 'intensity' was found. Similarly, a word search in ABSEL's Bernie Keys Library found zero hits for 'intensity' or 'immersion.' Few experts in this field, it would seem, address intensity or our phrase behavioral immersion directly. It is our conclusion that much of the literature on learning theory and/or educational methodology seem to work on the assumption that sufficient energy (what we call critical mass) exists in the system for the learning system to accomplish its educational goals and individual student development objectives. The absence of such focus is the primary motivator for the current study.

While Kolb does not specifically address behavioral immersion or intensity, he addressed the issue of a time line in experiential learning once in his 1984 definitive work. Kolb (p. 153) states that the time span for activities associated with four phases of experiential learning can span across years, decades or even a lifetime. This is obviously a much larger time framework than the skill development activities measured in this research and in academic and corporate education interventions.

Neither Kolb nor Lewin (1951) comment on the time line needed for meaningful reflection. Dewey makes a similar point, stating, "The crucial educational problem is that of procuring postponement of immediate action *until observation and judgment have intervened*" (our emphasis) (Dewey, 1938, p.69). Kolb labels this dynamic as an active/reflective dialectic, and describes it as the basis for transformative learning (1984, p. 41). Beckett and Hager echo this point of view stating, "Breadth and intensity is, we argue, the basis for 'organic learning'" (2001, p.11).

Kolb also observes that learning is, by its very nature, is a process fraught with tension and subject to conflict. Kolb sums up the meaning of these tensions:

> "This…dimension has active experimentation at one end and reflective observation at the other. Thus, in the process of learning, one moves from varying degrees from actor to observer, and from specific involvement to analytical detachment" (1984, pp. 30-31).

It is our assertion that increasing the degree of behavioral immersion in experiential learning processes serves to accentuate these conflicting tensions, thus highlighting both the antecedents and consequences of the experiential learning environment. The question we examine in the research presented in this paper focuses on the question: "Just how active is active, and does enhanced activity, via enhanced behavioral immersion, produce enhanced experiential learning and skill development?"

"CRITICAL MASS" THROUGH BEHAVIORAL IMMERSION, AND THE ACQUISITION OF SKILLS: RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The skill development data utilized in this study were obtained from student data in an MBA course entitled Executive Skills taught at a major Southwestern University. Executive Skills is an experiential course utilizing experiential learning methodologies. Experiential exercises are presented as course modules, with each exercise focusing on specific skills (see Method and Results section below for details). Every experiential module was designed to maximize the benefits of whole person learning, and every experiential exercise included:

1) the establishment of a cognitive framework for the exercise, including the rationale for its inclusion and its potential importance to the student
2) exercise components designed to elicit emotional reactions including elation and a feeling of success upon execution of the skill or frustration and continued determination upon failure to manifest the skill during the exercise, and
3) behavioral involvement either through direct participation in the exercise via skill practice or observation of those attempting and/or practicing the skill

In research published previously (Hoover et al, 2006), we utilized an assessment center on a pretest/posttest basis to establish a baseline for skill measures as well as skill development. The experiential course modules focusing on skill development were all conducted in the period between the pretest and posttest administrations of the assessment center. From this previous research, we can make the following assertion:

> *Assertion One: It is possible to design experiential learning exercises based on the concepts of whole person learning that will yield statistically significant increases in demonstrated and measured student skills.*

To put this in language parallel to the discussions above, we concluded that we were successful in designing skill focused experiential exercises that sufficiently activated the three CEB learning dimensions such that students were able to identify and master the targeted skills. Based on the success of the skill development measures we adopted, we can therefore also conclude that the three learning dimensions and the exercise components functioned to create a critical mass of behavioral immersion learning elements sufficient to trigger the desired learning/skill development outcomes.

In the study reported in this paper, we focused our attention on the skill acquisition attributable to the experiential teaching pedagogy in an intensive, compressed format over the summer session across 3½ weeks. This is compared to the same basic design but spread out in a traditional semester of fourteen weeks. In the full-length semester, course modules were scheduled once a week for 14 weeks and students had seven full days of learning reflection time. In the summer term, the 14 course modules came in four hour blocks on a day to day basis, and students most often had less than 20 hours reflection time.

We agree with Brookfield's (1995) position that the richness and intensity of experiential learning is not necessarily related to quantity or length of experience, and we believe we can evaluate

this concept by comparing the skill development performance of students from the long semesters to the summer sessions. This comparison is based on creating a critical mass of learning elements sufficient to trigger the desired learning/skill development outcomes, our Assertion One.

Our hypothesis derives from the concept of experiential learning and the development of a concept we call 'behavioral immersion'. However, to develop our behavioral immersion model, we take issue with what appears to be the prevailing wisdom. For example, Bjork and Druckman (1991), in a study of skill acquisition and knowledge transfer, posit that skill practice should be distributed across numerous sessions, and that these sessions should have substantial breaks between each session. Miller, et al (1998) observe that this rationale is why universities have a system of 3 contact hours spread across 15 week long semesters. Miller, et al, arguing for "spaced practice", go so far as to state "students should be provided the time to make the connections. A series of back-to-back decision rounds in a single session works against any reflective learning by preventing consolidation and integration of new information" (1998, p. 218).

We acknowledge that there are possible detrimental aspects of massed practice. And, we acknowledge that spaced practice does possibly allow time sufficient for reflective learning and may be instrumental for some subject matter, particularly that which is more abstract and less behavioral in nature. However, what Bjork and Druckman and Miller, et al, omit from their analysis is the actual learning impact of the practice session. Based on our concepts of behaviorally immersive learning and the critical mass aspect of impactful learning environments, we offer our second assertion:

> *Assertion Two: Reflective learning and the completion of a learning cycle by an individual are not constrained by a set time-period or by a minimal elapsed time requirement. Reflective learning takes as long as it takes for each learning situation, depending on a number of variables including learner readiness, the characteristics of the learning challenge and the intensity of the learning experience. If sufficient levels of multi-dimensional whole person learning are in operation, reflective learning cycles and skill acquisition can be completed over relatively short time periods.*

Evidence exists to point out that spaced practice has some potential downsides. For example, Gavetti and Levinthal (2000), in an experiential learning simulation found that "the virtue of shifting cognitive representation, however, may be offset by the loss of tacit knowledge associated with the prior cognition" (2000, p. 113). Therefore, it appears that there are tradeoffs and boundary conditions regarding time and reflective learning. We feel the mechanism that most effectively addresses this dilemma is enhanced experiential learning through the processes of behavioral immersion; that is, learning environments that produce synergistic learning outcomes through a virtual immersion in the learning process.

Further, when experiential learning is developed in the context of CEB dimensions, it is apparent that different learning experiences may lean more heavily on different dimension configurations. Traditional learning, relying extremely heavily on the cognitive dimension, may employ long gestation periods for knowledge and proficiency to incubate. In contrast, executive skills education relies only partially on cognitive development. Since behavioral and emotional dimensions rise in prominence in this pedagogy, immediacy, replication, and integration are central to the learning experience and gestation associated with spaced practice may represent, at best, a mixed bag.

As a proximal model, it is useful to look at the wide spread use of immersion techniques to acquire a second language. Genese (1985), in a review of language immersion programs, describes language immersion programs as "not as much a second language teaching as it is a pedagogical approach that promotes second language learning" (1985, p. 541). Day and Shapson (2001) provide experimental evidence of the efficacy of a French immersion program. Moreno and Mayer (2004) studied immersion in a virtual environment. One interesting aspect of their study was that they found the more they "personalized" their messages, the more that was produced "in both low and high immersion environments" (2004, p. 165). Finally, Prawat (1991), states "advocates of this third approach (immersion) argue that it is counterproductive to devote too much time to the explicit teaching of thinking; they believe that it develops naturally in classrooms when students are engaged" (1991, p. 3).

Thus, we see that the key to learning through immersion is the level of student engagement. As the learning individual becomes more cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally involved in processes of learning, he/she becomes less distracted by outside forces and more immersed in the learning challenge currently being experienced. Moreover, since behavioral learning requires requisite antecedent levels of emotional involvement and cognitive awareness, the term behavioral immersion serves to describe the essential characteristics of high intensity experiential learning. Behavioral immersion works because the learning person cannot escape the meaningful learning impacts of a rapid-fire environment. Thus, our hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 1: Given assertion 2, student skill acquisition in executive skills experiential education will be significantly higher in a summer session schedule as contrasted to a full-semester schedule.*

METHOD AND RESULTS

Sample. Our data set consisted of 246 students at a large public university. Of these, 150 were incoming MBA students who completed a required course in executive skills and were exposed to the pedagogy described earlier. Of these, 102 took the course in the condensed, summer format and thus received the pedagogy in an immersed fashion. Ninety-six students were not exposed to the pedagogy; of these 33 took the course in the condensed, summer format. Those not exposed to the pedagogy were undergraduate seniors in a capstone management course. MBA students were not available for control groups, since each of them was required to take the executive skills course. All students took the classes under the supervision of one instructor, thus there was no instructor/pedagogy confound. At this university, 70% of incoming MBA students enroll directly upon completing their undergraduate education rather than accruing work experience, thus the age and maturity difference between the MBAs and undergraduates was minimal.

Design. Our basic research design is a 2*2 factorial experiment, with students either receiving the pedagogy or not, and taking the course in either condensed format or not. Those exposed to the pedagogy took an assessment center pre-test in the first or second class prior to any formal instruction, followed by behavioral skills teaching interventions spanning 8-10 weeks, or three weeks when the course was offered in the summer format, and concluding with an assessment center post-test. Other activities and modules would also be administered during the teaching modules; generally, one class period (three hours, four times a week in the summer and four hours, once a week in fall and spring) was allocated per assessment center component.

The pretest/posttest format had the benefits of: 1) establishing a baseline of skill measurement, 2) focusing upon selected skill areas as learning targets (these were active communication, teams and teamwork, decision-making, and leadership initiative), 3) establishing post treatment levels of skill measurement, and, 4) reinforcing student appreciation of the experiential learning experiences. The two assessment centers were similar in format but different in content. This allowed for consistent skill assessment while providing a differing set of performance challenges, and minimized test-retest contamination with true skill acquisition.

The assessment center utilized measures the skill components of: 1) active communication (verbal and non-verbal), 2) teams and teamwork, 3) decision-making, 4) leadership initiative, and 5) planning/organizing. These skill measures are derived from a series of activities students complete as part of the assessment center. These behavioral activity components consist of: 1) an in-basket, 2) a team meeting for an executive hiring decision, 3) a team meeting to discuss business expansion/new market opportunities, and, 4) an individual speech. All team meetings and the individual speech are video-taped for subsequent blind scoring by an impartial outside source and skill assessment company. This process yields a score for each student on the behavioral activity components just mentioned as well as individual scores derived from assessing the target measures of active communication, teamwork, decision-making and leadership initiative. The specific assessment center we employed has been validated and employed in other published studies (Rode et al., 2002; Rubin et al., 2005).

Use of the assessment center on a pre-test/post-test basis allowed for comparison of student performance across the behavioral components and the assessed managerial skills. The content of the executive skills course between the two assessment center administrations was to teach to the managerial skills identified and measured. Each skill acquisition module was conducted in a comprehensive experiential learning format combining: 1) cognitive frameworks, 2) skill component identification, 3) opportunity for skill internalization, 4) behavioral practice, and 5) collective and individualized feedback on process and outcomes of the behavioral exercise. Some exercises had both direct and vicarious/observational experiential components.

Variables and analyses. Assessment center scores were provided for each student for both pretest and posttest and compared to an extensive database of students and professionals who had experienced the center. Raw scores for each activity and behavioral component were tallied. From these raw scores, percentiles were derived for overall performance as well as for each of the five dimensions (leadership, communication, planning/organizing, decision-making, and teamwork). Thus, our six *dependent variables* were the second assessment center administration (the posttest) for overall performance, and each of the five dimensions. Our *independent variables* included dummy variables for exposure to the pedagogy and for summer enrollment, and the test variable was an interaction of these two dummies. Thus, while we expected either pedagogy (long semester or compressed summer session) to contribute to skill acquisition, we believed the pedagogy and the summer session would interact together in synergistic fashion. Our *control variable* included the pretest scores for the corresponding dependent variable (overall or specific dimension), which was crucial in not only controlling for pre-existing differences but also for any possible regression to the mean effects. Descriptives and correlations for all variables are summarized in Table 1. Readers can contact the first author to receive the full hierarchical OLS regression data that was generated in testing the hypotheses.

The data from Table 2 indicate that behavioral immersion was generally associated with increased improvement in assessment center scores beyond the generalized improvement noted via experiential teaching. We present main effect terms for exposure to the pedagogy generally and exposure to the immersive, condensed environment, but it is the interaction of the two that tests our hypothesis. Overall improvement for the sample when exposed to the pedagogy in an immersive environment was significant (b=20.48, p<.001). Significant improvement was noted in four of the five dimensions: decision-making (b=16.93, p<.001), planning and organizing, (b=18.99, p<.001), communication (b=33.63, p<.001) and teamwork, (b=16.43, p<.01). We will present possible reasons for the lack of findings on leadership initiation in the discussion section, but our test hypothesis was supported. Excepting the area of leadership initiation, behavioral immersion in executive skills was correlated with increased skill acquisition improvement.

DISCUSSION

It is curious that the learning literature, particularly the experiential learning literature, has not specifically addressed the issues of behavioral immersion, learning intensity, and time. In this paper, we sought to establish the important roles of behavior and affect in learning, and to argue that learning is generally optimized when all three components are present to a high degree. Further, in examining executive education, such as improving executive interpersonal skills of MBA students, we believe that behavior and affect are indispensable to the learning environment and that behavioral immersion is a valuable tool. Because the literature is not well developed, we took a broad approach in considering experiential learning, its CEB components, and the issue of behavioral immersion.

To test these ideas, we considered an ongoing program at a major Southwestern University that requires a course in executive skills of its MBA students, and examined the relative improvement in skill acquisition between traditional semester students and compressed, summer students. Using assessment centers in a pre-test/pedagogy/post-test fashion, we found that, despite the arguments that learning is maximized when there is

time to digest input (Kolb, 1984), skill acquisition was superior in the summer format.

This finding is relevant not only to MBA curriculum designers, but is broadly consistent with corporate training, where workshops and 'boot camps' typically rely on behavioral immersion, and so support this philosophy. We do believe that the seemingly contradictory ideas of immersion and gestation may both be valid, depending on the nature of the learning input. While we strongly believe that the CEB components generally need to be present for learning maximization, we acknowledge that different learning constructs may require a preeminent emphasis on one or two dimensions; in other words, the three components work interactively but may have different weights and importance depending on the material. For example, in a freshman physics class, where initial cognitive demands are extremely intense, time off between classes for not only complex but highly abstract constructs that are entirely new to most students may be essential. However, for executive skill education, where behavioral integration and internalization into repertoires are central elements of learning effectiveness, what is crucial is the concept of the whole person (Rogers, 1961) and the utilization of the processes of behavioral immersion. In experiential learning situations such as executive skills in MBA programs, behavioral and emotional components are on at least equal footing with cognitive aspects of learning, and arguably even more central. Ongoing day-to-day interaction provides stronger behavioral and affective reinforcement through immersion, and allows for greater internalization of cognitions and behaviors, which is clearly the pedagogical goal.

Another important limitation is the other side of issues discussed above. Our findings do not generalize to all learning environments, rather they are most relevant as the behavioral and emotional components of learning take on primary rather than supporting roles. There is obviously no 'smoking gun' pedagogy that works for all classes, curricula, and instructors. Nevertheless, we believe that when behaviors are central to skill acquisition, as they clearly are in MBA management education, behavioral immersion and learning intensity are indispensable assets in the learning process. In our discussion of a parallel learning environment where immersion is thought to be valuable (language skills), it is important to note that while language acquisition certainly requires extensive new cognitions, language development occurs in a rich cultural and behavioral context (i.e. linguistic expression of cognitions, behaviors, and emotions). We do not therefore believe that this parallel is a mere coincidence, because management skills also occur in a rich cultural and behavioral context – the organization.

Future research in this area needs to consider behavioral immersion in varied pedagogical contexts to develop boundary conditions for the theory and findings presented in this paper, as we suspect those boundary conditions are important and will help enrich theory. Implicit in these contexts are the relative predominance of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional aspects of learning, so the individual and interactive effects of these dimensions may become more informed. In addition, the issue of time is quite interesting. While we compared a traditional semester format to a compressed summer format, behavioral immersion could be even more intensive, as in the case of a one-week corporate training session that comprises roughly the same number of hours. Time is also a central issue in learning retention. If, as we believe, behavioral immersion is an effective learning tool, then skill retention at graduation and beyond should be higher and should be correlated with programmatic, job, and career outcomes.

In conclusion, we believe that immersion creates the proverbial 'strong situation' for learning. However, all of us who have taught this particular course have confronted students who resist the class, from attitudes of perceived obviousness, to extreme overconfidence, to thinking the course is downright B.S. Learning executive skills centrally involves the Lewinian (1951) concept of unfreezing – confronting implicit theories of leadership and teams, creating a perception where skills such as these are not already maximized among overconfident MBA students and that improvement is not only possible but also needed. The opportunity to meet with students day-to-day, in our anecdotal experience, seems to create a better opportunity for students to become open to behavioral skills learning. Immersion creates not only a strong situation but also a sustained, intensive alternate reality where implicit theories and overconfidence can be directly and consistently challenged and overcome, thus generating emotional activation and momentum and receptiveness to the cognitive and behavioral components of executive skill education. We hope that this perspective adds to the repertoire of ABSEL scholars and to practitioners of experiential learning and business simulation.

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Descriptives and Correlations
Table 1

	M	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1 Summer	.43	.50													
2 Pretest overall	61.09	24.73	-.15*												
3 Pretest leadership	60.00	27.76	-.05	.75**											
4 Pretest decision-making	66.28	24.2	-.15*	.74**	.47**										
5 Pretest plan/organizing	56.08	26.31	-.15	.66**	.37**	.42**									
6 Pretest communication	59.31	27.68	-.04	.68**	.47**	.32**	.34**								
7 Pretest teamwork	50.64	26.33	-.07	.41**	.19*	.20**	.13*	.01							
8 Posttest overall	73.85	24.69	-.11+	.48**	.29**	.42**	.31**	.38**	.16*						
9 Posttest leadership	69.05	23.68	.03	.40**	.23**	.32**	.27**	.32**	.17*	.77**					
10 Posttest decision-making	73.78	24.57	-.04	.35**	.14*	.33**	.19*	.30**	.17*	.87**	.60**				
11 Posttest plan/organizing	73.97	25.18	-.00	.39**	.25**	.31**	.27**	.29**	.16*	.77**	.47**	.59**			
12 Posttest communication	70.51	26.63	-.41**	.43**	.29**	.39**	.30**	.33**	.08**	.76**	.52**	.59**	.49**		
13 Posttest teamwork	48.91	26.37	.15*	.18*	.16*	.15*	.07	.09	.14*	.44**	.32**	.32**	.29**	.12+	
14 Experiential teaching	.59	.49	.07	.11+	.09	.14*	-.04	.02	.13*	.46*	.32*	.45**	.45**	.27**	.20*

N=246. + indicates p<.10, * indicates p<.05, ** indicates p<.01, *** indicates p<.001

Hierarchical OLS Regressions of Post-test Scores on Experiential Teaching
TABLE 2

DV	Overall		Leadership		Decision-Making		Plan/Organize		Communication		Teamwork	
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2
Pre-test	.39***	.38**	.27***	.17***	.23***	.24***	.23***	.25***	.31***	.19***	.33***	.16*
Exp. Teach		13.70***		.16***		14.66***		16.08***		4.43+		2.64*
Summer		-18.00***		13.76		-13.37***		-12.83**		-44.55***		-2.84
Exp*Sum		20.48***		2.30		16.93***		18.99***		33.03***		16.43**
R2	.20	.44	.09	.14	.07	.30	.07	.31	.11	.44	.03	.09
ΔR		.05		.01		.03		.06		.13		.06
F	159.52***	48.11***	65.94***	10.16	46.50***	26.05***	48.37	27.07***	81.35***	46.59***	78.04***	6.25***

1) Note: Coefficients are unstandardized regression coefficients.
2) N=246. + indicates p<.10, * indicates p<.05, ** indicates p<.01, *** indicates p<.001