

# THOUGHTS ON HOW TO MOTIVATE STUDENTS EXPERIENTIALLY

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## ABSTRACT

*Previous work presented at ABSEL has dealt with the need to motivate students and has presented theoretical perspectives such as Loewenstein's (1994) Curiosity Gap Theory and Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory to provide insight as to how one might attack this problem. We offer several examples of experiential exercises which have been used in conjunction with these theories to motivate students.*

## INTRODUCTION

The need to motivate students has received coverage at ABSEL, and some theoretical bases suggested in terms of providing insight as to how to motivate students. This paper will offer two alternative frameworks (Loewenstein's Curiosity Gap Model and Deci and Ryan's Self Determination Theory) and discuss the application of experiential approaches that have been found effective in the past.

## STIMULATING CURIOSITY: LET'S SHAKE SOME TREES

Thomas Paine (1776) wrote, "The long habit of not thinking a thing wrong creates the superficial impression that it is right." Maybe as never before our job as educators is to get students to think, and to rethink what they think they know. The technological rate of change dwarfs that faced by those of us in ABSEL when we were being educated. How can we prepare our students for the future, so that they will still be vibrant contributors in ten or twenty years? Obviously, they cannot be competitive if they are locked into a certain way of seeing things; they have to be flexible and capable of changing modes of thought quickly. We suggest that we need to shake students' trees and make them more adaptive in their approach to the world. We also acknowledge that we need to provide alternative streams of logic to help the student once the tree has been shaken.

When one considers what is being provided to our students, one can argue that it is a perspective about how to make decisions and handle problems in an ever-changing world. We have them do case studies, not so they learn

solutions that can later be implemented in other situations, but so that they can replicate the business version of the scientific process to analyze situations. What are the alternatives? What are we uncertain about? What are the pros and cons of the various alternatives, especially considering the different situations that may occur? Creative adaptations of this approach will allow them to move forward. But all of us are lazy, and sooner or later (sooner, obviously) fall prey to our bounded rationality. How do we fight that? How do we get our students to fight that? As Friedman (2005) noted, they will have to be adaptable, and constantly seeking to acquire new skills, knowledge, and expertise that allow them to create value. We need to prepare students to deal with requisite variety issues, so that they learn how to generate outside-the-box alternatives. No one will have lifetime employment, but they need to develop lifetime employability, and learning how to learn is the most important skill they can acquire.

One obvious weapon we can provide our students is curiosity. Academics have to be curious. Clearly we are curious people, or maybe just strange, as we seek careers to maximize freedom of choice of topics to ponder rather than to maximize salaries or position. But that desire to ponder is engrained in us, and we are often frustrated when we do not find it to be engrained in our students. To prepare our students for a positive future, we must engender curiosity in those who are not doing it for themselves. Curious people will learn how to learn and repeat the process again and again. Loewenstein's (1994) Curiosity Gap Model suggests that people love to close curiosity gaps (solving puzzles, for example) and the more they do that, the more likely they are to see more gaps. We argue that our experiential learning orientations provide us with tools to widen the curiosity gap enough that our underachieving students are teased into closing the gap. It should be noted that the Model also asserts that learned helplessness is likely to occur if the gap between what they know and what they want to know is too great: however, we perceive that the more common problem encountered is that students see no reason to alter their preconceptions (and that their curiosity gaps are too small). We should also acknowledge that even a manageable curiosity gap may not motivate students if the topic is completely outside the realm of their interest or if they are strongly locked into a previously held perspective. Shaking trees should help with the latter issue, and the nature of the

experiential teaching process should help reduce the former issue as a problem (Gentry and McGinnis 2007).

Gentry et al. (2001) introduced Loewenstein's (1994) Curiosity Gap to ABSEL, and Gentry et al. (2002) found empirical support that those students with moderate curiosity gaps perform better. They called for future work that would deal with the stimulation of curiosity in order to motivate students. This paper is in part a response to that call.

## **EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISES TO STIMULATE CURIOSITY**

We will discuss a number of exercises which we see as being capable of shaking students' trees in terms of making them rethink what they thought they knew.

### **ENDOWMENT EFFECT**

You bring coffee mugs to class. One third of the students are given mugs. The other two thirds are shown the mugs. Those given the mugs are asked how much they would sell them for. Half of the other group are asked how much money would it take for them to be indifferent between having the mug and having the money. The last group is asked how much they would pay for the mug. The owners say \$7.12, according to Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler (1991), whereas the other two groups say about \$3.00. Since these are all methods used to determine indifference points, why does ownership of the mug yield so much more value? This can lead to discussions of the role of ownership globally (privatization) or to lease versus own consumer contexts.

### **DOLLAR OPTION**

You auction a dollar to the class, with the rule that whoever bids on it has to pay their final bid, regardless of whether it is the highest bid in the class. In most cases (not so in the time I tried it—you may want to have a stooge in the class) people will go to \$4 or \$5 as, if there is another bidder, at least you get the dollar to compensate. This is a great example of overcommitment to bad decisions and the failure to ignore sunk costs. Commitment to a decision made can be interpreted as being principled, but bad decisions can cripple. The pace of the flattened world is such that there is not a forgiving world out there that will allow things to move forward without penalty for very long.

### **RON FRAZER'S SIMPLE INVENTORY SIMULATION**

Years ago at ABSEL one of the authors went to a game demonstration session with Ron Frazer, who had developed a number of simple games written in Basic, which he used in classes as early as in the 1960s. There were only two of us there, and we played a simple inventory control game, based on notions of EOQ (economic order quantity). The stockout costs were horrible, so you needed to set your

reorder point very high and to have a lot of buffer inventory, as holding costs were more limited. Just in time has made these issues far less relevant, though stockouts will always exist as will inventory. Anyway, we experienced the situation that we were rooting against sales (hoping for a low demand) in order to avoid stockouts. It hit us that we are marketers and teach that demand is to be stimulated. The need for intraorganization integration became quite clear. There have been many instances when product demand has been overstimulated, given limited production capabilities. By the time that capacity has come on board, the attractiveness of the product may have waned. To some extent, the Prius is an example.

### **PEOPLE LIE**

At the Reno ABSEL years ago, Duane Hoover, former ABSEL president and then current Coors Beer distributor in Reno, discussed the interface between academe and the real world, noting that people are dishonest and lie to you. 'The check is in the mail.' One of the authors found confirmation in this as he was using a game, Drock World, in which dishonesty among groups occurred. The game taught channel aspects and required firms to negotiate quantity and price for shipments. If one firm failed to turn in a form representing the transaction or, worse, turned in another one with a better price with a different firm, the other firm in the original transaction either did not receive its goods or was stuck with goods that it thought it had sold. Real anger, and not simulated anger, was very observable. One can discuss channel conflict forever without the students really getting it, but they get it when they experience a betrayal by another firm.

The failure to see negotiated transactions implemented is startling. Bureaucratic errors should be handled by the administrator, shouldn't they? Maybe not, if they create a good learning situation. Students are aware that some people are greedy and opportunistic, but surely not the largely homogeneous group of students in their class. That other students do lie and cheat in a situation where there is no real return for doing so is food for thought, as is it not more likely to do so when there are big bucks riding on the decisions?

### **IMPLEMENTING THE CURIOSITY GAP**

Gentry et al. (2002) provide preliminary support that students with moderate curiosity gaps perform better in class. This section has discussed how experiential methods can be used to grow very limited curiosity gaps (common among underachievers) into moderate gaps. We encourage the development of many more experiential exercises that have the goal of getting students to rethink what they know and believe. Let's shake some trees.

## INCREASING STUDENT ROLES IN THE DESIGN OF EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISES

A missing ingredient with many simulations is a focus on those items that are intrinsically motivating to students. Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory suggests that when the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are provided, people will try to attain mastery, be more motivated, and be more spontaneously interested, maybe even curious. Autonomy relates to the notion of volition. If students feel the activity in which they participate is self-driven, they are more likely to achieve intrinsic motivation. If students feel a sense of being able to perform the activity in a successful yet challenging atmosphere, their interest will be maintained and intrinsic motivation kindled. If students know their peers or relevant social groups value something, they too will value it, which is known as relatedness. Knowing this, we should do a better job of creating simulations that are more self-driven and co-produced, where students are allowed to develop competence, and be involved in activities that are valued by their peers.

To establish volition and competence, simulations that allow more student choice is a start. Though we as academicians often scoff at the chance to allow students to dictate or least help produce course content, the experience could be beneficial to normally uninterested or disengaged students. To begin, simulations that focus on negotiation and developing negotiations skills not only make students aware of unethical behavior and market governance structures, but also foster competence through critical thinking especially when the object of negotiation is important to the student. Page and Mukherjee (2006), for example, do this through their focus on negotiations that are of personal value to the students, such as a major purchase, a romantic relationship, or work-related relationship. In preparing for the negotiation, for which they must later discuss in writing (a competence-enhancing skill), the students must prepare goals, strategies, and expectations, and examine the scenario from the other person's perspective. These simulations personalize the activity, make the students think from the other negotiator's perspective, and allow the students to see the many different possibilities that will exist for them in the workplace. Most importantly, the choice flexibility and the personal relevance of the negotiation topic enhance volition. Shami et al. (2004) run a similar volitional and competence-building task through the use of their Island Telecom simulation in which students are allowed to choose roles in the company, the government, or the media. The ethical dilemmas the students face are fictional, but are handled with passion and because the ethics in questions are handled with other students rather than the instructor, students are likely to feel more involvement and more control over the simulation.

Another activity that could trigger interest and curiosity as well as build competence is one geared toward negotiating with foreign cultures. One example covered previously at ABSEL is the BaFa BaFa game (Shirts, 1977). This involves a role play in which students break into two

cultures with different yet subtle characteristics. Students in each group are briefed about their cultural beliefs, have time to perfect competence with the differences as they interact amongst themselves, and then they interact with students who are unfamiliar with the culture. From firsthand experience, students appear to be naturally inquisitive about other cultures in this exercise and appear motivated to engage in the activity because they helped produce and enact it.

While simulations that build volition and competence are somewhat easy to draw upon, it is more difficult to trace simulations that foster relatedness or that are valued by social groups which students respect. Ones that would work, however, and help stimulate intrinsic motivation and curiosity are ones that involve brands and companies that the students get to select and then taught through teaching means and media that are preferred by the students. Not only will these enhance the relatedness aspects, but the volitional ones as well because students have control (or at least more control) over the educational process. Co-production, the concept being suggested here, is a broadly employed strategy in marketing as companies continually search for new ways to establish empowering relationships with their customers.

Though we at ABSEL have focused much on innovative delivery techniques, perhaps what we need is more incorporation of student views in the design and development of methods that conform to the way that modern students learn. Students today have at their disposal more technology, more information, and more ways to gather and integrate information than ever before. Often we become obsessed that our way of learning "back in the day" (to use today's youth-oriented vernacular) was the best and that we learned things more deeply. Has the human mind changed in the last few decades? Has the scope of what is to be learned been broadened that greatly? Getting educators to learn the technology and to use it in ways that students learn and become inspired are musts, and ABSELers, for the most part, have jumped on board with some of the ways students prefer to learn with the latest technology and techniques. Sometimes our greatest learning simulations and exercises result when the students get a chance to teach or co-produce the simulation or learning experience because it increases volition and responsibility.

As stated by Bendapudi and Leone (2003), co-production has been used by marketers for a long time (e.g., grocery stores allowing customers to scan and bag their own groceries and photography stores allowing customers to reproduce, crop, and enlarge pictures). The service-exchange perspective, upon which co-production is based, is focused on creating relationships. It is gaining momentum in marketing and marketing education and replacing the goods-oriented perspective as being fundamental to economic exchange (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Co-production works not necessarily because it frees time and costs from a production standpoint, but because a person assigns responsibility for co-produced items (Bendapudi and Leone, 2003). Co-production also creates greater satisfaction because the person helping to produce or

perform a function gets to see how his or her task or creation contributes to the overall process (Hackman and Oldham, 1976).

Some critics of the co-production may contend that a drawback of this approach is that the instructor loses control over the content and processes involved in the simulation. However, as with co-production in mainstream marketing, parameters can be put into place that limit the amount of co-production that is allowed. For example, in the above simulation on dealing with foreign ethics, students could still deal with the same set of ethical dilemmas and questions, but also have the option of deciding for themselves where they would like the simulation to take place, thus allowing for them to research the different ethical codes, standards, and norms that are unique to each culture. In this fashion, they are not only working with a real (as opposed to a fictional country) but also learning cultural elements about a society in which they are genuinely interested.

## SECTION DISCUSSION

The principles set forth in Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory are a start to not only making students rekindle their curiosity (and thus close the curiosity gap), but also the impetus toward a new paradigm in business education in which students co-produce the material they learn. Though we as educators have a difficult time letting go of the wheel, so-to-speak, the students will ultimately learn more, participate more deeply, and understand the inner workings of problems, situations, and simulations, as they never have before. The keys are to create environments that establish autonomy, create competence, and that are socially respected and valued by peers.

## DISCUSSION

We have offered two rich theoretical perspectives that have interesting insights for experiential learning. Both focus on learning, and the learner, and not just on teaching. We must realize that it is the student who learns, and focus on the processes used to learn. Yet, we also acknowledge the critical role of the instructor, who determines content, sets goals, and provides expertise to handle subtle differences involved in student-desired context changes. Rather than implementing the traditional focus on a one-way flow of information down to the student (the metaphor of pouring knowledge into an empty vessel), we have discussed the management of an active interface with students and what one can do to "activate" those students.

A major point is that human interactions are needed during the applications of these pedagogies. The second approach discussed asserts that those student inputs should be incorporated at the design stage, as co-production will increase long-term student involvement. The first approach discussed asserts that basic human interactions can be used to point out deviations from the "rational man" expectations of students.

The dynamics associated with the co-production process may threaten the instructor's self-perceived control in the classroom, but ABSElers have faced this phenomenon before and learned the benefits associated with it. One of those benefits is the generation of "teaching moments" when the "ah ha's" of a self-discovered curiosity gap take place. The instructor needs to anticipate those moments to the extent possible (consistent with the goal setting aspects considered when selecting or designing the exercise), and to be vigilant to unexpected ones as well. Clearly this process can represent the best of experiential learning, as it insures that we instructors are continuing to learn and to close our own curiosity gap.

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