

ARMCHAIR TRAVEL: AN ACTIVE LEARNING APPROACH TO
INCREASING GLOBAL AWARENESS AND PARTICIPANT SELF-EFFICACY.

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ABSTRACT

With the increasing emphasis on student involvement in learning and the internalization of the curriculum, business schools are faced with the challenge of providing an active learning approach to global awareness. However, student's low self- efficacy involving international experiences influences their participation and performance in these endeavors. This paper describes a classroom exercise designed to increase student's self-efficacy regarding global experiences. It uses an active learning approach and focuses on a hypothetical international travel experience.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, reports on the state of higher education have challenged both the way we think about teaching and learning (Austin, 1985; Cross, 1987; Serva and Fuller 2004) and the importance of global awareness (Friedman, 1999; Goleman, 1998). Business schools have been pressured to improve their educational outcomes and prepare students to be globally aware, lifelong learners, adaptable team players, and critical thinkers. (Servan and Fuller, 2004). Additionally, the accreditation process for business schools requires that faculty and students be actively involved in the learning process (AACSB standards #13 and #14) and provide a foundation in international business practices (AACSB standards #13).

This emphasis on global awareness is expressed by Friedman (1999) who insists that globalization is not just some economic fad or passing trend. It is the compilation of millions of concrete and specific action, reactions, behaviors, attitudes and results. A fundamental aspect of this environment is the employee's ability to understand, appreciate and adapt to other cultures (Goleman, 1998).

The concept of active learning has been borrowed and developed from the education literature and refers to the direct involvement of students in their own learning process. It is defined as almost any activity that substantially involves students with the course content through talking and listening, writing, reading and reflecting. Each of these

elements, in their own way, involves a different type of thinking and help students create new mental structures.

One of these mental structures affected is self-efficacy. This construct was first introduced by psychologist Albert Bandura (1977) and has gained importance as a predictor of individual behavior related to performance and choice. Bandura (1986) posited that individuals tend to attempt activities that they believe they can handle and avoid tasks and situations that they believe exceed their capabilities. This trait like characteristic has been defined as individuals "perception of their ability to perform across a variety of different situations" (Judge, Erez & Bono, 1998). It has been shown to be associated with higher levels of performance, effort and persistence (Gist and Mitchell, 1992) as well as a determinant of choice behavior (Bandura, 1986). In addition, an individual's general level of self confidence across a variety of tasks is positively related to one's task specific self-efficacy (Eden, 1988; Chen, Gully & Eden, 2001).

According to Bandura (1991) the perception of self-efficacy is malleable and determined by a number of different factors. These include mastery experience, vicarious learning (modeling) and social persuasion (Bandura 1986). Mastery experience involves allowing the individual to experience success on a task: vicarious learning involves interacting with "successful" others to learn appropriate strategies for task accomplishment; and social persuasion is receiving words of encouragement. Mastery experience has been determined to be the most effective method of improving self-efficacy (Wood & Bandura, 1989) and verbal encouragement has been found to be the least effective (McCarthy, 1997).

Foreign language immersion courses have shown that immersing an individual in a different culture and forcing them to participate, engage, question, express and react is an ideal way to learn a different culture. But, many college students have not had nor do they anticipate having the experience of traveling in a foreign country. And, while monetary costs create barriers for student involvement in international experiences, many times it is the fear of international travel that creates the biggest barrier. One of the greatest challenges in recruiting students for study

Developments in Business Simulation and Experiential Learning, Volume 34, 2007

abroad programs has been convincing the students that they can function and enjoy an extended stay in a foreign country. This low self-efficacy regarding international experience leads them to avoid global situations and lessens their potential for educational gains and for a more cosmopolitan viewpoint of life.

The lack of experience may even be the catalyst for their refusal to consider a role or a career that involves travel abroad. Their world view is very limited. The deficiency creates the self image that they are incapable of conducting themselves in new and unfamiliar foreign environments. A realistic travel project that allows a mastery experience can provide the student with valuable insight and broaden the student's impression of the world and their place in that world. It also has the potential to change their self image and subsequently increase their self-efficacy regarding the experience of international situations.

ARMCHAIR TRAVEL PROJECT

The following describes a classroom exercise, the Armchair Travel project, designed to increase student's self-efficacy regarding global experiences. It uses an active learning approach to expose students to the institutions, mechanisms, and citizens of other countries. It focuses on a hypothetical international travel experience that necessitates the development of creativity, critical thinking and cognitive knowledge.

Student Learning Outcomes

Student learning outcomes for the Armchair Travel project are ambitious. Upon successful completion of this hands-on project, a student should:

- Be more acquainted with working as a team (See Addendum A.).
- Be able to use the Internet to acquire information that is not readily available from other sources.
- Be more adept at critical thinking.
- Write and speak creatively.
- Create a feasible time table that encompasses educational and/or business goals with a personal agenda (art, music, museums, theater)
- Understand an exchange rate table.
- Understand, interpret, and explain the impact of fluctuating exchange rates.
- Understand the cost associated with changing financial instruments during travel and conducting business during travel.
- Understand the impact of exchange rates on a country's exports and imports.

In addition, indirectly, the student should experience a mastery performance international activity thus increasing their self-efficacy regarding such endeavors. The Armchair Travel Project can effectively be used in a variety of courses. Issues addressing individual differences, employee diversity, economic environments, sociology, international

business, international finance, philosophy, art appreciation, music appreciation, theater, and history can be explored.

Project Description

Before the project begins, interest in the travel project and international travel is generated by giving PowerPoint presentations about foreign locations. Guest speakers, some of them students from prior study abroad programs, share experiences, recommend websites, books, and even locations for weekend experiences.

For the project, students are asked to pretend to be participating in a five-week study abroad program in which they have four three-day weekends. As a group, they need to come to a consensus for one planned weekend travel excursion within the United Kingdom.

The class meets periodically in a computer laboratory where each student is given a digitized folder containing instructions for five assignments (see Appendix 1). The first assignment requires them to read a general set of assumptions needed in planning their excursions, and describes the project folder that will be due at the end of the lesson. The second assignment requires students to begin their research, print at least one page from a useful website, and write a personal journal entry describing an event, a piece of art, a museum, a tour, a piece of architecture, a cathedral, or a tour. To assist the students in writing their journal entry, they are permitted to use printed or electronic travel guides. The digitized folder includes a list of recommended websites. The third assignment requires the group to prepare a time budget for the seventy-two hour adventure.

The fourth and fifth assignments develop the ability to use foreign currency, evaluate currency changes and the impact of appreciation and depreciation upon trade between different countries. Assignment four is to develop a financial budget (in both dollars and in pounds). Students use the *Wall Street Journal* exchange rate table they were issued to convert their \$225 budget into pounds. They start their trip with the same amount of dollars but each traveler has a different amount of pounds since each exchange rate table differs. Expenditures per participant in the group may be the same in pounds, but will be a different dollar amount depending upon individual exchange rate tables.

The fifth assignment has seven requirements and requires each student to evaluate the impact of different currency rates upon tourist and the foreign tourist industry. Each group will have a traveler who has the disadvantage of a depreciated currency and their \$225 will not buy as many pounds as their traveling partners. One traveler in the group will have the advantage of an appreciated currency and their \$225 buys more pounds than their traveling partners. However, this assignment requires each traveler to examine their opportunities and those of their project partners as U.S. importers of products made within the United Kingdom and then as a U.S. exporters of products to the United Kingdom. Students learn that benefits and costs exist for both an appreciated currency and for a depreciated currency.

Developments in Business Simulation and Experiential Learning, Volume 34, 2007

Project Debrief

When the final deliverable is submitted, it is easy to introduce the possibility of traveling in a study abroad program, on vacation, or as a business undertaking. The reflective component is very valuable to self-efficacy. It should challenge the individual to make a diagnosis of their educational competence including both the external environmental exposure and their internal capabilities. The student can be guided into recognizing their ability to function abroad. They can be simply asked, "Why not execute the plan you have worked so hard to develop?" They recognize that they can develop plans for a short visit or for an extended stay abroad. The Armchair Travel project experience affirms that they could flourish within a foreign environment. It is more likely that each will now look forward to interacting with those who are culturally different. Their interest has been stirred in historical settings that takes one back more than two centuries and gives one a sense of times gone by. They wish to be able to experience the settings and events that bind them to their ancestors and their ancestor's struggles. Each recognizes that history, literature, theatre, and art come to life and seem bigger when physically in the setting of their origin.

CONCLUSION

College graduates need to understand the impact of the global environment upon our national standing, domestic economy, history, fine arts, and their career and personal security. The Armchair Travel project strengthens the ability to convey to college students of most majors both cultural and economic knowledge of international concerns. Even more important it provides an affirming active learning experience regarding international experiences. While no quantitative data has yet been collected, qualitative surveys suggest that this mastery experience has increased the students perception of their ability to function in international settings and as such should result in higher self-efficacy. It is hoped that this increase in self-efficacy will lead to choice behavior that results in actual exposure to international environments and their undertakings in life will take on a different perspective because of the realization that they "can do it."

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Appendix 1
The Armchair Travel Project

First Assignment: Review of the United Kingdom Three-Day Weekend

1. You have \$225 (which you will have to exchange for pounds). Each person, not team, will have his or her own exchange table. One pound usually cost between \$1.50 and \$1.90. You will use *The Wall Street Journal* Exchange Rate Table issued to you.
2. You are at the Roehampton Institution (in a college dormitory) near Wimbledon. You take bus 79 (pass provided) to either Putney Bridge or to Hammersmith tube station. It is about a fifteen minute bus ride. You then must determine your route from this tube station to the British Railroad station for departure from London. Tube stations are located underground. You simple clime stares or use the escalator to the upper level where the very large British Railroad station of the same name is located. Determine what time you will leave the dormitory and how long it will take you to travel to your destination.
3. Your group must travel at least one night away from London, England. Use the British Railroad pass provided for eight days of travel as part of your Study Abroad Program.
4. You must budget your time and money for at least three days of travel, 72 hours (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday). However, you may leave as early as 4:00 P.M. Thursday and should if you are traveling to Ireland, Wales, or Scotland.
5. You must provide a list of resources for each outing (travel guide, page#) (website or copy of the web page), etc.
6. If you are on campus, you are provided breakfast each morning from 7:00 – 8:00 a.m. Dinner is served each evening from 6:00 -7:00 p.m. Sunday through Thursday.
7. File folders and travel books are available during our class period. The material can be used during the class or by a group between two class periods.
8. You may tour most major cities by paying seven pounds for a day's usage of the local transportation called "Guide Friday." The tour in the double-decker bus is usually good, and your ticket can also be used as a bus pass for twenty-four hours from time of purchase. Your bus/tube pass from London is only good in London.

Second Assignment: Using the Internet for the United Kingdom Three-Day Weekend

In your "armchair travels", use the Internet to begin a look at what is available in London, England. Today's work will support your future efforts. In the near future each traveler in your group must write a detailed description of one of the following: one event, one museum, one tour, one cathedral, one picture, or one series of art work, etc. (number 8 of the first assignment). Today each member of your group needs to locate on the internet a detailed description of one of those tourist options. Be sure you get a physical address. Your description will be written as through your adventure was in person rather than in a chair. It is recommended that you try to locate the directions. Try to use the underground (tube, subway) as much as possible. Bus schedules tend to be difficult to use and you do not have enough money for cabs.

When you write your description for the report, it will be as a journal entry would be made from a personal visit. Be sure to use "Grammatik" in WordPerfect or "Spelling and Grammar" in Microsoft Word. Everything is to be computer typed in 14-font, double spaced.

Third Assignment – Your Itinerary

The group may submit one time schedule. It must include details. You will leave Roehampton by bus 72 on the quarter hour (give exact time). You will travel to either Hammersmith or Putney Bridge tube station. From that tube station you will take "name of tube line" to "name of tube station," until you take a tube line to a British Railroad Station. You will record the day and time you depart London by rail and the day and time you arrive at your destination. You must be as detailed with your return plans. These plans should be recorded using the format in the digitized file named "Budget Format England." This file will provide the format for both your group time budget and your individual financial budget.

Developments in Business Simulation and Experiential Learning, Volume 34, 2007

You record the location at which you plan to eat. You must eat at least one good meal a day. You record the entertainment and tourist sights at each location; include times (the expense will later be noted later in your financial budget). Record your overnight accommodations, locations, and a brief description. Include a copy of your source or the Internet address. You must account for Friday morning to Sunday evening.

Fourth Assignment: Financial Budget

Assignment 1 introduces you to the travel project. Assignment 2 introduces you to doing the research necessary to plan a trip abroad. Assignment 3 introduces you to setting up a time schedule so you use your time efficiently. The process should be based on a consensus of the group and should meet the needs of the individuals in your group. This assignment begins with group work. You are to make a time budget and list all anticipated expenditures and their "pound price." You may complete this portion for the three days as a group.

Once you agree upon the items, events, etc. and their pound price (source quoted), each member must then separately convert the pound prices listed into dollar expenditures based on their own *Wall Street Journal* exchange table. This conversion into dollars is individual work. Each traveler must use their own exchange table. You recorded the exchange of \$225 dollars for pounds using the ten thousands listed. Include a copy of your exchange table in the project folder near this personalized budget. As you spend the money you can round your dollars to the nearest cent. Individually you must record a budget for each day. The budget must include the pound price per listing and the dollar price per listing. Now summarize your expenditures in pounds and in dollars for the three days by categories of food, transportation, entertainment, souvenirs, lodging, etc.

Assignment Five: Individual Currency Evaluation

Each individual traveler will compare their currency to those traveling in the group and will submit their own findings.

1. Begin this section of the folder with a list of each *Wall Street Journal* exchange rate by date for each traveler.
2. You need to evaluate the exchange rates over time for those dates listed. Did the dollar appreciate or depreciate? This means, did the dollar buy more (appreciate) or did the dollar buy less (depreciate) between the first two dates listed? Did the dollar appreciate or depreciate between the next two dates, etc.?
3. Did the foreign currency buy more (appreciate) or buy fewer dollars (depreciate) between the first two dates? Did the foreign currency appreciate or depreciate between the next two dates, etc.?
4. Use your exchange rate table to evaluate the impact of using different venues for exchanges. Your rate is usually better at a bank than at the front desk of the hotel. Who found the best venue and therefore should have the most fun as a foreign tourist? Who would have the least fun based on the amount of foreign currency received for their \$225?
5. Pretend each traveler is a U.S. importer of foreign goods. Describe who among your group would be able to import the most products from the foreign country based upon their exchange rate? Who would be able to import the least amount of products from the foreign country based exclusively on exchange rates?
6. Next, describe who would be able to export the most U.S. products to foreign countries based on their exchange rate? Who would export the least amount to the foreign country based exclusively on exchange rates?
7. Summarize the impact of appreciation and depreciation of a currency upon trade between two countries.