

Developments In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 22, 1995

SPECIAL SESSION ON EXPERIENTIAL TEACHING

James W. Gentry, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
William D. Biggs, Beaver College
John R. Dickinson, University of Windsor
David J. Fritzsche
M. Keith Wilson, University of Manitoba

ABSTRACT

The session will focus on specific instances in which mistakes have been made in the use and design of experiential exercises and what the instructors learned from them. A panel of discussants will integrate the experiences and heuristics learned into a framework guiding the use and design of experiential pedagogies.

INTRODUCTION

Everyone learns from experience, teachers included. The session has five presenters who should have great insight, given all the errors which they have made in the design and use of experiential pedagogies. The intent for the presenters to use the framework of the Thiagarajan (1994) article, in which he candidly discusses his own "learning experiences" as a game designer, and the insights which he gained from the experiences. A panel of discussants will then place the insights shared by the presenters into a more integrated framework, which can be used to help other teachers avoid some of the pitfalls raised.

MISTAKES I HAVE MADE IN USING COMPUTER SIMULATIONS

Bill Biggs

The author groups the absurdly large number of errors made in his undistinguished career into three categories: (1) failing to do enough trial runs; (2) running errors; and (3) creating conditions which cause problems. Trial runs have long been advocated by the author, and he shares personal experiences (including some with his own game) that demonstrate the rationale for this admonition. Running errors include the inadvertent deletion of critical files; clearly a substantial variety of back-up files are a necessity. Once simulation games reach the "routine" stage, there is a natural tendency on the part of instructors to add complexity. Sometimes the added complexity can have unexpected consequences; numerous "creative" suggestions are made to enable others to dig oneself out of the holes thus generated.

MAKING A GOOD THING BETTER (OR, REGRETS, I'VE HAD A FEW)

John Dickinson

The author discusses his vast experience in designing and using games that are not well integrated with course content. Three specific issues are covered: (1) the game introduction; (2) simulation content not capturing conceptual course content; and (3) the failure to debrief adequately. Lessons learned include: games should be designed to allow increasing decision complexity over time; provide an early overview of course content, in order to prepare proper interpretation of game elements; consider administrative restrictions limiting the complexity of the game early; and schedule the game toward the end of the course. Suggestions are made concerning the enrichment of strategy decisions to capture more of the conceptual course content, and strong admonitions are made concerning game briefing (introduction) and debriefing.

BLOOPERS IN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Dave Fritzsche

The author shares four errors he has made repeatedly, but acknowledges that these four are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of his vast experience. His "favorite errors" were (1) making economic environments too tight (and thus making the game results are too depressing to keep students enthusiastic); (2) providing insufficient information concerning new complexities being added to the game (thus, there is a need to avoid being too subtle); (3) making mechanical errors (make sure you pretest everything); and (4) being overconfident when repairing "bugs" which you have discovered.

HOW THE SEARCH FOR REALISM RESULTED IN HOPELESS CONFOUNDING

Jim Gentry

The author discusses one of his failed attempts to develop an experiential exercise, in this case a cross-cultural negotiation exercise in a trade-show context. The attempt to include comprehensive details in order to make the exercise realistic resulted in an experience that confused greatly and provided little basis for learning. Debriefing uncovered the general lack of insight in terms of the purpose of the exercise, as well as a nearly complete misunderstanding of the role of trade shows in international business. The author argues that the instructor

Developments In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 22, 1995

should keep things as simple as possible, at least until there is assurance that the basic structure of the exercise is thoroughly understood.

FOOT IN MOUTH, LEARNED EXPERIENTIALLY **Keith Wilson**

The author discusses problems that can occur when too much is made of the results of a trial period. The instructor had been excessively complimentary when a group produced spectacular results in a trial run, only to set them up for a fall when the other groups compensated in the "real" run of the period and they did not. The variability of the performance in trial runs has to be acknowledged by the instructor, and the paper provides a vivid description of the need to "eat crow" after overreacting to a very extreme (and unlikely) occurrence.

REFERENCE

Thiagarajan, Sivasailam (1994), "How I Designed a Game--and Discovered the Meaning of Life," Simulation & Games, 25 (December), 529-536.

DISTINGUISHED DISCUSSANTS, PARTICIPATION FACILITATORS, AND SESSION SALVAGERS:

Al Burns, Louisiana State University
Hugh Cannon, Wayne State University
Ron Frazer, Clarkson College
John Wingender, Oklahoma State University