

Experiential Learning Enters the Eighties, Volume 7, 1980

TOWARD THE ULTIMATE EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE

Bob E. Smiley, Indiana State University

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the operation of a student operated radio station utilized by the school as a laboratory for media classes by various academic departments. The station is unique in that it is a commercially operated station and involves all aspects of radio.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching, using simulation and/or experiential learning has come a long way. In the early stages, the majority of learning was by pure experience. By this I refer to the many trades where a young person signed on as an apprentice to learn the trade and become a journeyman. (12,1-11) (7,212-230). In more recent history, teachers of mass numbers in classrooms have looked for methods to aid the student in learning. The method selected in many cases has been a simulation of "reality" using a statistical base. These simulations were usually kept rather simple in order that the facilitator could process the data for decisions by manual means. (8) (1,115-125).

BACKGROUND

With the advent of the computer, it has become possible to add many more parameters with relative ease. (5) (9) This has resulted in a somewhat rapid proliferation of both available simulations and their use. (13)

ABSEL, by its stated purpose, chose to further the teaching using simulations while also recognizing the need and worth of the more experiential forms of learning. A review of the proceedings of the ABSEL conferences and recent simulations appear to perhaps indicate a subtle trend to more use of this apparently valuable tool, Experiential Learning. The 1975 Proceedings report by Hoover and Whitehead (10, 28) indicate preliminary results of equal learning with greater student satisfaction. In the same issue, Certo (4, 33) found an "... overwhelming majority of questionnaire items, perceived opportunity to satisfy human needs was greater in the experiential training group than in the traditional training group." In his report to the 1978 conference, Mancuso found that students placed in an internship program "... appear to be more mature and their grades appear to be higher when the students return." (11,14) In addition he found that the companies liked the idea of internships because it saved them money in having help and, because some interns we later hired, saved them money in the training of a new employee. (11, 15) In the 1979 ABSEL Proceedings Watkins found that, after receiving a first course in dispute resolution that a second course, when wholly experiential, resulted in "student response to that course to be more highly positive than under a traditional format." (4, 31)

It appears then that it can be said that where Experiential Learning is utilized, the poorest result is at least equal to the results using traditional methods, but with the majority of

the classes showing at least perceived better results from the humanistic view.

Today, with Experiential Learning being defined as "...learning which uses the learner's experience as a base. This definition implies an active and personal approach to learning" (2, 8) or "...placing the student in a created or actual environment in which the student can engage directly in the activity under study" (6, 1), we of ABSEL meet each year to hear about and to discuss various learning experiences. The majority of these reports deal with computer simulations or experiential learning in the form of case study, role playing or internships. The results are interpreted in various ways from statistical analysis or student opinion or other means as "better courses." (15, 16-22) (3, 32-38)

It seems then that the ultimate simulation would be not a simulation at all, but to place the students in a situation which was not an imitation of the business world, but in fact let the students operate an ongoing commercial enterprise. This then is the subject of this paper. A student run commercial enterprise.

DISCUSSION

In the early years of FM radio, there were many groups who hoped to organize and operate profitable broadcast systems. Unfortunately, most found this impossible. The equipment was not refined, very few receivers existed and advertisers did not feel like paying for this small select group. As a result, one of these stations and its commercial license became the property of a college. That college organized a board of directors to oversee operations; appointed a faculty member to direct day to day operations and to use the station where it served the best purpose. The ground rules included conditions that college funds were not to be used for operations but that revenues from sales should support the firm. Thus, learning from experience began.

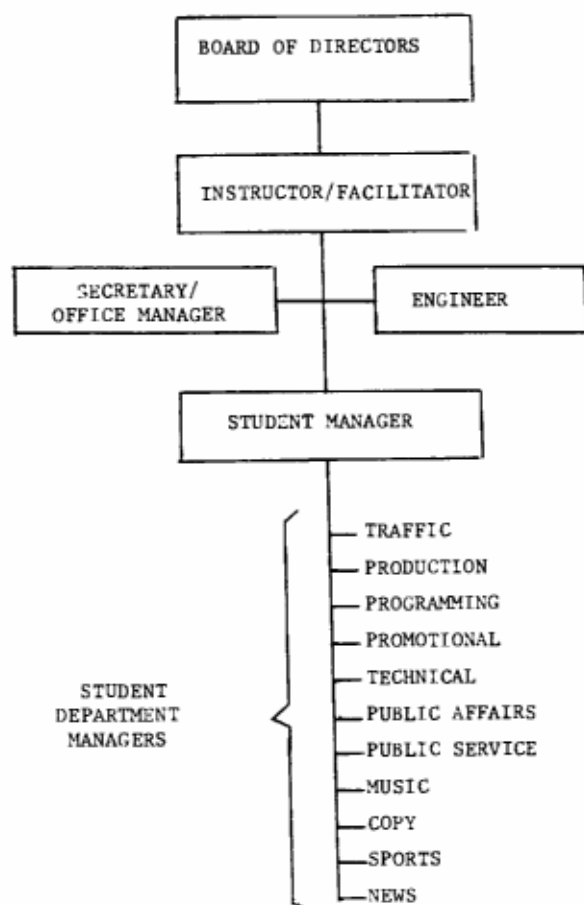
This paper relates that story of Experiential Learning in a unique situation. It is not totally a simulation and is not itself a course for Credit. The closest description would probably be that of a laboratory used by different departments to fulfill their own particular needs.

Some examples are the Speech Department use for speaking or writing for on-the-air work. The Journalism courses utilized the facilities for news gathering, writing, and reporting. The Education Department utilizes the station facilities for the state mandated "media course." The Science Department even uses the station for aspiring Engineers who want to practice in the real world. Of course, the Business student gets his chance with advertising, selling and sales promotion along with the actual business operation of the firm. And because it is a commercial broadcast station, all government regulation and taxing agencies oversee the operation of the firm. There you have it, a full fledged business run by students for the benefit of the students.

Experiential Learning Enters the Eighties, Volume 7, 1980

the organization chart of the firm shows a traditional corporate structure.

FIGURE 1



ORGANIZATION CHART

The board of Directors consists of Faculty and Staff of the school with the Student Manager being an ex-officio member. The Instructor/Facilitator is responsible to supervise the students operating the station for purposes of fiscal matters and adherences to the many rules and regulations of the Federal Communications Commission and various other government agencies. The Secretary/Office Manager and Engineer are non-student. In addition, the Instructor/Facilitator helps coordinate with the various other academic departments who may be using this laboratory in their teaching.

TYPICAL SEMESTER

In a typical year, those students involved in the station management will meet to decide what program format and special shows will be offered. With this decided, those responsible work to implement the plan. The Traffic Director causes the computer program to be changed to generate correct logs for operation; the Promotion Director oversees creation of promotion material to be produced and salesmen to start selling commercial time. Each other department director likewise works to see that his

department gets its work done to insure that the total coordinated plan works. The Student Manager oversees the total operation and coordinates efforts as needed. Also, the Student Manager develops a station budget for the term. He must anticipate sales revenues for the period and expenses to be paid. If there is a gap predicted, he must then present this budget to the student body Treasurer to obtain supplementary funds.

When the semester begins, the staff of the station start broadcasting. The students train new people, write copy, record tapes, play records, maintain equipment, engineer shows, do play-by-play announcing, write editorials and any other job which needs to be done.

As managers, they also evaluate those in their area of responsibility and may, on occasion, fire someone who is not performing to standard.

EVALUATION

This is, it seems, a grand attempt to provide real Experiential Learning for students. It has not always gone smoothly. Some Instructors have not maintained control and overzealous students have run contests without prizes (the station purchased prizes when pressed), debts have been left unpaid for long periods of time and some students failed to show up at the appointed time.

Bright spots have been bringing "Old Tyme Radio" back along with coverage of local high school and college sports and programming to the young people of both the college and the community.

The placing of students in a business situation where they are permitted to succeed or fail in a "real world" setting has been, according to feed-back from students, outstanding. (75% of the students are working in the field of business within 3 years after completion of their schooling.) Also, many of the graduates go directly into radio or TV broadcasting positions.

The station has not made a profit. It serves well as a laboratory to those departments who utilize it. The students appear to better understand the world of business and particularly radio. Graduates are station managers, commercial announcers, newsmen, teachers, businessmen, and many other forms of occupation. They have, they say, benefited greatly from their experience in learning at this radio station.

Experiential Learning Enters the Eighties, Volume 7, 1980

REFERENCES

1. Andlinger, G. R., "Business Games-Play One, Harvard Business Review, March-April, 1958.
2. Armstrong, 3. Scott, "Designing and Using Experiential Exercises," Experiential Learning in Marketing Education: Proceedings of the October 1976 Conference of the Mid-Atlantic Marketing Association, University of South Carolina, March 1977.
3. Badgett, Tom F., et al., "An analysis of Performance in Simulation Games Compared to Performance on Structured Course Criteria: A Case Study", The Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Conference of the Association for Business Simulation and Experiential Learning, 1978.
4. Certo, Samuel C., "Experiential Training Methodology, Traditional Training Methodology, and Perceived Opportunity to Satisfy Human Needs," The Proceedings of the Second National ABSEL Conference, 1975.
5. Day, Ralph L., Marketing In Action, A Decision Game, Homewood, IL: R. U. Irwin, 1973.
6. DeLozier, M. Wayne, et al., Experiential Learning Exercises in Marketing, Santa Monica, CA: Goodyear Publishing, Inc., 1977.
7. Douglas, Paul Howard, American Apprenticeship and Industrial Education, New York: Columbia University, 1971.
8. Green, Jay R. and Roger L. Sisson, Dynamic Management Decision Games, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1959.
9. Greenlaw, Paul S. Marksim: A Marketing Decision Simulation, Scranton: International Textbook, Ca, 1964.
10. Hoover, J. Duane and Carlton Whitehead, "An Experiential-Cognitive Methodology in the First Course in Management: Some Preliminary Results", The Proceedings of the Second National ABSEL Conference, 1975.
11. Mancuso, Louis C., "The Two-Step Flow of Experiential Learning: A Preliminary Investigation" The Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Conference of the Association for Business Simulation and Experiential Learning, 1978.
12. Scrimshaw, Stewart, Apprenticeship, Principals, Relationships, Procedures, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1932.
13. Sord, Burnard H. ed., "Computer Simulation and Learning Theory", The Proceedings of the Third International ABSEL Conference, 1977.
14. Watkins, Thomas L., "Understanding Dispute Resolution Through Experiential Learning", Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Conference of the Association for Business Simulation and Experiential Learning, 1979.
15. Wolfe, Douglas E. and Eugene T. Byrne, "programmatic Experiential Based Learning in an MBA Program", The Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Conference of the Association for Business Simulation and Experiential Learning, 1978.