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ATTITUDE TOWARD EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISES, THE STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP, STUDENT PSYCHOLOGICAL TYPES, AND PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

An investigation was undertaken to study the relationship between student personality type, student attitude toward experiential exercises, student-teacher relationship and performance in an undergraduate personnel management course. The hypothesis in general was that the more active personalities, positive student-teacher relationships, and positive attitudes toward the experiential exercises would have positive impact on cognitive tests in the course. The most important finding was the importance of the student-teacher relationship.

INTRODUCTION

It seems reasonable to assume that the primary reason for the use of simulation and experiential learning in the classroom is to increase course effectiveness. How do we assess this increased effectiveness? In most cases, it means that the student assesses the course's effectiveness by means of a student evaluation. Student evaluations are not known for their validity. Two previous research studies by the author support this position [6,7]. In the first study, students in a lecture class and an experiential class were asked to respond to a question concerning whether they were learning useful things for their career. The responses of the students in the lecture class indicated that they learned more things useful to their career. A common exam was given to both classes. The scores of the students in the lecture class did not indicate that they learned as much as the students in the experiential class, but that they actually learned less. So much for the students' perceptions.

A follow-up study looked at the relationship between the student-teacher relationship and the students' perceptions of course effectiveness. This emotional contamination has been found in numerous educational situations [1,2,4,5,7]. The present study proposes to explain this socio-psychological phenomenon.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Who are we satisfying when we use experiential exercises such as group dynamics, group processes and interpersonal communications? Previous research has shown that the active learning pedagogical methods are more effective than passive methods but do all students react equally? It would seem reasonable to assume that more active students would prefer more participatory teaching methods. Therefore:

Hypotheses

H1. Students with stronger domineering needs will be more satisfied with experiential methods than those with low dominance needs.

H2. Students with high self-acceptance will be more comfortable, i.e., more satisfied, in experiential classes than students with low self-acceptance and vice-versa.

H3. Students with high achievement needs will be more

satisfied with experiential methods than students with low achievement needs.

H4. Further, it is proposed that students who feel comfortable with their professor will tend to perform better on their examinations.

H5. Students who are more satisfied with experiential methods will be more effective on knowledge mastery type exams than students less satisfied. And lastly...

H6. Students who have comfortable relationships with their teacher will perform better on knowledge mastery type examinations.

The hypotheses state that certain personality types (high dominance, self-acceptance, and high achievement) will be more positive toward experiential exercises which will result in higher examination performance. The research was conducted in two personnel management classes each with an enrollment of approximately forty students. The experiential exercises were from two sources, Personnel Management in Action, by Whatley and Kelley and from the author's own library of exercises. The teacher conducts other classes which are primarily lecture, or case. His student evaluations are basically above average with only two classes judged as average or below average in ten years of teaching.

Design

The students' response to the teacher and to the experiential method was assessed two weeks previous to their first knowledge mastery exam. The students' assessment of the course, their attitudes toward the experiential exercise; was collected by means of a nine-item questionnaire administered with the instructor out of the classroom. The attitude questions used a five point semantic differential from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The examinations were objective with true-false and multiple choice items. The students' exam scores were expressed by a class percentile distribution.

Personality Variables

All three personality variables were measured by a modified form of the California Psychological Inventory, California Psychologists Press, Inc. It is a highly regarded instrument with a bibliography of scores of studies establishing its reliability, validity, and norms with numerous groups.

The first hypothesis stated in general that the more dominant student would react most favorably to experiential exercises - a more active than passive learning approach. The instrument definition of dominance is to "Assess factors of leadership ability, dominance, persistence, and social initiative [3, p. 10]. The second variable, self-acceptance, also suggests a more active, assertive individual with high stress seen as "intelligent, outspoken, sharp-witted, demanding, aggressive, and self-centered; as being persuasive and verbally fluent; and as possessing self-confidence and self-

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assurance" [3, p. 10]. The third variable, achievement via independence, also is concerned with more active behavior being described as "those factors of interest and motivation which facilitate achievement in any setting where autonomy and independence are positive behaviors" [3, p. 11].

STATISTICAL RESULTS

The hypotheses were operationally tested by means of a test of significance (at least 90 percent confidence) using Pearson correlation coefficients. The matrix entitled "Student Performance, Teacher Relationship, and Attitude Toward Experiential Experiences" indicates the statistical relationship by underscoring the correlation coefficients that are significant at least at the .10 level of significance (see Table 1).

The correlates of the personality variables provided interesting data. The results of the dominance scores did not show a relationship with the students' attitudes toward experiential exercises--only showing significant correlations with the students' performance on the second midterm and his overall grade point average. Therefore, per Hi, this does not suggest that "aggressive, confident, persistent, . . . persuasive and verbally fluent, . . . independent, . . . as having leadership potential and initiative," type students are more apt to be positive toward experiential exercises than more "retiring, inhibited, . . . silent and unassuming" students. The hypothesis "Students with stronger domineering needs will be more satisfied with experiential exercises" was not supported.

The second hypothesis tests the relationship between self-

acceptance and attitude toward the exercises. This hypothesis also wasn't supported. How students felt about themselves--for example, low self-acceptance tends to be seen as "methodical conservative, . . . quiet, self-abasing and given to feelings of guilt and self-blame, passive in action" was not significantly related to how they reacted to the items assessing the experiential technique. None of the correlations were statistically significant.

The third hypothesis tests the relationship between the students' achievement needs and their attitudes toward the experiential exercises. This variable which described high scores as "mature, dominant, demanding, independent, self-reliant" and low scores as "inhibited, cautious, dull, submissive and compliant before authority" again statistically rejected the notion that a particular psychological type can predict attitudes toward experiential pedagogical methods.

The fourth hypothesis tests the relationship between the students-teacher and the students' performance. These results are important because this relationship was assessed before the exam and the data supports the hypothesis that the quality of this relationship is related to students' performances in class, not by the first exam, but was by the second exam which suggests that this relationship requires time to affect study behavior and consequently grade performance.

The fifth hypothesis concerns the relationship between the attitudes toward experiential exercises and performance on the course exams. There are three items that measured the students reaction to the experiential por-

TABLE 1
STUDENT PERFORMANCE, TEACHER RELATIONSHIP AND
ATTITUDE TOWARD EXPERIENTIAL EXPERIENCES

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Comfortable w/instructor	1.00	<u>.32</u>	.11	.05	<u>.50</u>	.33	<u>.46</u>	<u>-.50</u>	.12	.08	<u>.59</u>	-.14	.09	.03
2. Exercise beneficial for understanding		1.00	.13	<u>.40</u>	.18	<u>.49</u>	<u>.83</u>	-.20	<u>.51</u>	-.28	-.24	-.24	.15	-.07
3. More time in lecture			1.00	<u>-.27</u>	<u>-.36</u>	-.03	<u>.46</u>	.31	<u>.52</u>	<u>.40</u>	.12	.18	-.01	-.01
4. More time in exercises				1.00	-.31	.01	.16	.23	<u>.51</u>	-.10	.01	.01	.03	-.05
5. Exercise made topics interesting					1.00	<u>.66</u>	.10	<u>-.87</u>	<u>-.45</u>	<u>-.43</u>	-.54	-.19	.10	.14
6. More exercises in business courses						1.00	<u>.43</u>	<u>-.62</u>	-.21	<u>-.52</u>	<u>-.85</u>	-.32	.02	.00
7. Professor-Student relationship							1.00	-.22	<u>.46</u>	-.23	<u>-.59</u>	-.19	.18	.66
8. Major								1.00	<u>.34</u>	.52	.07	-.10	<u>-.40</u>	<u>-.46</u>
9. Grade Point Ave.									1.00	.29	.35	.32	.22	.10
10. Midterm #1 percentile										1.00	.18	-.09	<u>-.39</u>	<u>-.42</u>
11. Midterm #2 percentile											1.00	<u>.47</u>	<u>.52</u>	<u>.47</u>
12. Dominance												1.00	<u>.88</u>	<u>.92</u>
13. Self-Acceptance													1.00	<u>.97</u>
14. Achievement														1.00

Statistical significance at least .10 by underlined correlation values.

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tion of the course to establish whether the exercises were "beneficial for understanding the topics covered in the course," that "exercises made topics more interesting," and that "experiential exercises should be used in more courses." The relationships were not statistically significant in the predicted direction between how the students felt about the exercises and how they performed on cognitive mastery exams.

The last hypothesis deals with the role of the instructor and shows, in general, statistically significant relationships between the student-teacher relationship and how the student reacts to the experiential exercises (variables 2,5,7) which is very important, especially given the previously presented impact of this relationship on student performance. If the relationship was perceived as positive, the student's perception of the exercises tended to be positive.

DISCUSSION

The statistical results of the research provided insights into topics central to experiential learning- student personality types and their reactions to experiential methods; students' attitudes toward experiential exercises and their performance on cognitive exams; and third, the student-teacher relationship and its impact on attitudes toward exercises and on cognitive exam performance. The psychological "type" defined--basically a person who feels very good about themselves, assertive, achievement oriented, and non-passive--does not appear to be related to how the student will react to experiential methods. The "passive" personality type students reacted the same to the exercises as the "active" personality types.

The findings of this study did not indicate that the exercises actually had impact on cognitive performance. This suggests the need for a critical review between the exercises we use and their learning objectives-- whether they are cognitive, affective, or behavioral.

The importance of the teacher-student relationship had a stronger effect on student performance than on the students' attitudes toward the experiential exercises. What the results appear to say is that if the student- teacher relationship is good, the students will perform better and possibly react positively to whatever pedagogical techniques he uses. Previous research, happily reports that the student who likes experiential exercises perceives that they are effective [8] and is even related to their planning to take more courses in that discipline.

The student-teacher relationship and student performance begs the question of teacher characteristics. Hart and Driver found that teachers scoring high in extraversion, intuitiveness and feeling on the Myers Briggs Type Indicator tended to receive higher student ratings [4]. Sherman and Blackburn found that highly rated teachers were found to be dynamic, amicable and highly intellectual [9]. Because of the timing of the assessment of the student-teacher relationship in the present study, it contributes to the research in that it indicates the relationship's importance to motivating the student and receiving good evaluations on the pedagogical methods used. This is especially important given that some teachers who do not have good relationships with their students might opt for experiential methods feeling that their role could be more neutral or passive which the present research indicates is simply an erroneous assumption.

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