

# Insights into Experiential Pedagogy, Volume 6, 1979

## EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING FROM CLASSROOM TO BUSINESS

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### ABSTRACT

The Student Seminar Series at Arizona State University's College of Business Administration has taken experiential learning out of the classroom and into the business world. Students in a graduate-level organizational behavior course plan, execute, facilitate, and evaluate a workshop for managers, who pay a nominal fee to attend. It has proven to be an outstanding learning tool for the students and a service to the business community.

### INTRODUCTION

Experiential learning is often used by teachers in the classroom and in consulting situations. In most cases the transfer of learning goes from professor to student or professor to participant.

This paper describes the Arizona State University College of Business Administration Student Seminar Series, where the learning process is somewhat different.

Graduate students in Arizona State University's Health Services Administration program (part of the College of Business Administration) are required to take an organizational behavior (OB) course. Two semesters ago, this instructor started offering the option of conducting a workshop, in lieu of a term paper. Approximately eight students chose the workshop both semesters, and the ASU Student Seminar Series was created.

We applied the medical school concept of "See one, do one, teach one." Early in the semester, the class participated in a day-long workshop (seeing), facilitated by the instructor. As the course progressed they were involved in experiential exercises, cases, theories (doing). Finally, they produced their own workshop (teaching).

### EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVE AND BASIS

This project's learning objectives were (using Bloom's and Bruner's learning theories as a model): To know and understand the purpose and use of workshops; to be able to apply this knowledge by planning and conducting workshops; and to analyze and evaluate the product.

According to Bruner [2, pp. 48-49] the process of learning involves three almost simultaneous processes, i.e. acquisition of new information, transformation and manipulation of knowledge, and evaluation.

Bloom's [1] taxonomy of educational objectives identifies six levels of learning: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. By the end of the semester, the Student Seminar Series offered the opportunity for the students to learn on all six levels, as explained below.

### Knowledge

They were able to recall a wide range of material, such as facts, concepts, principles and theories relating to organizational behavior and group dynamics, since they had to do extensive research in preparation for the workshop.

### Comprehension

The students understood the principles and concepts and were able to know which OB concepts fit with particular case problems and exercises.

### Application

They developed the ability to determine which experiential exercises could be applied to achieve a certain objective.

### Analysis

The area of analysis most developed by the students was the ability to recognize specific techniques used in organizing and delivering a training program.

### Synthesis

Two areas of synthesis were employed; the ability to use a personal experience effectively while discussing a concept; and planning a unit of instruction for this particular teaching situation.

### Evaluation

The students participated in a general feedback session and were later required to turn in a written evaluation of the total workshop as well as evaluations of their personal performances.

### THE PROCEDURE

Planning for the workshop was done by the students, with periodic feedback sessions with me. Knowles [3] gives supportive argument for learners accepting responsibility for planning and operating their learning experiences, as well as having them participate actively in the learning process itself.

Development of the workshop went as follows:

#### 1. Learning about Workshops:

Definition, purpose, possible audiences, etc.

In order to develop an appreciation for the "what and how of workshops, students were early-on given two readings from the University Associates Handbooks:

Pfeiffer, J. W. and J. E. Jones, Design Considerations in Laboratory Education, in J. W. Pfeiffer and J. E. Jones (eds.), *The 1973 Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators*, (Palo Alto, Calif: University Associates, 1973) {5, pp. 177-194}.

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Middleman, R.R. and Gale Goldberg, "The Concept of Structure in Experiential Learning," in J. W. Pfeiffer and J. E. Jones (eds.), The 1972 Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators, (Palo Alto, Calif: University Associates, 1972) [4, pp. 203-210].

About three weeks into the semester the whole class attended a full-day workshop on group dynamics which was facilitated by the instructor. The two-fold purpose was (a) to develop a fighter group and (b) to give the students a clearer understanding of what a workshop is.

### 2. Decision: Who Will Be the Workshop Team?

After learning about workshops and basically how they are put together, the students were given the Option of devoting their time to the workshop or to a term paper.

### 3. Selection of Target Audience:

They chose middle managers in health care organizations.

Because of their status as graduate students, they felt an appropriate audience would be middle-managers; however, a number of CEO's and top-level managers did attend the workshops.

### 4. Assignment of Responsibilities:

They decided who would take care of the needs analysis, brochure, mailing and distribution of brochure, room and meal arrangements, curriculum, who would facilitate each section, and who would be emcee.

a. Emcee - Since the workshop was to be facilitated by a number of students, it was decided to have an emcee who would be the thread of continuity for the attendees. The students were asked not to choose this position on a volunteer basis, but rather to critically examine the skills of group members--since this was a vital position.

b. Other positions - Some students wanted to do more behind the scenes work, such as brochure preparation, room and meal arrangements; others chose to spend more time on curriculum development and facilitation.

### 5. Needs Analysis of Target Audience:

A group of 30 middle-managers in health care were surveyed with a needs assessment instrument by two group members, who attended a course the 30 were taking. Motivation and communication came out as the greatest needs.

### 6. Development of Educational Objectives and Curriculum:

The students were told to list a few basic objectives (such as being able to identify common communication blocks) and to develop the six-hour program based on those. At the end of the workshop, the participants should have achieved these objectives and all exercises had to be related to them.

The emphasis was on simplicity, i.e., not too many objectives or too many short exercises. A change of pace and continuous momentum buildup were built into the program.

### 7. Working With Experienced Seminar Staff People to Prepare a Budget:

Items to consider: brochure printing, handout duplication, notebooks, nametags, film rental, meals, coffee breaks and the university overhead of 15 percent.

### 8. Brochure Design, Printing and Distribution:

The original idea was to mimeograph and fold a brochure then mail it out. But after some deliberation, the students opted for a professionally printed brochure. Even though it cost more, we were certain it made a great difference, i.e., bringing in more and higher-level registrants. Postage was conserved by distributing the brochure through our network of alumni and administrative residents.

### 9. Dress Rehearsal of Workshop:

The day before the workshop, the instructor spent about four hours going over each facilitator's lead-in and conclusion. Critical feedback was given tactfully, so that more positive feedback would be given by the attendees.

### 10. Facilitating Actual Workshop

In order to increase attendance, we planned the workshop for a Friday, going from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., with a one-hour scheduled lunch. This gave the attendees a chance to leave earlier and prevented the confusion that can occur with a "get your own" lunch.

### 11. Evaluation:

Evaluation forms containing each student facilitator's name and an effectiveness scale of 1. to 10 were distributed at the end. In addition, student facilitators and instructor spent an hour at the end of the day reviewing the total workshop. Finally, student facilitators were required to submit their own written evaluations.

Continuous support assistance was received by the Center for Executive Development, which is part of the College of Business Administration. The staff guided the students in logistical (brochure, room, meals, budget) matters.

## TIMETABLE

Based in the two semesters of experience, a timetable was developed:

1. Date and workshop topic, along with educational objectives chosen 7-8 weeks before workshop.
2. Brochures to printer at least 6 weeks before workshop. Brochures in mail at least 4 weeks before workshop.
3. Lunch room reserved and meal arranged 4-5 weeks before workshop.
4. Flow of topics for workshop chosen 4 weeks before.
5. Newspaper article written 4 weeks before; article sent to press 3 weeks before workshop.
6. Specific exercises chosen 3 weeks before.
7. Handouts given for duplication 2 weeks before.

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8. Practice and ready to go last week before workshop.

CONCLUSION

### THE WORKSHOP AND EVALUATION

About 30 middle-to top-level managers paid \$15 and \$25 (the two seminars were priced differently) to attend this student-run workshop. Participant evaluations were very high, and both times the students were asked by some attendees to give similar workshops in their organizations.

Immediately after the workshop the students gathered with the instructor for a feedback session, sharing perceptions. The final requirement for the students was to write a short evaluation of the workshop relating how they felt about their individual performance and what areas the total workshop needed for improvement.

### OTHER LEARNING AND BENEFITS

In addition to increasing the students' ability to plan, organize and initiate a workshop, a number of other learning experiences were derived from this project. The students were more or less forced--but by their own choice nonetheless--to enhance their public speaking and group discussion-leader skills. Interaction with the health administrators in a "successful" setting, helped increase their self-confidence. As a result of this experience, several Students decided to pursue consulting after their graduation.

### ISSUES

A number of problems and situations occurred during the planning and implementation of the two workshops. Some of them were soluble, others just pointed us in another direction.

1. Program fee. The first workshop, on Motivation, cost the participants \$15 (\$10 for students); the second, on Communications, cost \$25 (\$15 for students). Fewer people signed up for number 2, mostly we felt because of the higher fee for a "student" workshop, but also because topic number 1 seemed more immediate to them.

2. In/Out Groups. The students who formed the workshop group became a cohesive unit, and the others felt somewhat left out. At the end of the semester there was some discussion about whether to make the workshop required, but it was finally decided the disadvantages of that would outweigh the benefits. However, the next class was informed that those who did not choose the workshop might feel like the out-group. This seemed to lessen the problem during the second semester.

3. Student Credibility. During the first workshop, they often made reference, almost apologetically, to their student status. Some of the participants mentioned on their written evaluations that they did not think this needed to be brought up more than once. The managers, it seems, were less concerned about the problem than the students were.

The Student Seminar Series at Arizona State University has proven to be a useful tool in the teaching of organizational behavior. Not only did the workshop provide rich learning experiences for the students, but the program also offered a relatively inexpensive service to the community, and it enhanced the prestige of the Health Services Administration program as well as that of the College of Business Administration. Articles appeared in newspapers and we received letters from top administrators thanking us for undertaking such a worthwhile educational project.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Bloom, Benjamin S., Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, (New York: McKay, 1969).
- [2] Bruner, Jerome S., The Process of Education, (New York: Vintage, 1963).
- [3] Knowles, Malcolm S., The Modern Practice of Adult Education, (New York: Associated Press, 1970).
- [4] Middleman, R.R. and Gale Goldberg, "The Concept of Structure in Experiential Learning," in J. W. Pfeiffer and J. E. Jones (eds.), The 1972 Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators, (Palo Alto, Calif: University Associates), 1972, pp. 203-210.
- [5] Pfeiffer, J. W. and J. E. Jones, "Design Considerations in Laboratory Education," in J. W. Pfeiffer and J. E. Jones (eds.), The 1973 Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators, (Palo Alto, Calif: University Associates), 1973, pp. 177-194.