

Insights into Experiential Pedagogy, Volume 6, 1979

THE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP IN EXPERIENTIAL CLASSES AND THE STUDENT'S PERCEPTION OF COURSE EFFECTIVENESS

Lane Kelley, University of Hawaii
Arthur Whatley, New Mexico State University

ABSTRACT

Course effectiveness is a significant issue especially for "innovative" classes. Courses that are taught in unorthodox ways are naturally suspect. This study was conducted to analyze the relationship between the teacher-student relationship and the student's perception of course effectiveness. The review of related research suggested that the teacher-student relationship is important in lecture classes in grade school, adult education classes, and in college students' choice of major. A review of the research on the effectiveness of the experiential approach provides mixed results. The research in the present study suggests that the emotional relationship between the teacher and student is related to students' perception of the effectiveness of the experiential method.

INTRODUCTION

During the last decade management development education teaching methods have experienced a virtual revolution. In previous times the prevailing teaching methodology was the lecture-discussion and if the teacher was innovative, perhaps cases and case discussions would be used. Today it is not unusual to find sociodrama and individual analysis of group roles, group dynamics, individual and group decision making, role playing and other human relation skill building exercises used in the college classroom. These are generally referred to as 'experiential' techniques. The purpose of the present research is to analyze the role of the teacher-student relationship and the students' perceptions of the effectiveness of experiential exercises. This is a significant question in that the student evaluation has become important in many business schools as a measure of a teacher's effectiveness. The present research examines in specific the teacher-student relationship and what it contributes to the students' perception of the course's effectiveness.

RELATED RESEARCH

Thistlethwaite [9] reported that National Merit Scholars considered one of the critical variables influencing their choice of a field to be the instructor's enthusiasm. The next three studies illustrate the importance of the teacher-student relationship in elementary education. Christensen [4] found a significant relationship between the quality of the teacher-student relationship and the student's level of achievement in tests of vocabulary and arithmetic. Hawkes and Egbert [6] found a significant relationship between the degree of the teacher's empathetic understanding of the student and the student's ratings of teacher competence. Aspy [1] studied the teacher-student relationship and found that it was related to the student's gain in achievement. In the data the effect of the teacher-student relationship was as great as the effect of the range of intelligence in the classes. Truax [10] found that the vocational instructor-rehabilitation client relationship was related to the client's class attendance, attitude toward the course, and his

performance on tests. The clients were basically young adults.

A study by Haslett [5] of university students was done to determine the factors students perceived as being the criteria of effectiveness of professors. Five factors were reported:

1. student/teacher rapport
2. instructional style (included in this is knowledge of material, organization and interestingness)
3. communicative style (included was congeniality and informality)
4. stimulation
5. personalization--teacher's ability to add a personalized human quality to teaching and to make class material relevant to students.

From the above research studies, it might be concluded that the 'personal' element that the instructor establishes in the classroom is very important for choosing majors, cognitive learning in elementary school, and also accomplishing some other behavioral objectives.

THE EXPERIENTIAL APPROACH AND ITS EFFECTIVENESS

Are experiential methods effective? One research article in the Academy of Management Journal [11] reported that a business policy simulation computer game team which had gone through Kolb, et. al.'s Organizational Psychology: An Experiential Approach did not do better than a team which had not gone through the exercises. The design, hypothesis formulation, and sample of this study does not allow any conclusions. Another study of the experiential approach in a business policy course reported that the use of "the" experiential approach to teaching business policy appears to be a very effective teaching device and that secret ballots of students the next semester chose the experiential approach [7]. A third study of the effectiveness of "the" experiential approach in teaching a business policy course concluded that the experiential method produced relevant learning about the human factors involved in the process of policy formulation but for the bulk of the class, however, this experience was almost "too real" [2]. The experiential approach in this study was actually a required field study without reading lists, lectures, a reward system and standards, and a highly uncertain environment. The hypothesis formation, research design, etc. of this study, like the previous, does not allow for any conclusions about experiential learning.

Butler and Keys [3] studied the relative effectiveness of a simulation laboratory and a traditional lecture-discussion course. Two groups of participants in each course were pre-tested as to their knowledge of facts and concepts regarding human relations and human resource development. Post-test measurements of the two groups on the same instruments revealed gains that were not significant for the control (lecture-discussion) group. The experimental (simulation) group measured highly significant gains.

Insights into Experiential Pedagogy, Volume 6, 1979

Commensurate with the significant knowledge gains by the experimental participants, the responses from their subordinates over a two-month period indicated significant changes in their perceptions of their supervisor's behavior. This was not true of the control group. The authors conclude that the simulation method was more effective than the traditional method in improving the supervisory behavior of the participants.

Kelley [8] compared an integrated didactic-experiential approach for teaching a personnel management course to a lecture-discussion course and reported that students were more "satisfied" with the experiential course, and scored higher on an exam designed to measure knowledge of the subject matter. The students also reported that participation in the exercises was more interesting and stimulating than lectures but they didn't feel that they necessarily learned more. This is important because the students in the experimental course scored higher on an exam designed to measure their knowledge of the subject, which is just the opposite of their perceptions. From the above research we can see that in some instances the experiential approach is an effective teaching method. The present study concentrates on one key variable--the role of the teacher in the effectiveness of the experiential method.

HYPOTHESES, METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

In order to analyze the teacher-student relationship and the students' perceptions of course effectiveness, the following hypotheses were defined.

"Students who felt comfortable with the instructor" would be positively related to their perceptions:

- H₁: that experiential exercises are beneficial for understanding the topics covered in the course.
- H₂: that less class time should be spent in lecture.
- H₃: that more class time should be spent in experiential exercises.
- H₄: that experiential exercises make the topics more interesting.
- H₅: that experiential exercises should be used in more business courses.

The above hypotheses were also tested in terms of the degree to which students felt comfortable with the teacher.

A questionnaire was designed using a five word semantic differential from "strongly agree to "neutrals" to "strongly disagree. The questionnaire was administered during the last week of instruction. The students were told that their identities would be anonymous. The teacher was not in the classroom when the questionnaire was administered. Experiential exercises consumed approximately 40 percent of the class-time.

Table 1 is the correlation matrix containing Pearsonian r values between various attitude characteristics (the dependent variables) and the two independent variables of (X₁) feeling comfortable with the instructor and (X₂) the perceived quality of the teacher-student relationship.

At this point each hypothesis along with the relevant data from Table 1 will be presented and discussed in terms of whether or not the hypothesis is supportable.

H₁ Experiential exercises are beneficial for understanding the topics covered in the course.

X₁ Feeling comfortable with the instructor--
Pearson r = .2711.
Significant at .01 level.
X₂ Teacher-student relationship--Pearsonian
r = .3069.
Significant at .03 level.

These data provide both statistical and directional support for the hypothesis. The degree to which students feel comfortable with the instructor and perceive that the professor-student relationship is good is positively related to their view that experiential exercises are useful for understanding course material.

H₂ More class time should be spent in lecture.
X₁ Feeling comfortable with the instructor--
Pearsonian r = -.3087.
Significant at .003 level.
X₂ Teacher-student relationship--Pearsonian
r = -.2900.
Significant at .006 level.

Here again support is provided for the statistical and the directional aspects of the hypotheses. In an experiential course (forty percent of the time spent on experiential exercises) the degree to which students feel comfortable with the instructor is negatively related to their desire for more time to be spent on lecture.

When the same statistics based on the professor-student relationship and the desire for more time in lecture is examined, the findings are similar. The better the professor-student relationship, the less time is desired in lecture.

H₃ More class time should be spent in experiential exercises.
X₁ Feeling comfortable with the instructor--
Pearsonian r = .0966.
Not significant at any reasonable level.
X₂ Teacher-student relationship--Pearsonian
r = .2540.
Significant at .016 level.

The test of this hypothesis resulted in mixed feelings. The relationship between feeling comfortable with the instructor was not found to be significantly related to the need for spending more class time in experiential exercises. This could be interpreted to mean that the forty percent of time already spent is adequate in students' views.

This lack of significance did not hold up when the professor-student relationship was correlated with the need for more time in experiential exercises. This statistic was both significant and in a

H₄ Experiential exercises made the topic interesting
X₁ Feeling comfortable with the instructor--
Pearsonian r = .2677.
Significant at .011 level.
X₂ Teacher-student relationship--Pearsonian
r = .2922.
Significant at .005 level.

positive direction.

The students' view that experiential exercises made the topic interesting was significantly and positively correlated with the degree to which students felt comfortable with the instructor and the professor-student relationship was viewed as positive. These two independent variables, then, are related to students' perceptions regarding the interesting nature of experiential exercises.

Insights into Experiential Pedagogy, Volume 6, 1979

TABLE 1
CORRELATION MATRIX

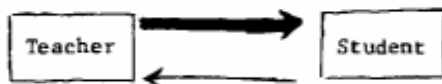
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7
Q1 Comfortable with teacher (X_1)	1.0000 S=0.001	0.2711 S=0.010	-0.3087 S=0.003	0.0966 S=0.368	0.2677 S=0.011	0.1901 S=0.074	0.7646 S=0.001
Q2 Exercise beneficial for understanding		1.0000 S=0.001	-0.2379 S=0.025	0.3856 S=0.001	0.5320 S=0.001	0.4429 S=0.001	0.3069 S=0.003
Q3 More time in lecture			1.0000 S=0.001	-0.4994 S=0.001	-0.3703 S=0.001	-0.3361 S=0.001	-0.2900 S=0.006
Q4 More time in exercises				1.0000 S=0.001	0.3467 S=0.001	0.4365 S=0.001	0.2540 S=0.016
Q5 Exercises made topic interesting					1.0000 S=0.001	0.6687 S=0.001	0.2922 S=0.005
Q6 Exercises in more business courses						1.0000 S=0.001	0.2262 S=0.033
Q7 Teacher-student relationship (X_2)							1.0000 S=0.001

- H_5 Experiential exercises should be used in more business courses.
 X_1 Feeling comfortable with the instructor--Pearsonian $r = .1901$.
 Significant at .074.
 X_2 Teacher-student relationship--Pearsonian $r = .2261$.
 Significant at .033 level.

Here, too, both independent variables are found to be significantly related, in the desired positive direction, with students' perception that exercises should be used in more courses.

DISCUSSION

The research for this paper supports the importance of the teacher-student relationship in establishing the effectiveness of the experiential method. The experiential method would seem to require this perhaps even more so than the lecture-discussion method. The lecture-discussion method is basically teacher dominated with the teacher choosing the materials that he will use to cover his topics. For example, in covering job enrichment, the teacher might choose only the supporting research in his lectures. The discussion then is used primarily to clear any misunderstanding or confusion about the material covered. In this situation the learning cycle can be depicted as;



The heavy line emphasizes the teachers power in determining lecture material and also the relative quantity of teacher" messages compared to those of the student. Using the same type model illustrates why the teacher- student relationship is important in the experiential classroom. In experiential learning, the teacher moves

from the dominator to a facilitator role. For example, he introduces the concept, then the student experiences the concept and modifies, accepts, or rejects it. In the lecture method, the power comes from the lecture's arguments; in the experiential method the power moves to the students' experience of the concept. The student is active and has significant responsibility in the process. He must have a supportive environment to tie the concept to his experiential field. He is doing something in experiential learning whereas in the lecture method, it can be argued that the student plays the role of a fairly ineffective recorder. For example, if leaderless discussion is used to validate the methods used in assessment centers, the exercise can only function if the student functions in a way that allows others to define the roles that he plays and then in turn that he feels comfortable providing feedback about other students' behavior. If the students feel threatened by the teacher, they may not be able to "open-up" to the degree required to accomplish the objective of the exercise.

The data supported the importance of the student-teacher relationship. In previous research (8) it was reported that an integrated didactic-experiential approach resulted in higher student exam scores compared to a lecture-discussion section even though the students perceived that they learned more in the latter. This research goes one step further and suggests the role of the teacher-student relationship in terms of the students' perception of course effectiveness. If that relationship is positive, the students' perception of course effectiveness tends to be more positive. Note should be taken of the incongruency between student perception of effectiveness and test results. In previous research [8] reported in this paper, the students 'learned' more in the experiential course than in a lecture course but perceived that they learned less. Colleges still tend to use student evaluations which are perceptions of effectiveness regardless of their validity. The research reported in this paper indicates that perhaps student evaluations are not always valid and that the teacher-student relationship is important in forming their perceptions of course effectiveness.

It should also be mentioned that the discussion in this

Insights into Experiential Pedagogy, Volume 6, 1979

paper is in terms of the causal direction of the hypothesis. The converse warrants further study; that is, that the more the exercises are interesting and beneficial to understanding, the more comfortable the student feels with the instructor; or that the performance and quality of the learning experience is related to the students' feelings toward the instructor.

REFERENCES

- [1] Aspy, D.N. and W. Hadlock, The Effect of Empathy, Warmth, and Genuineness on Elementary Students' Reading Achievement," unpublished thesis.
- [2] Belasco, J.A., A.M. Glassman, and J.A. Alutto, 'Experiential Learning: Some Classroom Results," Academy of Management Proceedings, 1973, pp. 235-241.
- [3] Butler, J. L., and L. B. Keys, "A Comparative Study of Simulation and Traditional Methods of Supervisory Training in Human Resource Development," Academy of Management Proceeding of Annual Meetings, 1973, pp. 302-5.
- [4] Christensen, C.N., 'Relationships Between Pupil Achievement, Pupil Affect-Need, Teacher Warmth and Teacher Permissiveness," Journal of Educational Psychology, 1960, pp. 169-174.
- [5] Haslett, B.J., "Dimensions of Teaching Effectiveness: A Student Perspective," Journal of Experimental Psychology, vol. 44, Summer 1976, pp. 4-10.
- [6] Hawkes, G.R., and Egbert, R.L., "Personal Values and the Empathic Responses: Their Relationships," Journal of Educational Psychology, vol. 45, 1954, pp. 469-476.
- [7] Hicks, H.G. and G.E. Popp, "An Experimental Approach to Teaching Business Policy Learning Environment," Academy of Management Proceedings, 1972, pp. 277-280.
- [8] Kelley, L. , "An Experiential Evaluation of an Integrated-Didactic Experiential Approach for Teaching Personnel Management," Journal of Experiential Learning and Simulation, accepted for publication.
- [9] Thistlewaite, D.L. and N. Wheeler, "Effects of Teacher and Peer Subcultures Upon Student Aspirations," Journal of Educational Psychology, vol. 57, 1966, pp. 35-47.
- [10] Truax, C.B., and R.R. Carkuff, Toward Effective Counseling and Psychotherapy: Training and Practice, Mann Alexander (ed.), Aldine Publishing Co., Chicago, 1966, p. 112.
- [11] Wolfe, J., "A Comparative Evaluation of the Experiential Approach as a Business Policy Learning Environment," Academy of Management Journal, Sept. 1975, pp. 442-452.