

MAKING THE MOST OF TIME: A FLIPPED CLASS APPROACH TO STUDY ABROAD

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ABSTRACT

Study abroad programs have been used as significant experiential learning events. Due to the short nature of some of these programs, it is important to prepare students in advance to take advantage of the experiential learning opportunity. During a Study Abroad trip to Ireland, 15 students were given a "flipped class" approach to learning. Results of student engagement were compared between the "flipped class" and the previous year not "flipped class" where student questions significantly increased. Discussion of how to create such a course and future research are included.

INTRODUCTION

Real-life scenarios are effective learning experiences, since students recognize them as meaningful learning activities (Morrison, Rha, & Helfman, 2003). Therefore, the goal of experiential exercises should be to increase student learning by increasing self-efficacy, thereby allowing students to overcome the business-related issues they may face in their careers.

Experiential learning exercises that integrate (1) active participation, (2) realism, (3) decision-making pressure, and (4) include the excitement and anxiety associated with real life scenarios increase student self-efficacy in the future. Turner and Turner (2015) stated that experiential exercises should include complex decision-making scenarios that result in high-pressure decision-making situations. This may be because students are most willing to learn when anxiety and excitement are involved at the same time (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Bandura (1988) argued that self-efficacy plays a major role in how people cope with anxiety. Developing student self-efficacy, before they are required to perform the experiential task, may reduce the level of arousal due to anxiety for the future task.

OVERVIEW OF THE EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE

This experiential exercise was built around a study abroad trip to Ireland. Based on the recommendations by Koernig (2007), this trip, and previous trips to Ireland balanced visiting points of cultural interest with business tours/interactions with local business leaders. During the business visits business professionals presented an overview of their company. These professionals in the field presented a level of realism and presented students with real-life scenarios. At the end of the presentations, students were encouraged to ask business leaders relevant questions. Based a moderate level of interaction, and questions, during previous trips the instructors decided to implement a "flipped-classroom" approach to the study abroad program.

Similar to previous semesters, students signed up for the Ireland Study Abroad trip in December and were informed the course would involve them addressing an International Business topic. Signing up for the trip also meant the students signed up for a three semester hour course. In previous semesters this course focused on students learning about Ireland culture, domestic business, and international business practices. During the "flipped classroom" approach students were required to identify an International Business topic and provide that topic to the instructor before February 1st in preparation for the Spring Break (March) trip to Ireland. The instructor reviewed the topic and made recommendations to the students to increase the depth and complexity of the topic. Examples of topics were: How does and American get a job in Ireland or other European Union countries? What are the biggest challenges facing Brexit and Ireland's role in International Business in a post-Brexit world?

Students received feedback from the instructor by February 8th and students were required to complete an 8 page (double

spaced) paper before the end of February. Students were informed their papers should be written for other university students to study and learn vicariously through their experience. Examples of papers were given to the students. The instructor provided comments about the papers prior to the students departing on their Study Abroad trip.

The overall goal of this “flipped class” approach to the Study Abroad trip was designed to allow students to build their self-efficacy about International Business topics prior to the company presentations. Students conducted their own research and put together ideas about a topic they found to be interesting and important, before the trip began. Students were aware they would receive a grade for the papers, but also knew their work would be reviewed by other students. The intent was to provide the level of support needed so they could practice decision making skills as business professionals in real-world business meetings and to provide professional papers that others could use.

A secondary learning objective was to develop a level of intuition, which is typically not part of a traditional management education curriculum (Sadler-Smith & Burke, 2009). This experiential exercise allowed students to develop intuition and provided a setting for the instructor to provide rich feedback to the students. In previous trips it was anticipated students were excited about the visits, but were anxious to ask questions. During this trip this anxiety was reduced by allowing students to become experts in the field and have data to back up the questions they would ask based on their intuition during the presentations.

Finally, the amount of time students spent with business professionals during this trip was limited. It is important that educators use their limited time with students as effectively as possible (Gosen & Washbush, 2004). Allowing the students to focus on the content prior to the experience allowed for deeper understandings and reflections.

EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

This exercise was successful on many levels. First, it gave students a personal recognition of learning (Morrison et al., 2003). Students watched each other ask relevant business questions in business settings. This increased their own confidence and created situations where there were multiple students waiting to ask questions of the professionals. In this exercise, students gained first-hand experience in communicating their questions and gathering relevant information for the papers.

Second, the number of student questions significantly increased from the previous Study Abroad trips. Table 1 shows the number of questions asked for each business visit in the previous study abroad course and the “flipped” study abroad course.

TABLE 1
Number of Student Questions Presented in Business Visits

| Business Visit | Not-flipped | Flipped |
|----------------|-------------|---------|
| 1 | 7 | 18 |
| 2 | 5 | 22 |
| 3 | 9 | 14 |
| 4 | 6 | 9 |
| 5 | 12 | 17 |
| 6 | 8 | 19 |
| 7 | 4 | 24 |
| 8 | 4 | |

A one-tailed t-test of the difference of means was conducted using this data. Results are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2
One-tailed t-test of difference of means for Number of Questions Asked

| Visit | Mean | Standard Deviation | t-stat | p-value |
|-------------|-------|--------------------|--------|---------|
| Not flipped | 6.88 | 2.75 | | |
| Flipped | 17.57 | 5.00 | -5.23 | <.001 |

Qualitative evidence of this “flipped class” approach were comments made by several of the business professionals made comments like: “Wow! The students were really engaged today,” and “This group of students really took this visit seriously.” Other qualitative and quantitative data that could be collect on future trips are: the number of students who had prepared notes, number of comments on the travel to and from the visit where the company being visited was discussed, surveys from the business professionals. It is expected that these results could be experienced by other groups/classes who use a “flipped class” approach to study abroad (Daly, 2001).

Final evidence of student learning came from the exceptional papers students developed from the visit. The students were proud of their papers and many of these papers are still being used by many of the instructors to teach in their classes.

CONCLUSIONS

This dramatic increase in student participation and learning is evidence that instructors must make the most of experiential learning exercise time. Class time is becoming even more scarce these days and students must be prepared for the experience when it is presented. Using a “flipped class” approach is one way to achieve this type of result. However, it is recommended that instructors go one step further and provide students feedback about their preparation before the experience. This provides students with further self-efficacy and allows them to gain more from the experience.

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