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HOW REAL SHOULD EXPERIENTIAL PEDAGOGY BE? A VIEWPOINT FROM OUR STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Experiential pedagogy attempts to allow students to learn by doing. The goal of all of this is to provide the students with skills that are readily transferrable to a "real world" career. This paper reflects a composite viewpoint, from a large student group, of how true to life the classroom experience should be.

INTRODUCTION

Advantages and Disadvantages of Experiential Learning

There are many advantages and few disadvantages of experiential learning. One advantage from experiential learning is motivation. Increased student motivation, resulting from heightened interest in the teaching and learning process, is a commonly reported phenomenon following experiential learning exercises. This quality alone shows that students like to learn from experiences presented in a classroom that are designed to be relevant for future real world situations and still have fun while doing it. Secondly, a student faced with an experiential learning game or situation usually has little previous experience to support him/her in a novel context. Learning through classroom experiences has become a great communication skill for the open-minded, showing them a new way of learning. Removal of student-teacher polarization is the third advantage. In recent years, the instructor's function has become more to inspire, stimulate and motivate, rather than direct, order and judge. This, in turn, has meant that the instructor has been adapting to accept a less dominant, less intrusive role in the learning process. Few direct judgements on student performance are required, as most experiential learning games are self-monitoring. Students take decisions and then observe their consequences. Their own evaluation of these consequences then influences their future actions (Taylor and Walford, 1978).

The Need For More Experiential Pedagogy

Forty-six states have formulated an industrial training strategy to attract new businesses. This industry-specific job training was first recognized in North Carolina during the 1950s. Other states followed during the 1980s with "shadow" training programs that made a commitment to industry that

the region would provide qualified employees with the appropriate level of skills and education to fill personnel needs (Siler & Weiner, 1989). According to Steve Weiner and Charles Siler, the U. S. educational system does little to prepare young people for jobs in the real world, and innovative programs which include pre-hiring, screening, and training services are necessary to produce adequately trained employees. Statistics indicate that the nation's schools are not only graduating adults who are functionally illiterate, but they are doing so at a time when factory production jobs are becoming more and more complex with a greater number of problem-solving skills and communication skills being required.

How Real Should Experiential Pedagogy Be?

Colleges and universities should provide the training and education that would empower a graduate to be able to compete in today's job market. Experiential training provides the only viable technique to give the student the experience and learned skills that businesses are searching for and expect to find.

The question is not how far should the instructor go in the classroom to provide the appropriate learning environment, but the real challenge is changing the way the school system and society view the accomplishments of the student. Too much emphasis is placed on a grade. The prestige of being on the president's or dean's list overrides all other motivation for some students. Admission to graduate school or employment with a respected firm still is dictated by grades received. In addition, tuition and costs of books reimbursement are often based upon grades received. As long as that is the recognized value my employer places on my accomplishments.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Sample

Responses were collected from 161 students from various sections of a Fundamentals of Management class. This university is known for its extensive utilization of experiential learning and, utilizes experiential learning extensively. The ages and ethnic origin of the sample were very diverse. A vast majority of

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the students were either working full or part-time. Thus, the majority of the sample was knowledgeable about the real world.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was quite simply in design and was administrated at the end of the semester after the students had participated in a variety of experiential exercises. In addition, the students had been engaged in many very lively discussions of the evolution, need for, and possible advantages and disadvantages of experiential learning. The students had only to circle their preference on the five levels of experiential exercises shown below that ranged from no experiential learning to real as life.

1. Prefer standard lecture method to experiential exercises. This method of pedagogy is the traditional lecture and notetaking method.
2. Prefer experiential exercises that have no consequence whatever. Students may form teams for superficial discussion of the research projects or the current events, but none of these activities result in any consequences to the student whatsoever
3. Prefer experiential exercises that have only social consequences. There might occur some mild teasing by other students resulting from differing levels of performance in these exercises. However, the only consequences from these experiential exercises are of a mild and social nature.
4. Prefer experiential exercises that have moderate "real world" consequences. The students are assigned to a permanent team for the duration of the course. The majority of class time is devoted to highly dynamic experiential exercises that evoke real world frustrations and conflict as well as the intrinsic rewards that accrue from completing a job in an outstanding fashion with the corresponding extrinsic acclaims. In reality, this is a class designed to accomplish learning by doing.
5. Prefer experiential exercises that emulate "real world" consequences. Such experiences occur without the knowledge of the students. Some example's reflecting the darker side of the real world would include experiences that would include staged conflict, class cheating, sexual harassment, racial discrimination, and

ethical

violations. Other than emotional distress, the worst thing that could happen is that the student could fail the course.

Discussion

It was an obvious surprise to this researcher to find such a strong proclivity for more realistic experiential exercises with stronger real world consequences; given the vastly diverse student sample involved in this study. As was mentioned in the questionnaire, some of the real consequences could affect grade attainment and even possible course failure. However, it appears that the students are very much more attuned, then perhaps many instructors are, that they want to be sufficiently prepared to handle just about anything the real world may present them.

It came as no surprise that there was no gender differences. Many positive things are happening to eliminate gender bias, perhaps not as fast as many would like, but at least in the classroom there appears to be a lessor degree of gender bias. The results of this study indicated that females are just as eager to be prepared for the real world as are their male peers.

CONCLUSION

Since we were children we used games as a means of entertainment and education. Simon says taught us how to concentrate while hopscotch developed coordination. Similar methods of 'earning are being applied on the adult level for different application. Current applications to gaming range from war games to business games.. The growth in popularity is due to the many attributes of this learning method. Contributions are made in areas like motivation, heightened interest, behavior development, and self esteem. Not only is there positive development in intra-personal qualities but also in situation diagnosis, and interpersonal relationship development. Life is one long drawn out lesson made up of smaller lessons. How we handle future lessons depends on how we dealt with past experiences. Moreover, our success in the future is more dependant on our ability to objectively evaluate and apply experiences of the past to future situations.

REFERENCES

References available upon request.