

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 15, 1988

BRING THE REAL WORLD INTO THE CLASSROOM

Bob E. Smiley, Indiana State University

ABSTRACT

Teaching must change. The feet tire and test methods of years past are being questioned at all levels. Suggestive of new and better methods have been made by many including Lebrecht (1980), Smiley (1980) and Thistlethwaite (1982). In a follow up study, reported by Smiley (1982), it was found that the students had found the hands-on type educational experience to be, in their opinion, a much more enjoyable method which, for them, aided greater learning.

This paper reports on an experiential learning application of those ideas of bringing the outside world into the classroom.

Background

For many years, the methods of teaching in most courses have not changed. The student is required to attend the classroom and listen to lectures on the subject of study, read a text book, work problems and demonstrate a level of knowledge on exams.

This method is defended by those who advocate it as the best method of disseminating a lot of information in a short period of time. There is no argument with this if the class size is very large and the time is limited. But, if the class is of a reasonable size, fifty or less, there is a better and more interesting method available. One of the reading business writers and critics, Tom Peters has suggested that this style of teaching and the lack of true business experience by the instructors, is limiting the true learning being done in the business schools of our nation. He in fact says that "a grade of F is too kind for the business schools." (Peters 1987)

The Real World Project

The method, here referred to is one of bringing projects from the outside world into the classroom. This is done in the hard sciences on a regular basis. Chemistry classes work in the lab and produced various products from the base chemicals. The biology students study life forms and dissect small animals to provide a clearer understanding of the material studied. Why then, can we not make it a practice to bring the 'live specimens' into the business classroom? The answer is, WE CAN!

The Method

For a number of years, the author has solicited projects, fitting the subject being studied, to be accomplished by the

students as a part of the course. This included research projects for local firms who needed market research and promotion plans for firms who needed help with their promotion. This has provided new interest and enthusiasm for the students and professor alike. To illustrate, an example will demonstrate the method. In 1987, an art gallery needed help in both research and promotion. The directors were concerned that the attendance to the gallery was lower than they desired. In spite of specific showings, which were considered of great interest and worth to the community, people just were not taking advantage of this free service. Some of the hypothesis included a lack of awareness or both the gallery, its shows and its location. Actions had been started to correct these problems.

The class began the project by visiting the gallery and having a guided tour by the director of the gallery. He explained the history of the gallery and the holdings. This helped the class understand the product of interest for the project.

A member of the board of directors of the gallery who owns a promotion firm was designated the representative or the board for regular contact. He attended the class once a week on a regular schedule to review the work of the class and to answer questions. After the visit to the gallery and the first classroom visit by the client, a questionnaire was developed, by the class, to test the hypotheses of:

1. People of the area are not aware of the gallery.
2. People of the area do not know the location of the gallery.
3. People of the area are not interested in art.
4. People of the area are all welcome in the gallery.

In order that these hypotheses could be tested, a survey was conducted by the students in the promotion class. They used random intercept selection with quotas for the most heavily traveled areas of the community. To these responses was added a random phone survey of the city where the gallery was located. The results of the survey indicated that a significant number of those responding were aware of the gallery (72%). Thus, hypothesis 1 was false. To test the question of knowledge of the location, the respondents were asked to direct the student to the gallery and, of those aware of the gallery, 76% gave acceptable directions. Thus, hypothesis 2 was found to be false. To test the level

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 15, 1988

of interest in art the respondents were asked how many times they had actually visited a gallery in the past year. Forty six percent indicated at least one visit to a gallery somewhere within the past year. Hypothesis 3 was then shown to be false. The testing of hypothesis 4, all welcome in the gallery, was addressed by asking the respondent for estimates of the kind of person who attended the gallery, their estimates of average income levels and general comments. A small but alarming number of those surveyed indicated that they saw the gallery as a private club for the elite of the area where they gave lip service to the public being welcome, but, that they just didn't feel welcome. Thus, hypothesis 4 is also found false. The promotion project then became one of not just creating awareness of the gallery, but really one of making people aware of their welcome to the gallery and one of making the community aware of the events taking place. Some of the suggested activities for the gallery management to use to accomplish their goals were to:

1. Actively promote-. the shows of the gallery.
2. Actually purchase advertising instead of depending on the free time and space available through the broadcast and print media.
3. Take the art to the people by having showings in the shopping areas of the community.
4. Redo the entrance to the gallery to make it inviting.

While these were the primary recommendations of the students in their report, many others were provided. The members of the management of the board are now reviewing and considering their next step with the benefit of the results of this classroom project.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The young mind is a wealth of knowledge and is unbiased in most instances. The student becomes enthused and puts mammoth amounts of effort into these "real world" problems which leads to greater learning and applications of the principles as well as greater satisfaction with the course in general.

As has been shown with most classroom use of experiential exercises, this too requires a large amount of work by the instructor. However, the increased learning and satisfaction plus the social benefit to the civic organization and the community, when the project is actually utilized, make it all worth the effort.

REFERENCES

1. Lebrezn, Gene, "Business Consulting: A Practicum for Undergraduates," Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Vol. 9, The Proceedings of the Ninth Annual conference of the Association for Business Simulation and Experiential Learning, 1982, p. 60.
2. Peters, Tom, "Our nations business schools have much to learn – but will they?" In Chicago Tribune, April 27, 1987, sec. 4, p. 12, col. 1/
3. Smiley, Rob E., "Toward the Ultimate Experiential Exercise" Experiential Learning Enters the 80's, Col 7, The Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Conference of the Association for Business Simulation and Experiential Learning, 1980, p. 26.
4. "Toward the Ultimate Experiential Exercise: The Student View," Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Vol. 9, The Proceedings of the Ninth Annual conference of the Association for Business Simulation and Experiential Learning, 1982, p. 140.
5. Thistlethwaite, Paul C. "A Personal Marketing Strategy Approach: Framework and Application," Insights Into Experiential Pedagogy, Vol 6., Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Conference of the Association for Business Simulation and Experiential Learning, 1979, p. 171.