

Insights into Experiential Pedagogy, Volume 6, 1979

A PRACTICAL DESIGN FOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING EXERCISES: ROLES, TECHNICAL EQUIPMENT AND ALTERNATIVE DEBRIEFING FORMATS

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ABSTRACT

The design of an experiential exercise is comprised of three key characters: the instructor, the facilitator and the learner, whose interactions affect the learner. This interaction takes place within the dimensions of a facility having a variety of technical advantages, such as videotape recording and other equipment, or simply in a classroom. The exercise, itself, is not complete without the added dimension of a debrief which may be in any of several alternative formats, ranging from the instructor talking with the learner to the sophisticated use of video equipment.

INSTRUCTOR, FACILITATOR, AND LEARNER ROLES

In order to design an experiential laboratory the human factors are among the most important elements. First it is important to define the roles of those involved in the activities. The instructor is the one who organizes the class content and objectives. He/she is responsible for deciding what and how textbook knowledge is presented. Also the control of the class is the instructor's to maintain or delegate. There are, of course, other functions of the instructor such as grades, discipline, and so on, but these are not relevant to this paper.

The facilitator is responsible for the physical facility as well as administering the experiential exercise. The knowledge and ability of organizing the exercises are the responsibilities of the facilitator.

The learner is the student in the instructor's class. The learner is responsible for materials which the instructor assigns. He/she is also responsible for following the directions of both the facilitator and the instructor.

This triad is important to understanding the Gestalt design for experiential learning. The discussion of the relationships begin with the instructor and move in a clockwise spiral into the heart of experiential learning. (See Figure 1.)

The instructor decides on the content and objectives of the class. However, in order to introduce the experiential aspect of a given objective the instructor needs the services of a specialist in experiential exercises. The ties between the specialist, or facilitator, and the instructor are the educational objectives. Prior to an experiential exercise the instructor and facilitator meet to decide on which of several potential exercises best fit the objectives of the class. The facilitator then is in charge of administering the exercise to the class. The instructor is present during the entire exercise to observe and prepare for the debriefing of the content and the relation of the exercise to theory presented in class. The facilitator is now part of a team which allows each member to specialize his/her efforts toward maximization of the learning derived from the experiential exercise.

The tie between the facilitator and learners is through observing and controlling behaviors. The facilitator presents the exercise to the learners and the amount of interaction necessary between the two is dependent on the exercise. Some require an authority figure and active intervention in the process, while others may only require a person to time the activities. The facilitator is also observing and preparing for debriefing the process and behavior, if necessary.

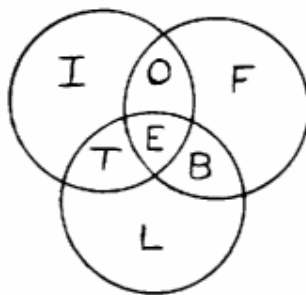
The learners and instructor are tied together in the exercise by the theory. The theory from the classroom is to be applied in an experiential exercise. The ability to apply theory in a real life situation is the goal of the instructor and learners, with the application of theory in a controlled environment the starting point.

In summary, the reason for the laboratory is to facilitate the conducting of experiential learning exercises. The effectiveness of the experiential exercises depends on the culmination of interactions among the instructor, facilitator and learners, and the intermingling of theory, educational objective, and behavior that create "understanding" on the part of the learners.

PRACTICAL OR TECHNICAL DESIGN OF THE FACILITIES

There are, for this discussion, four key components in designing an experiential laboratory. The first is space. (See Figure 2.)

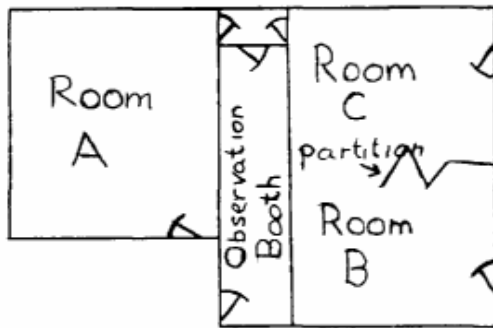
FIGURE 1



F = Facilitator
I = Instructor
L = Learner
T = Theory
O = Educational Objective
B = Behavior
E = Experiential Learning

Insights into Experiential Pedagogy, Volume 6, 1979

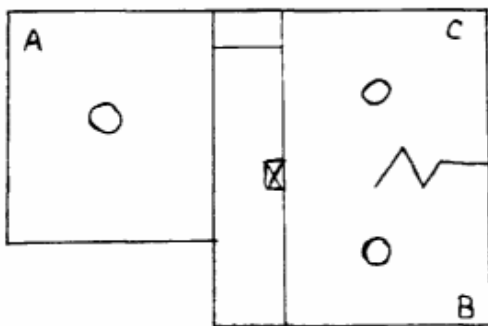
FIGURE 2



The space, as shown in Figure 2, is flexible. The largest room is a combination of Rooms B and C, and is formed by opening the partition between the two rooms. If that is too large, the next smaller room is A. However, if space is needed for smaller groups, Room BC can be divided by closing the partition. Thus, the space component is designed to be a flexible component of the laboratory.

The second component of the experiential laboratory is observation. In Figure 2, the observation booth is depicted in the center. This design allows the observer the maximum viewing potential from a single vantage point. The intercom system (see Figure 3) is located in the ceiling of each room with the master control in the observation booth. This system is placed so that the instructor and facilitator can stand at the intercom's master control' and see any room with a turn of the head.

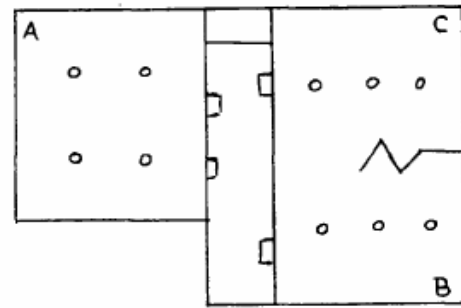
FIGURE 3



- ☒ Master Control
- Speaker/Microphone

The third component then is communications. The intercom in Figure 3 functions as a two-way communications device. The master control is equipped with a series of buttons which allow the instructor or facilitator two-way communications with one, two, or all three rooms simultaneously. The master control also allows the instructor/facilitator to monitor each room individually with the push of a button. Although the intercom allows the instructor/facilitator the ability to monitor each room, another system is used to allow observers to monitor the activity in the rooms. (See Figure 4.)

FIGURE 4



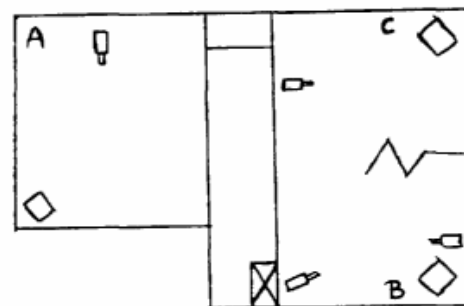
- ☐ Headset Jacks
- Microphone (suspended from ceiling)

The function of an observer is normally to watch and report on one room. Therefore, the observer needs to hear only the room being observed. The system of microphones and headsets, shown in Figure 4, cuts down on the extraneous noise in the observation booth. The only audio the observer receives through a headset is from the room in *front* of the headset jack (i.e., the jack by Room B picks up only Room B, not A or C and vice versa), thus allowing the observer to hear all communications in the room without other distractions.

The final component is feedback. The feedback component in this section only deals with the equipment needed in recording for feedback purposes. The microphones are a vital part of this component. The microphones are connected to a videotape recorder in the observation booth, thereby serving the dual function of receiving audio for observer headsets and for a recorder for feedback.

Another necessary part of the feedback component is video. (See Figure 5.) The cameras are mounted on the wall near the

FIGURE 5



- ◊ B & W Video Camera
- ☐ T.V. Monitor
- ☒ Central Control Unit

ceiling and are all remotely operated from the central control unit in the observation booth. The pan and tilt functions allow the cameras to pick up greater than 80% of the room. The remote zoom allows cameras to pick up minute details such as eye

Insights into Experiential Pedagogy, Volume 6, 1979

contact between participants, hand movements and gestures, and even written notes taken by the participants in the room. The video signal from the cameras is sent to the central control unit. There the signal is recorded with the appropriate audio on one or two videotape recorders (VTRs). Within this central control unit there are three VTRs to allow each room to be recorded separately. There is also a special effects generator (SEC) which allows the video signal from all three rooms to be to be mixed or selectively recorded on one main VTR. From the central control unit the VTR signal (audio and video) is sent to the monitor for feedback. (See Figure 5.) Each room contains a monitor so that the feedback is seen by the participants without moving them from one room to another. Through a series of switches, the videotape recorded on any of the three VTRs can be played back to any room, or all three rooms simultaneously.

In summary, although each room is equipped with cameras, microphones, intercom and a monitor, the equipment is placed out of the way of the participants. During experiential exercises the equipment is not noticed and often participants say "I didn't know you were taping us, even after they have been told the exercise is to be videotaped.

Flexible Debriefing Formats

In the first section, the roles and interactions of the instructor, facilitator, and learner are discussed. The traditional debriefing formats of instructor to learner, facilitator to learner, or even observer (peer) to learner are only a small number of the possible debriefing formats. In the case of a joint debriefing by the instructor and facilitator, the instructor debriefs the theory or book knowledge while the facilitator debriefs the process or behaviors present in the exercise. To this point the discussion of debriefing is concerned about a one on one debrief. The same traditional debriefing formats apply to debriefing one or a group of learners. The only differences are the degree of detail in the debrief. Also the traditional debriefing as defined so far is possible in any setting, like the classroom, and is not dependent on an experiential laboratory.

The experiential laboratory described in the second section of this paper allows extended debriefing formats. This is not to say that traditional debriefing methods are obsolete. Quite the contrary is true. The experiential laboratory is an extension and an aid to the other debriefing formats. The lab has the added attraction of an observation booth, which allows the observer (whether instructor, facilitator or peer) the convenience of viewing from behind a one-way glass. This permits the observers to view and discuss an exercise without disturbing the exercise. The laboratory facilities add the dimension of video feedback to each of the previously mentioned debriefing formats. The debriefing is enhanced by this unbiased replay of the video presentation.

As in the case of the traditional debriefing, not all possible formats are going to be discussed. Also, the video is never used as the sole debrief of an experiential learning exercise. It is important that the roles of the instructor, facilitator, and learner in the debriefing process be remembered; that video playback is an added dimension in the debrief, not a substitute method.

The first debriefing format involves an experiential exercise being run in three rooms simultaneously. The activities in the rooms are each recorded simultaneously on separate VTRs. At the conclusion of the exercise the instructor/facilitator debrief to their particular

points over the intercom or in each room and each observer debriefs in the room they observed. After the learners are debriefed as to what to watch for in the videotape, each room watches the monitor in their room. The same format is often used with the debrief occurring after the video viewing. This allows the participants to make their own observations.

The second debriefing format is to have all three rooms participating in an exercise and (through the use of a special effects generator) switch the remote cameras so that segments of the exercise in each room are recorded on a single VTR. When this videotape is played back to all three rooms simultaneously the participants view how others approached the same exercise.

The third debriefing format is for a group to be videotaped in one room while the instructor and another group observe by watching from another room. In this case, although the video is always on the participants, the audio being recorded is lowered when the instructor (who is also miked and being recorded) debriefs. The instructor's debrief is both directing the attention of the observers and is also on the tape so that the participants may hear the debrief after the exercise.

The fourth debriefing format is to have all three rooms participating in an exercise and only videotape certain sections of the exercise. This is especially effective in exercises that produce strong emotions and rash decisions at a predictable point. The instructor is then able to debrief to that point and have the videotape playback short and to the point. With the introduction of a random access machine to the videotape system, the same effect can be obtained by videotaping an entire exercise but randomly accessing the videotape at particular points.

The fifth debriefing format allows the instructor to record the debrief on the videotape while the experiential exercise is in progress. Then after the exercise is over the videotape supplies the participant with both the observation opportunity and the debrief. This format is especially effective when the exercise is long and debriefing time is short. The participant is free to view the videotape later on an individual basis and still have the benefit of the instructor's debrief.

There are several more debriefing formats available in an experiential laboratory equipped with versatile video equipment. The important point to remember is that it is the quality of the debrief that is the most important. The facilities are only a part of that quality. To maximize the quality of a debrief the proper format should match the presentation.

In summary, the first section delineated the roles of the instructor, facilitator, and learner, showing the interactions among each of the roles and the resulting interdependence of the three. The success of the exercise in many ways depends on how well the triad communicates. For example, if the instructor and facilitator do not communicate, the exercise that the instructor selects may not be the best possible exercise for the class objective, or the way the exercise is run is not conclusive to the desired Outcome. In short, the learner is lost as to relating that ex- exercise to the theory or class assignments; the quality of communications among the three directly affects the experiential learning process.

The facilities as stated in the second section either enhance or detract from an experiential exercise. The

Insights into Experiential Pedagogy, Volume 6, 1979

outcome of the exercise is directly influenced by all four components of the facilities. If the space is too small, the observation blocked or hindered, the communication is impaired so that only part of the exercise can be heard, or there is a technical malfunction in the videotaping process affecting the video feedback, the exercise as a whole is negatively affected. The debrief is a culmination of the two previous topics--the matching of the triad (instructor, facilitator, and learner) with the facilities available (space, observation, communications, and video feedback).