ABSEL RESEARCH - FROM ADOLESCENCE TO ADULTHOOD
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One mark of the mature adult is the ability to sift through the multitude of meaningless activities and experiences that cross his path each day and to reflect only on those that truly have significance to his goals in life, allowing him to set future priorities accordingly. The Second National ABSEL Conference was characterized with just such maturity. One of the significant areas which ABSEL members have sifted and gleaned from this year's experiences is that dealing with the learning process as it applies to experiential environments. My comments will apply exclusively to this priority.

Not only were all of the presentations more mature--building on thoughts of last year and available research since then--but certain persons have taken unto themselves the pursuit of a continuing and exhaustive research on various aspects of experiential learning. (I am sure this is true in other areas of interest as well.)

Developing Untapped Learning Environments. In the presidential address I quoted Byrne's disappointment with the progress of what he calls the soft behavioral areas of business administration, as opposed to the quantitative and financial areas. It appears that James Schreier, Richard Beatty, George Milkovitch, and other ABSEL members are creating behavioral exercises that will assist in closing this gap just as the Georgia State gaming group has been closing the gap between pure mathematics and applied problem-solving in the quantitative areas. (My chosen topic will not permit the mention of numerous other breakthroughs being made by ABSEL members.) Milkovitch's work on "human asset accounting" should delight Rensis Likert's proteges.

Defining Learning. Ralph Roberts and Steven Field raised the questions: "Of what does learning consist in games? Can it be perceived by students?" They stimulated my own thinking about the need to distinguish successful performance from successful learning in games. This made me think once again of the need to structure and delineate parts of games and experiential techniques that deal with either content, experience, or feedback. Perhaps if we define learning better we can begin to analyze, measure, and improve it much more efficiently. For the time being, I am intrigued with Eugene Byrne's definition "... to learn experientially is to internalize learning."

The Sequence of Learning. DeHayes and Perkins raised the interesting question of whether there is a need to follow certain sequences in learning business strategies. Students enrolled in their blocked group of courses, finance, marketing, and operations research, must follow certain patterns in analyzing and working through the case. Perhaps there is an orderliness to learning in such a case that we have omitted in some of the business game programs. This sequence of learning question will require meticulous records and careful analysis such as the "learning journal entries" suggested by Sam Certo of Indiana State University.

The Timing of Learning. Duane Hoover, who assisted us in defining experiential learning at last year's meeting (like the professional comedian far beyond the amateur state of simply learning new jokes), is now looking at the timing and quantity of experiential learning suitable for certain groups of students. He points out that less mature students are not prepared for a 100% experiential learning course. Byrne and Wolfe of SMIJ are telescoping down on this question even more intensively in terms of an experiential learning model, and the definition of learning styles which they are refining.

The Management of Learning. Several presentations brought out certain deterrents and stimulants to learning in games. Leo Parrish suggested that teams that "play to win" often don't "play to learn." I will let you read his rationale for this perceptive thought. Byrne and Wolfe are exploring the effect of learning styles, group mixes, and success in games. Obviously, if winning does not mean learning, we have another dimension which may require creative management at this point. What a rich environment for group research! Truly, Sam Certo, appears correct when he says the last unexplored frontier of management in existence is the classroom! But we must not be discouraged--remember Clark Rogers' quote that "...it usually takes a whole century of analysis to provide one day of synthesis." There is further hope in Rogers' provocative thought that "simulation might do for planning what the computer has done for mathematics..." He also brought us Dick Moore's optimistic note ". . .that simulation may be the 'Future's Language' ." Maybe the synergy and imagineering of ABSEL experiential teachers will shorten the cycle required for synthesizing the efficient Management of Learning Environments."