

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: AN ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE MARKETING CURRICULUM USING KOLB'S LEARNING STYLES

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Introduction

New AACSB standards revolve around the tenets of Mission/Innovation, Impact and Engagement (AACSB, 2013). These tenets transcend and provide the tone and manner for the standards that will be distinctly executed according to an accredited school's mission. Changes in the external environment necessitated review of the previous standards that had been in place since 2003 (AACSB, 2013). Changes include for example, the advance of technology, increased globalization, skills desired by employers, and needs of current students (Duke, 2002). The needs of current students relate to each of these changes as many of today's students gravitate toward use of technology, participate in a more global society, want to acquire skills desired by industry and want to be able to apply those skills. The new standards are designed to address these changes and increase relevance and outcomes for AACSB schools and more specifically enhance the student's learning experience and outcomes. The purpose of this paper is to review the tenets of impact and engagement, highlighted specifically in the strategic oriented standards, and to reinforce the importance of impact and engagement in the learning and teaching standards as well. Experiential Learning, touted in the literature to enhance learning (Bonwell, & Eison, 1991; Duke, 2000; Petkus, 2000), will be the focus of impact and engagement evaluation in the context of student learning styles. The first part of the paper reviews impact and engagement initiatives related teaching and pedagogy with focus on experiential learning. The second part of the paper builds the relationship between experiential learning and learning styles. It will be argued that intentional design of experiential activities with multiple learning style modalities will increase learning and impact and engagement as a result.

Methodology

Specific experiential assignments were collected from sections of Marketing Principles and Practices, Consumer Behavior, International Marketing, Marketing Research, New Product Development and Sales Management courses. After eliminating duplicate assignments a total of fifteen discreet experiential assignments were identified. Together the faculty discussed each activity and its components (many assignments had multiple parts) and classified each according to Kolb's framework.

Findings and Discussion

In order for an experiential activity to be considered an impactful and engaging learning tool, it has to be planned carefully to incorporate multiple aspects of the Kolb (1984) learning cycle (Young, Caudill, & Murphy, 2008). More specifically, students must be able to "involve themselves fully, openly and without bias in new experiences (CE); be able to observe and reflect on these experiences from many perspectives (RO); be able to use concepts based on appropriate theory (AC); and be able to use these theories to make decisions and solve problems (AE)" (Kolb 1981, p. 236). Below is an example which demonstrates how experiential assignments can incorporate the four stages of learning. While an assignment may begin in a particular experiential learning stage, the subsequent related activities typically involve the other stages to the same or lesser degree. Additionally, after review of various assignments and their respective sub components (See Appendix A) an assignment may encourage activities involving multiple learning stages simultaneously or in a non-sequential manner as noted in Figure 1. Therefore it is argued that assignments with multiple components engage

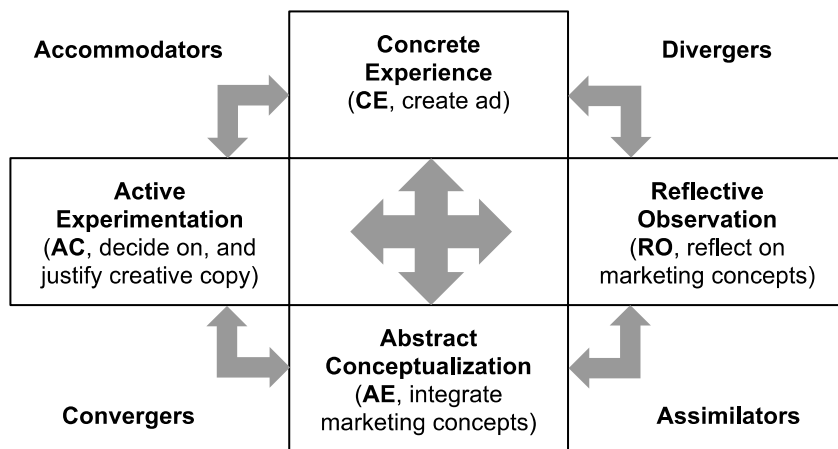


Figure 1: Create a Print Advertisement Experiential Assignment Categorized with Kolb Framework

various experiential learning stages, not necessarily in order and are therefore impactful to different types of learners.

Experiential Assignment Example #1: Create a print advertisement for a client who wants to sell a product that has just been legalized. You will pitch the idea to the client therefore be able to justify the advertisement and its elements using concepts.

In the example assignment above, students are engaging in a new experience (creating an advertisement- concrete experience) based on observations and reflections from previous in class discussions (reflective observation). Additionally, students integrate existing theories (abstract conceptualization) in order to make decisions regarding the advertisement's elements by applying theories and concepts reviewed in class (active experimentation). This assignment moves through all four stages of the experiential learning model, with activities often occurring simultaneously in different stages and activities moving through the stages non-sequentially. The above experiential assignment has components that relate to each learning style and as such reveals an assignment that is expected to be high in aiding learning and directly relate to impact and engagement measures. Ideally assignments should encourage all four types of experiences outlined in the Kolb framework (Kolb, 2005; Petkus, 2000) without concern for the order.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

As with all research, this study is subject to limitations that could inspire future research. One limitation is not obtaining and classifying an exhaustive list of experiential assignments from all marketing classes in the sampled marketing department. Nonetheless, the authors feel that the included assignments give the reader sufficient examples to inspire the development of new and innovative marketing experiential assignments that intentionally incorporate Kolb's framework. Another limitation is that the classification of each assignment to Kolb's (1984) model is limited to the interpretation of the three authors; however, samples were assessed similarly to an inter rater reliability session therefore the authors feel that this limitation does not weaken the main contribution of the paper, which was to suggest an avenue to meet new AACSB standards for engagement in the classroom.

Conclusion

It is argued herein that it is important to create experiential activities for students that are multifaceted and incorporate activities that will be valued by students of various learning styles

in order to address the four stages of Kolb's learning cycle. However differing from past literature the authors posit that elements relating to all of the learning stages can be implemented non-sequentially as well as sequentially within the dimensions of Kolb's model. Furthermore, awareness should be heightened to offer diverse assignments at least at the class level, if not at the program level, to avoid incongruence between students' learning styles and academic assignments. Incongruence of this nature may result in lower academic performance and lower student adaptation (Kolb 1981); both of which are in direct opposition to the revised AACSB standards which encourage impact and engagement. In order to reach these objectives, the authors have outlined various marketing assignments that were designed to have components to stimulate participation among students with various learning styles in order to stimulate thought for future marketing assignments.

Appendix A: Marketing Experiential Assignments*

Number	Experiential Activity	Primary Learning Stages/Learning Styles
1	Research references for a paper.	AE- RO/3-4
2	Conduct individual retail store visits.	AC-RO/4-2
3	Interview an industry expert.	AC-RO-CE/3-2-4
4	Create an advertisement, product prototype, or press kit.	AC-AE-CE/ 3-1
5	Conduct primary research.	AE- RO/ 3-4
6	Create a Facebook page and identify effectiveness measures.	AC-AE-CE/3-1
7	Conduct group retail visits and brainstorm.	CE-RO/2
8	Identify Marketing Strategies in the media.	RO-AC/4
9	Attend a career skill-building seminar or event.	AC-AE-RO/4-3
10	Analyze First Mover Advantage in an emerging market.	RO-AC/4
11	Watch an international business program and analyze marketing strategies.	AE-CE/1-3
12	Interview someone whose first language is not English.	AC-RO/4-2
13	Observe consumer behavior in situation and reflect on the observation.	AC-AE-RO/4-3
14	Take the VALS survey and reflect on results.	AC-AE-RO/4-3
15	Watch a television episode of Shark Tank and analyze effectiveness of pitches and responses.	AC/3-4

*Details for the above assignments are available from the authors.

Key:

Experiential Learning Stages

CE = Concrete Experience RO = Reflective Observation AC = Abstract Conceptualization AE = Active Experimentation

Learning Styles

1 = Accommodating 2 = Diverging 3 = Converging 4 = Assimilating
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References Available upon Request