

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENTIAL TEACHING TECHNIQUES IN MARKETING COURSES AS PERCEIVED BY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines experiential teaching techniques as by perceived students. Student evaluations of learning in four experientially enhanced marketing classes are compared with five classes in the same subject, taught by the same instructor earlier. It was found that experiential teaching increased student perception of learning in several important dimensions.

There are four basic teaching techniques (Hoffman, 1980):

1. Lecture
2. Discussion
3. Experiential
4. A combination of the first three.

The lecture method is probably the oldest in use. The professor speaks, the student listens and takes notes. Primary learning comes from what the student hears and/or sees and studying his or her notes outside of the classroom. With the discussion method, the professor attempts to elicit specific responses from the student. It is the students' own in-class responses and group discussion which may follow through which most of the learning occurs. Note that in the discussion method there is a much higher level of student involvement. Finally, we have experiential techniques. Of the three methods, this method requires the highest level of student involvement. The student learns primarily from his own experiences rather than something he hears from the professor, that the professor has encouraged him to say, or from a discussion in the classroom. Examples of experiential teaching in the marketing classroom include role playing, simulation games, and projects.

Most marketing professors, in fact most university professors, probably use some variation of lecture and discussion, with a reduced amount of time, if any, devoted to experiential techniques. Yet there is considerable evidence that lecture and discussion may be less effective than experiential techniques, especially for marketing students. Several marketing educators have described success with experiential techniques (Cohen, 1986; Deegan, 1984; Goretsky, 1984; Madden, 1983; Sensback and Adler, 1986). Learning by marketing students may occur more effectively with experiential techniques due to the fact that learning occurs more effectively where there has been an attempt to simulate the conditions and skill needs that are encountered in the ultimate learning situation (Madden). This conclusion is supported by research which categorizes

different styles of learning preferred by students in different disciplines.

Four different styles of learning have been identified through the use of a self-administered, self-scored instrument that allows learners to be classified by their predominant or preferred learning styles (Korb and Fry, 1975):

accomodator
converger
diverger
assimilator

Research demonstrated significant differences in these styles (Polnick 1971).

An accomodator's greatest strength is in doing things, carrying out plans and experiments. An accomodator has an amazing ability to adapt readily to whatever immediate circumstances are encountered. Marketing students tend to be accomodators. A converger tends to be unemotional. A converger prefers to deal with things rather than people and tends to have a narrow technical focus. Engineering students would fall into this group. A diverger excels in situations that call for generation of ideas and a background of broad cultural interests. There are many history students in this category. Finally, we have the assimilator. This style of learner has considerable ability in generating theoretical models. The assimilator is less concerned with the practical, and more concerned with the abstract. As you might expect, this category includes economists.

Students have been found to choose fields of interest that are consistent with their learning styles (Fry and Kolb). If there is a mismatch between the field's learning norms and the individual's learning style, the student will frequently leave the field rather than change styles (Polnick).

Where did the styles come from? Most individuals develop learning styles that emphasize certain abilities over others. In a classification system of abilities which includes concrete experience, re-

flective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation, marketing students tend to prefer teaching techniques associated with concrete experience and active experimentation (Polnick), in other words experiential.

Like many marketing professors, the author has utilized all four teaching techniques in the classroom.

In an undergraduate marketing capstone course, experiential teaching techniques were increased by more than 400% as a percentage of total class time over the time allocated previously. A comparison was made between four experientially enhanced courses and five courses of the same subject taught earlier. The increase in experiential teaching consisted of the addition of marketing simulation games, formal presentations, and role playing by students. To examine the learning from experiential teaching techniques as perceived by students, the answers to four questions were analyzed from post course student questionnaires before and after the introduction of increased experiential teaching. The analysis included the mean score achieved on a five-part scale as well as percentile rank compared with other marketing courses. (See Table 1)

The four questions examined were:

1. Course was intellectually challenging and stimulating.
2. Learned something considered to be valuable.
3. Increased interest in subject as a consequence of course.
4. Learned and understood subject materials.

For all four questions, mean scores and percentile ranking increased after experiential teaching techniques were increased. A statistical analysis was performed comparing total points awarded before and after the experiential technique increase. The increased scores in questions 1, 2 and 3 were found to be statistically significant at a level of .05, question 4 was not.

Therefore, as perceived the students, increased experiential teaching was more intellectually challenging and stimulating, resulted more in learning something considered to be valuable, and resulted in increased interest in the subject as a consequence of the course. If as perceived by the students, they only tended to understand the subject materials better, they also understood them no worse.

Of course, perception of learning by the students is not the whole answer. A crucial question is whether the material was actually learned and understood

better when experiential methods were used. Because different methods of evaluating the students were used prior to introduction versus after the introduction of increased experiential learning, an accurate analysis of real learning comparison could not be accomplished in this study. This must await future research. But it does seem clear that increased experiential learning is preferred by marketing students. This is probably due to the fact that this style more closely matches accomodators--the learning style most preferred by marketing students and more closely simulating the conditions and skill needs that are encountered in the ultimate performance situation.

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Table 1

Prior to Introduction of Increased Experiential Teaching

Course No.	No. of Students	% Completing Questionnaire	Question 1 Mean/Percentile	Question 2 Mean/Percentile	Question 3 Mean/Percentile	Question 4 Mean/Percentile
1	26	82%	3.79/46	4.07/56	3.95/67	4.37/92
2	30	77%	3.86/50	4.00/49	3.79/59	4.13/75
3	17	51%	3.93/50	3.75/26	3.81/44	4.17/76
4	31	78%	4.15/60	4.38/62	4.12/64	4.15/73
5	37	95%	4.20/56	4.42/61	4.15/61	4.20/72
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After Introduction of Increased Experiential Teaching

1	35	82%	4.58/87	4.76/89	4.56/90	4.47/94
2	24	80%	4.53/83	4.69/85	4.40/82	4.50/93
3	27	73%	4.61/89	4.76/92	4.47/86	4.47/92
4	31	97%	4.53/83	4.73/88	4.50/87	4.42/91
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		Chi-square	4.8	4.6	4.0	1.0

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2. Learned something considered to be valuable.
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