

HOW AN EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE ENHANCES LEARNING IN AN INTRODUCTORY MARKETING CLASS

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ABSTRACT

This mixed methodology study compared two groups learning about various sales processes. Our approach was to compare a control group, an introductory marketing class that received a lecture on a given subject, with an experimental group, a similar class that received the same lecture plus engaged in a related experiential role play exercise. Both groups were immediately tested on basic facts and understanding (multiple choice questions), definitions (short answer), and the ability to apply the concepts (short essay). Additionally, both groups were asked to fill out a qualitative survey asking how and in what ways the lecture, and if applicable, the role play, helped them prepare for the different types of testing. The survey also inquired about their enjoyment of the lecture and role play. The tests were graded. The survey data was coded and themes were developed using an inductive method of analysis and interpretation. The original surveys were analyzed again utilizing the codes. A variety of techniques including scoring, clustering themes and axial coding were used to develop a framework in which to address the research questions.

The Lecture Plus Role Play group outperformed the Lecture Only group on all three kinds of questions, although the difference in average score for the multiple choice questions was not statistically significant. We would expect the addition of the role play to have the least incremental effect on the multiple choice performance versus the other types of questions. In general, factual information was provided in the lecture and then tested for in the multiple choice questions. However, as we might predict, the performance on the short answer and essay questions was significantly better for the Lecture Plus Role Play group as the role play allowed the students to “work” with the information provided in the lecture. In this sense, the information was reinforced and the students had the opportunity to construct their own understanding of the information embedded in the role play. This, in turn,

prepared them for the short answer and essay questions.

Equally interesting are the survey data indicating that the Lecture Plus Role Play group enjoyed the lecture to a greater extent than was the case for the Lecture Only group. Also, the Lecture Plus Role Play group felt that the lecture prepared them for the multiple choice, short answer and essay questions to a greater extent than was the case for the Lecture Only group.

It was noteworthy that several of the Lecture Plus Role Play group expressed a concern that *they* had trouble paying attention to the lecture. Why did the Lecture Plus Role Play group seem to take a higher level of responsibility for their learning? It is possible that the Lecture Plus Role Play group had learned the material to a greater degree than the Lecture Only group (the test scores support this), and had the confidence to reflect and realize that they had not gained a deep understanding of the material based on the lecture alone. Hence, we might view experiential learning as having benefits that extend beyond the learning of a particular lesson or subject area. In fact, the addition of an experiential learning exercise allows students to gain an additional perspective on their own learning style that they might not when preoccupied with simply “absorbing” material in a lecture.

A good portion of the Lecture Plus Roles Play group mentioned that they found the role play to be enjoyable, funny, and/or entertaining. We would make the argument that all students, and perhaps especially NetGen students, tend to become most engaged with subject matter that they find entertaining. Accompanying this thought is the argument that students learn best in groups or through “cooperative learning.” The interchange among students forces them to examine the information and evaluate their understanding as they form and address questions.