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Learn Twice Invited Brief: Experiential Learning

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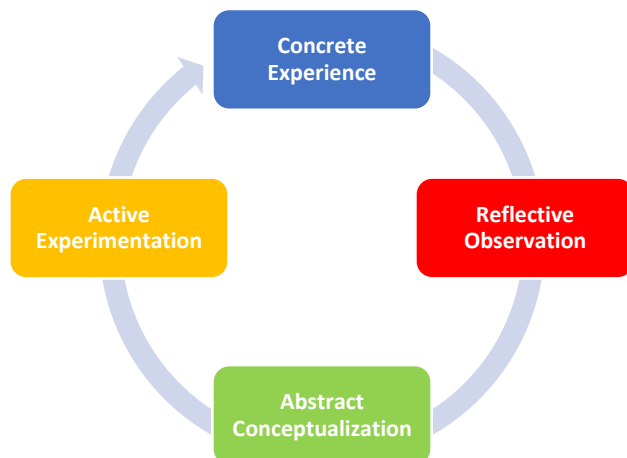
Experiential Learning

In the ever-evolving landscape of business education, the traditional classroom lecture is gradually making way for more dynamic and immersive learning experiences. One such pedagogical approach that has gained significant traction in recent years is experiential learning. The Huntsman School of Business is investing significant resources to create experiential learning opportunities for our students. In 2022, Dean Douglas Anderson declared, “We know experiential learning, or learning by doing, works, and it will be our focus over the coming decade” (Huntsman School of Business, 2022).

This article provides a review of the concept of experiential learning, an overview of the theory, its benefits, and a range of examples both inside and outside the classroom. It concludes with a discussion of the steps that teachers can take to create experiential learning opportunities.

Definition and Overview

Experiential learning is an educational philosophy that emphasizes learning through real-world experiences, reflection, and development of skills and knowledge through experimentation (Dewey, 1938; Piaget, 1973). It is based on the belief that learners construct knowledge when they actively participate in the learning process, making connections between theoretical concepts and practical situations (Kolb, 1984).



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The process of experiential learning typically involves four key stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). Through this iterative cycle, students are encouraged to engage in activities, critically reflect on their

experiences and how it relates to the experience, extract key insights, and experiment with their newfound knowledge in future relevant activities.

Benefits of Experiential Learning

Experiential learning provides a variety of benefits to the learner. A meta-analysis conducted by the Association for Experiential Education found that experiential learning interventions led to significant improvements in cognitive and affective outcomes, including problem-solving skills, critical thinking abilities, and self-efficacy beliefs (Burch et al., 2019). The following is a brief discussion of just a few potential benefits from experiential learning.

1. **Bridging Theory and Practice:** Experiential learning bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and its practical application. By actively applying academic concepts to real-life situations, students gain a deeper appreciation for the relevance and utility of what they learn in the classroom, thus increasing their motivation and engagement (Furco, 2002; Yale, 2023).

2. **Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills:** Experiential learning cultivates critical thinking skills by challenging students to analyze complex problems, evaluate possible ways to approach the issues, and make educated decisions (Roberts & Roberts, 2008). By tackling authentic challenges, students develop the ability to think creatively, adapt to ambiguous conditions, and approach problem-solving from multiple perspectives.
3. **Deeper Understanding and Retention:** Immersive experiences have been shown to facilitate deeper understanding and long-term retention of knowledge (Roberts & Roberts, 2008). By actively engaging with the subject matter, students are more likely to make meaningful connections, recognize patterns, and internalize key concepts, resulting in a more comprehensive grasp of the material (Yale, 2023).
4. **Personal and Professional Development:** Experiential learning fosters personal and professional growth by nurturing essential qualities such as self-confidence, resilience, adaptability, and leadership (Furco, 2002). Through experiential activities, students are often pushed outside their comfort zones, allowing them to develop new skills, overcome obstacles, and gain valuable insights about themselves and their potential.

Types of Experiential Learning

A few of the many types of experiential learning (Moore, 2010; Boston University, 2023) include:

1. **Internships:** Working with practicing professionals allows students to apply their academic knowledge in professional settings, gain industry-specific skills, and develop networks that can be valuable for future career opportunities.
2. **Business Competitions:** Participating in business competitions allows students to apply their knowledge and skills in a competitive setting. These competitions can focus on various fields such as marketing, finance, entrepreneurship, or consulting. Students often work in teams and develop comprehensive strategies to address specific business challenges, presenting their solutions to seasoned evaluators.
3. **Field Trips and Industry Visits:** Taking students outside the classroom and into real-world business settings can offer valuable experiential learning opportunities. Field trips to manufacturing plants, corporate headquarters, or trade shows provide students with a firsthand understanding of industry practices, operations, and trends. Global learning experiences also provide unique international perspectives and cultural engagement.
4. **Simulations and Business Games:** Simulations and business games offer students the opportunity to simulate real business scenarios, make strategic decisions, and observe the consequences of their actions in a low-risk environment. For example, students can participate in a simulation where they develop marketing strategies, set budgets, create a production schedule, and analyze the competitive response.
5. **Service-Learning Projects:** Service-learning combines community service with academic coursework. Students are tasked with developing solutions that meet identified community



needs and reflect on the service activity to better understand course content and gain an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.

6. **Undergraduate Research:** Engaging students in undergraduate research allows students to delve deep into a specific research topic, apply research methodologies, and contribute to the creation of new knowledge. Students work closely with faculty mentors to design research questions, gather data, analyze findings, and present their research outcomes. This hands-on experience not only enhances critical thinking and problem-solving skills but also nurtures a deeper understanding of the research process and fosters a passion for inquiry and exploration.
7. **Case Studies:** Case studies present students with real or fictional business scenarios, encouraging them to analyze the situation, identify key problems, and propose viable solutions. For instance, students can analyze a case study on a struggling company and work with a team to develop a turnaround strategy.
8. **Collaborative Consulting Projects:** Partnering with local businesses or organizations, students can engage in consulting projects that require them to interact with clients to determine needs, analyze the internal and external environment, and provide recommendations to meet those needs.

Steps to Create Effective Learning Experiences

Faculty members should consider the following as they develop experiential learning activities:

1. **Identify Learning Outcomes:** Clearly define the specific learning outcomes and skills you want students to acquire through experiential learning activities. Align these outcomes with the course objectives and ensure they are measurable.
2. **Design Authentic Experiences:** Develop experiential learning activities that closely resemble real-world situations. These activities should be challenging, meaningful, and relevant to the course content and objectives.
3. **Provide Guidance and Support:** Offer guidance and support to students throughout the experiential learning process. Facilitate discussions, provide resources, and offer feedback to help students reflect on their experiences and deepen their understanding.
4. **Incorporate Reflection:** Build in regular opportunities for students to reflect on their experiences. Encourage them to critically analyze their actions, identify insights, and connect their experiences to course concepts and theories.
5. **Promote Collaboration:** Encourage collaborative learning experiences that promote teamwork, communication, and problem-solving. Provide opportunities for students to work together, share diverse perspectives, and learn from each other's experiences.
6. **Assess Learning:** Develop assessment strategies that evaluate both the process and outcomes of experiential learning. Use a combination of methods to assess students' understanding, skills, and growth.
7. **Continuous Improvement:** Continually refine and improve your experiential learning activities based on feedback from students, colleagues, and industry partners. Reflect on the effectiveness of the activities and make necessary adjustments to optimize the learning experience.

Conclusion

Experiential learning has emerged as a transformative approach in education, and it is an important part of the future of the Huntsman School of Business. The Huntsman School has excelled with experiential learning opportunities in research, competitions, internships, service, simulations, and many other activities. To achieve our strategic objective to become the “premier, undergraduate business and economics program in the Intermountain West,” we must collaborate to continually innovate our curricular and co-curricular offerings to include cutting-edge experiential learning opportunities for our students.

If you are interested in sharing examples and expertise about an experiential learning model in a report or a training session, or if you would like to share your expertise about another teaching strategy, please contact Dan Holland at learntwice@usu.edu.

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