From periphery to core: The increasing relevance of experiential learning in undergraduate business education

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ABSTRACT

Business educators have been challenged to provide a learning experience that prepares graduates to successfully compete in a dynamic business environment. The insistence on building demonstrable competencies prior to entering the workforce has led to a shift in the academic community. Experiential learning has gone from the uncommon, exceptional experience, to a standard method of education. Through the examination of prior literature, we identify the progression of learning models through this transition. In addition, we suggest that contemporary approaches to experiential learning that provide for practical, personal, and social applicability serve as the foundation for the increasing significance of experiential learning in undergraduate business education.

Keywords: Business Education; Experiential Learning; Learning Models; Management Education

INTRODUCTION

Business schools have largely prepared graduates to perform well in the business, government, and social sectors in a theoretical, and philosophical manner. Unlike other forms of education, such as medical schools, where students are trained in simulated real-world scenarios business education relies mostly on concepts, theories, and beliefs. This has occurred for generations as "America's most elite universities put a higher priority upon research and theory development as well as faculty prestige while lower tier business schools usually promote themselves as providing a practical education by tapping the ability of low-paid, part-time adjunct faculty" (McHann and Frost, 2010). Each institution endeavored to meet the needs of their most important stakeholders – the students – and in the process they attempted to devise an exact formula for preparing students and preserving their institutional brands. Anecdotal evidence suggests the most relevant education however is both philosophical, and practical. It is the balance of theories learned in the classroom as well as the development of interpersonal skills from navigating real world challenges often faced during full-time employment that builds competency in graduates.

Many business schools, torn between the pressure to generate knowledge through research and the expectation to develop graduates with ability to manage organizations, have opted to devote their energies to the former. The oft-heard critique is that business schools are not effective in developing leaders, and many have called into question the utility of a university degree in a competitive, global economy that quickly rewards skill and talent.

These priorities are shifting, however, as business schools look for ways to retain and expand their student populations. Increasingly, business schools are responding to the pressure to make their curricula more relevant, to prepare students who are "ready on Day One" to be active contributors and to provide insights that help managers solve real problems.

An education that is well rounded gives students an opportunity to close the knowing-gap. The knowing-gap is the critical difference between what a student knows and what he or she can actually do. In order to close the gap, students must develop a disciplined *habit of learning* so that a feedback loop is established so that, long after graduation, students not only *know*, but also can actually *do* (McHann and Frost, 2010; Kolb, 1984).

This article addresses the increasing importance of experiential learning as a core component of the undergraduate business curriculum. First, we review classical experiential learning theory, drawing heavily on the seminal work of Kolb (1984). We offer a perspective on the use of such models in business education, suggesting that the application of experiential learning (EL) has been ad hoc, decontextualized and episodic. Next, we review more recent approaches to EL, with an emphasis on the more systematic, contextualized, and sustainable. This shift in emphasis and focus, we argue, signals a move from periphery to core as EL becomes more fully integrated into business education. We end by asserting that contemporary EL models offer three key types of applicability for business students, each of which corresponds with a phase of the EL cycle. Practical applicability, which is an outgrowth of concrete experience, addresses the skills and abilities needed in a business environment. Social applicability, which refers to the learning that occurs when students are immersed in sets of relationships similar to those encountered in a work setting, relates to active experimentation. Finally, personal applicability relates to reflective observation and facilitates internal transformation among students resulting from their ability to be introspective regarding the learning experience.

Learning styles theory: the basis for experiential learning

The notion of "discipline to learn" is grounded in Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), which provides a model to resolve the conflict between how information is gathered (prehension) and how information is used (transformation) (Kolb, 1984). The ELT model emphasizes a need for learner involvement in all educational activities and, addresses the concept of how experience makes learning meaningful. The learning style inventory is used to match student learning styles to complex subject matters, to understand individual preferences for certain learning experiences, and to suggest the adoption of different teaching methodologies which suit various learning styles (Akella, 2010). The theory has gained significant importance in recent years, as "faculty [members] affirm that students carry little competence and knowledge from one course to the next, from one semester to another, and from college to the workplace" (Smith, 2011). Building an education-to-workforce pipeline that serves students and employers well requires technical skills, conflict management talent, and exposure to theories that are relevant to the ever-changing business sector.

Understanding how students learn has helped to develop modern models. Smith (2011) outlines Kolb's theory as a process of:

> taking in information (prehension) and the process of using that information (transformation) involves two unique processes. The first dialectic dimension, "prehension," involves learners navigating two epistemological extremes: absorbing information empirically through Concrete Experience (CE) or absorbing information cognitively through Abstract Conceptualization (AC). The second dialectic dimension, "transformation," involves learners navigating two extremes as they decide what to do with the prehended (internalized) knowledge: do they reflect upon alternate meanings and perspectives (Reflective Observation (RO)) or do they take action based upon the prehended knowledge (Active Experimentation (AE))? (p. 2).

At the Concrete Experience (CE) stage a student activates their senses, develops a stronger awareness; at the Reflective Observation (RO) portion of the cycle individuals begin to consider alternate interpretations of the CE along their relevant personal experience to value the CE; at the Abstract Conceptualization (AC) ensures participants access to concepts, which can aid them in making sense of the CE; and, the final stage, Active Experimentation (AE), is when the learner decides upon and/or takes action with respect to their ability to reflect upon the original Concrete Experience. During the AC it is critical for skilled educators/trainers to be present so that psychological, affective, and mental shifts are monitored (Smith, 2011). This realization has lead to models that provide opportunities for students to take in learning that activates more of their five natural senses. By engaging with data taken in by tasting, touching, smelling, hearing, and seeing students are given stimuli which taps into cognitive psychology and their "processes of memory, perception, problem solving, creativity and critical thinking." (American Psychology Association, 2013)

Over the last three decades, the academic community has studied learning styles as a means to improve the instructional design of courses. The approaches to understanding how we learn have been segmented into four categories: personality, information processing, social interaction and instructional preferences (McCarthy, 2010). It is a focus on personality that led to the creation of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), based on Jungian psychology, which

examines how the individual perceives the world and makes decisions, while information processing examines how students absorb.

Perhaps not as common outside of educational institutions is the Learning Style Inventory (LSI), which is focused on the information-processing portion of student learning. Figure 1 shows the learning style inventory as layered onto the experiential learning cycle. This more complex framework serves as a means to guide educators in identifying the best hands-on, real world experiences to include in their curriculum. Tools such as the LSI can ensure each student is given a fair opportunity at an accessible experience that will bring the business education theories to life. Between 1969 and 2005, five learning style inventories have been published and the results have lead to the conclusion that academic class level and cultural background can influence learning style preferences. The inventory relies on two assumptions. First, learners can enter the cycle at any stage; and second, that weaker preferences can be strengthened to aid the learner in adapting to various teaching styles (McCarthy, 2010).

A brief explanation of each style, which corresponds with Figure 1, is offered below.

- Divergers prefer to approach learning through concrete experiences and process information through reflective observation. They are best at viewing existing situations from different points of view. Their strength lies in imaginative ability as they tend to have broad cultural interests, and are feeling orientated.
- Assimilators prefer to approach knowledge through abstract conceptualization and process information through reflective observation. They are best at understanding a wide range of information and putting the information into a concise, logical frame. Assimilators are less focused on people and more interested in ideas and concepts.
- Convergers also approach knowledge through abstract conceptualization however they process through active experimentation. They prefer to deal with technical tasks and problems rather than with social and interpersonal issues. Their strength lies in problem solving, decision-making, and the practical application of ideas.
- Accommodators have the ability to learn primarily from hands-on experiences. They tend to perform well in situations where they must change to meet immediate circumstances and their strength lies in their ability to carry out plans involving new challenges.

Traditional approaches to experiential learning

Undergraduate learning most often relies on lectures as a chosen method for content delivery (Fulford, 2013). For educators and institutions the responsibility to teach was often primary, while finding an educational delivery method that would allow participants the opportunities to practice and hone their leadership skills became a secondary or tertiary thought.

The traditional approaches of experiential learning occurred with no regularity and with minimal context. As the research of EL has come out over the decades it has been implemented ad hoc and with limited context. In many instances exposure to experiential learning in undergraduate business education was dictated by access to a specific instructor or institutions creating opportunities of inequity across the country. Students fortunate enough to have a customized education were encouraged to participate in hands-on, real world learning occasions by invitations from their peers, faculty members, and others loosely associated with the university or college. Examples of these early models often include international and/or domestic trips that were established based upon pre-existing relationships and they typically took place

intermittently throughout the academic tenure of the student. With little to no structure EL opportunities required both an interest and ability to finance the loosely formed learning.

The irregular nature of experiential learning as practiced in the traditional sense came with significant barriers. As such, an education that would stimulate all senses, redirect learning feedback loops, and provide a unique competitive advantage post graduation was not accessible and therefore underutilized. These conditions would lead to many students misjudging EL and prevented them from viewing the prospect as something to endeavor towards. With barriers in front of them and no true value recognition to make the effort of surmounting the barriers, students were not demanding an experience-based education. The research from 1977 thru 1986 concluded, "people tend to avoid tasks that they believe exceed their capabilities and take on tasks and activities that they believe they can handle" (McCarthy and McCarthy, 2006). As expected the literature goes on to highlight how shifting away from tasks that are too daunting greatly alters the personal development of individuals, and in order to work around this scenario the self-efficacy (McCarthy and McCarthy, 2006) of students must be developed because it influences their desire to stretch beyond experiences that appear easy. In short, without the structure of experiential learning students had no incentive, no comprehension, and in some cases no confidence in their ability to learn outside of the classroom. Yet as history and research would go on to prove, without applicable life experiences fully integrated into the curriculum (rather than an extracurricular or co-curricular activity) many students may not believe they have the personal, academic, social or financial capacity for EL.

Nevertheless the importance of EL has been well known among university leadership. This knowledge is founded upon John Dewey's, the towering giant of educational philosophy in the past century and the originator of the practice of student teaching, theories on experiential learning as a pedagogical tool. His influence upon subsequent generations of educators has been profound (Rosenstein, Sweeney and Gupta, 2012). In the old model applying knowledge in a shared, social setting offered a special advantage to students. The lack of consistency in offering EL was not correlated to the known benefits of EL. Educators were aware that some students excelled while others were locked out, and most often would have to wait for the experience of a finer point business education until they graduated and obtained a permanent job.

Rosenstein et al (2012) present their findings from an online survey conducted among university department chairs in an effort to gain perspective on university-wide use of experiential learning. The results offered several hypotheses as to how professors and administrators could have operated under their own knowing-gap. The findings showed there was a difference in cross-disciplinary definitions. Language was important to the shift. Thus as old models were examined and new models considered it became critical to ensure a shared language was established. Having educational leadership in charge of a lexicon that would accurately explain what experience students should expect prevented EL from remaining highly customizable from instructor-to-instructor. Among the respondents at Adelphi University ninety-one per cent of thirty-five department chairs indicated their department made use of EL with greatest use during the junior and senior years. Institutions subscribe to various core beliefs and the evidence is inconclusive in regards to the impact of age, maturity at the time of experiential learning in undergraduate business schools. Some institutions adhere to a belief that the earlier a student can have an experience that utilizes an expansion of their five natural senses the better; there are other institutions that align with Adelphi and believe in the importance of a foundational education so that older students are prepared to fully engage with non-lecture style learning.

Moving from traditional to contemporary approaches

Indications of change from a more traditional model to a more contemporary approach began to appear as institutions developed task forces charged with moving beyond loosely-structured and inconsistent sets of activities to incorporate non-traditional learning into existing degree programs in a more comprehensive systematic manner. Institutional leadership began receiving pressure to provide a collegiate experience that scaled both wide and deep. As the demand to educate larger numbers of students increased it became critical to genuinely understand how students learn. Technological advances have impacted all of society. Its role in shifting experiential learning in undergraduate business education has been swift and profound. The rapid expansion of technology into the classroom has provided opportunities to engage with both hardware and software in order to deepen quantitative and qualitative learning. An obvious example is the introduction of video conferencing. The ability to remove the constraints of geography allows students to interact with a guest lecturer in a functional and interactive manner. Previously students might be limited in their opportunity to supplement their core curriculum, but technology can now guarantee direct contact with stimuli that activates the senses of sight and hearing. Interacting with business leaders from all over the globe via technology has greatly enhanced experiential learning. Real world interactions are still preferred in principal yet the electronic transmission of content has made it easier to expand the reach of knowledge.

Likewise, access to technology provides a seamless learning experience. Students are now able to learn both online and offline, which requires their abilities to be reflective of modern trends. When theories and concepts are more easily accessible they no longer hold the same value. Under the old model a student might be competitive because they were afforded a unique opportunity; in contrast, the new model of experiential learning values the ability to process large amounts of information and distilling it down to a stream of reflective understanding. Plug-in cameras, redundant Internet, library resources on demand, sound recording and applications built into hardware designed to be mobile means more opportunities to close the knowing-gap. It is no longer acceptable to know and not be able to do when resources are plentiful. The expectation is undergraduate business students will leverage the power of technology to create and process information gained from experiential learning (Lair et. al, 2007).

Fourcade and Go (2012) outline three key challenges faced by managers, and for which traditional pedagogy has no fruitful response: (1) ongoing crises and focus on short-term results, which results in a loss of meaning among managers, (2) isolation brought about by a proliferation of often contradictory and confusing standards, to which we would add that the consequences associated with violation of those standards are increasingly severe, and (3) increasing demands amid shrinking resources. In the face of daunting challenges that await them, students must be fortified with more than knowledge as they enter the business arena. The "stakes" continue to rise as the work environment becomes more risky. In fact, the ability to tolerate and manage risk is also fruitful ground for experiential approaches (Larsen, 2004) as is the ability to devise and execute on a strategy (Joshi et al, 2005).

The importance of style in shifting from traditional models to contemporary frameworks was influenced by increasing diversity of student populations and the importance of equity in access to EL. When colleges expanded the demand for diverse, relevant experiences across cultures rose. Perhaps under the old model, assumptions could be excused but with new models taking over it has become critical to consider how race and ethnicity, among other things, plays

into a student's experiential learning understanding. EL should be integrative enough to involve the whole person; learning must not just engage a student's intellect but also their senses, their feelings, and their personalities (Baden and Parkes, 2013).

Smith (2002) found that when white master's level diversity course students had prior meaningful experiences with various dimensions of diversity they engaged with the topics affectively at a similar rate of Black students. This would lead business educators to propose education that enables learners to have concrete diversity related experiences during the course to more deeply impact learning (Smith, 2011). The steps taken are imperative. If these bridges are built undergraduate students will connect to the material presented and learn how to build community. Community building requires communication proficiency, emotional intelligence, and general interpersonal skills. When undergraduate students have EL integrated in their education they are provided opportunities to safely practice transferable talents for future use in the workforce. As students build community they are learning to accept the textured histories, attitudes and behaviors of others engaged in the experience with them. J. Goosby Smith (2011) asserts that White students' understanding and appreciation for diversity education is primarily impersonal, while minority group members grasp the material from a personal and affective position (based on empirical data presented). She also argues that diversity education must include a consideration of Whiteness - the race that largely comprises the U.S. power structure. Otherwise, the continued marginalization of the concept of race (which is to say, to locate race only in minority group membership), we allow a significant portion of the U.S. population to continue believe that it does not have a race. (Smith, 2011).

With the 1970s Civil Rights era diversity curricula focused on "educating people in power, since the racial and gender injustices were most often perpetrated by those in power upon those who lacked power" (Smith, 2011). The assumption was understandable at one point but it no longer serves the current educational landscape (Smith, 2011). As students from cultures without power integrate elite and non-elite institutions, equity in opportunity must be considered. Experiential learning was forced to move beyond the "privilege centric" dynamic. Students of all demographics were (and are) encouraged to take advantage of EL rather than wait until their career begins to refine their business and leadership education. In short, institutional administration was forced to acknowledge that when building bridges to opportunities some factors required greater aim - race, ethnicity, and identity matter.

An increasingly competitive job market requiring specialized skills also requires employees are coachable and adaptable. The market dictates that recent graduates have a certain amount of emotional intelligence in addition to technical training. The U.S. military was researched to better understand how EL could lead to improved management. Sekerka et al (2011) posit a moral decision-making model, balanced-experiential inquiry (BEI), as a more complex view of experiential learning. The model is the process undertaken as a person proceeds toward moral action, relies heavily on personal experience. For the model to be effective participants need an event to reflect upon, good or bad, so that they can comprehend in an atmosphere of conversational learning through group discussion. It is the combination of introspection and discussing past stories that honor both positive and negative aspects of a participant's handling of past ethical issues. This balance promotes better ethical decision making in the future. Educators and employers are asking: is it possible to develop ethical decision-making? Findings from BEI point to the answer yes. BEI allows a professional to overcome emotions, self-regulation and self-efficacy such that ethical responses can be executed (Sekerka, Godwin and Charnigo, 2011). Theories such as these are a major factor in experiential

learning continuing to gain value in undergraduate business schools. If educators can provide a hands-on learning opportunity to a student, which can later be referenced in controlling one's own outcomes and moral decision-making it will provide a competitive advantage to the student, the university or college, as well as an employer.

Contemporary approaches to experiential learning

Fulford (2013) posits teaching at the collegiate level "emphasis should be on leadership skills and participants should be responsible for their own learning as well as that of one another." These concepts are linked to research released seven years ago, which identified the a critical component of excellent leadership requires modeling behavior and inspiring a shared vision. In Fulford's Team Based Learning experience students learn the content as well as how to use it. This methodology has shown that students continue learning even after the course is complete. The model requires that groups are properly formed; remain intact long enough to become cohesive teams; and, are repeatedly given challenging tasks with reflective prompts and clear feedback (Fulford, 2013). In short, research has created pathways for new models that understand leadership, among other business topics, requires space to think and act. Relevant learning must be taught in motion and not just in theory.

As Bevan and Kipka (2012) note, experiential learning is "…particularly powerful in connection with management education, as it is perceived to be effective in the support of training and education in fields as diverse as talent management, leadership performance, competence development, change management, community involvement, volunteering, cross-cultural training, and entrepreneurship."

Far greater intention and context has lead to a more dynamic experience. Modern business education links students to established structures within the university or college setting. Moving from an impromptu model to a systematized one allows students to have greater confidence in their ability to overcome the barriers of equity and access in experiencing learning outside of the classroom. In this regard students have support in understanding the value of new stimuli, so that their critical decision-making skills and emotional intelligence are developed from a continuous learning feedback loop. The structured support also develops the self-efficacy of students such that they have greater control and confidence over their ability to have an EL encounter early in their educational career. Within the new model, dialogue links experiential learning to core learning. Conversation in a class setting provides opportunity to develop skillsets that link to professional paths, skills that open doors to increased earning potential, and greater responsibility. Fully integrated into the curriculum, experience based learning is more likely to be offered as a course with formal assessments and mentorship from core faculty. As a result, EL has become replicable and scalable across university departments. With the ability to repeat the model without sacrificing the integrity of the experience larger numbers of students have access to EL.

Further, students can gain exposure to an "in vivo" approach based in real, sometimes spontaneous circumstances, rather than a highly stylized and planned approach (Fourcade and Go, 2012). Indeed, as Illeris (2007) has argued, "the more complex the type of individual acquisition is, the more likely it is that the learning could be characterized as experiential."

Experiential learning can be a highly effective educational method especially for adults as it engages the learner at a more personal level by addressing the needs and wants of the individual. The process requires qualities such as self-initiative and self-evaluation. To be

effective, it should employ the whole learning process from goal setting, to experimenting and observing, to reviewing, and finally action planning. This complete process allows for the learning of new skills, new attitudes and even new ways of thinking (Kickul, Griffiths and Bacq, 2010).

As we consider the shift toward more complex approaches to EL, it is useful to review the influence of the case method approach. Harvard Business School pioneered the case study approach to begin exposing students to real-world learning scenarios. The assumption was the case model would trigger deeper learning, and help to move students from untethered theory to anchored learning. This method began to bridge the gap between educational styles that introduce relevant circumstances in a safe environment (such as medical school). Practitioners, educators, and employers all began championing a shift in business education such that students were able to wrestle with challenges that come alive and require a new path of thinking. Since the first business case was introduced, this method has grown in popularity and quickly swept across some of the most elite institutions in the country. Currently the popularity of business cases as a form of hands-on learning has reached a peak. As lively as cases can make the classroom discussions the current understanding is they are still no substitute for direct learning opportunities (Joshi et al, 2005). Leading universities and colleges are looking to incorporate both dramatic and everyday direct opportunities for experience learning into the curriculum. In these instances cooperative education placements, internships, job shadowing, and classroom based hands-on laboratory style activities have all found their way into the structures of program development (McCarthy and McCarthy, 2006). Newer models are leaning into reflective, iterative, action-orientated and a continuous nature of acquire-interpret-apply (plan, do, study, act) methodologies (McHann and Frost, 2010). It is still a challenge to identify the proper vehicle for delivering data that will alter the cognitive process of students thus educators across the country continue to adapt to experimental models.

Perhaps one of the most interesting areas for using experiential learning is ethics, and sophisticated approaches are being developed in response to a sense of urgency in helping students understand, analyze, and manage in ethically-ambiguous contexts. One innovative tool in initiating new mental processes is journaling. "The literature on the method of journaling, or journal entry assignments, is limited but it has shown some value throughout all three stages of learning – acquiring, interpreting and applying information" (Schutte and Wetmore, 2012).

As students begin with little or no clue on how to use the method of journaling to reflect and put learning into action, professors provide real time feedback to guide the students learning in context to the curriculum. Schutte and Wetmore (2012) illustrate an attempt to measure the use of reflection to assess the change in values observed during experiential learning. The findings show student engagement has gone beyond educational rhetoric, when given direct prompts. Engaged learning through writing down reflections has emerged as a valid and effective strategy for educators. Experiential learning prepares students to function more effectively in careers and communities after graduation because students encounter complex, real-world situations requiring adaptable application of fundamental concepts. Institutions have begun to encourage and require blog posts, journal entries, and other forms of documenting streams of thought. One example of a core curriculum change is William Jewell College's 3-question inquiry that encourages introspection around the questions: what can we know; how do we know; how should we behave? In addition, an overseas trip to Honduras is offered as a means to heighten civic engagement through the stimulation of new sights, sounds, tastes, smells and stimuli engaged through touch (Schutte and Wetmore, 2012).

The most common forms of experiential learning in a business school include team-building exercises, simulations, guest speakers and internships. These types of activities can connect students and faculty to ever changing business models but to gain the full benefits of experience-based learning, students need to be engaged as individuals and have the opportunity for self-reflection.

Applicability and experiential learning

More complex approaches to experiential learning call for a more nuanced understanding of their utility for students. EL approaches go beyond providing insight and epiphanies for students, they stimulate specific and defined areas of awareness in students that deepen both the experience and the student's memory of it. The first type of applicability, practical applicability, relates to the knowledge, skills and abilities that students will need in a business environment. A business education should translate into theory but also everyday skills and abilities in order to ensure graduates are competitive in the job market. The literature shows how experiential learning provides opportunities to develop new learning behaviors that can be applied and reapplied throughout adulthood. This feedback loop of continuous learning will unsurprisingly transfer into business environments, offering advantages for those afforded access. Critical thinking skills have been shown to improve when experiential learning techniques have been employed (DeSimone and Buzza, 2013) using case study, online courses, detailed questioning,, and peer assessment (DeSimone and Buzza, 2013a). The use of experiential approaches that utilize technology (e.g. Huang and Behara, 2007) allows students to deepen their knowledge of technology as they take on managerial challenges. This dual skill set is crucial.

The social applicability in experiential learning immerses students in a set of relationships that they will encounter in the business world, domestically and globally. In a competitive, global economy business undergraduate students will greatly benefit from the knowledge of how to build and maintain relationships across various divides. Understanding how teams are formed and sustained will impact the social and personal lives of students. Whether the activity requires that students locate themselves at an earlier stage in life (based, for example, on the kindergarten exercise explained in Fourcade and Go (2012)) or to interact in the present. Revisiting and reconsidering one's actions as a child interacting with other children elicits a different set of thoughts and feelings which can nonetheless be helpful in the person's current role as a student, and in his/her understanding of how they might act as a manager. Certainly group dynamics that emerge as students engage in exercises related to innovation (e.g. Li et al, 2007) and a range of other areas often yields great results for students.

Then the personal applicability of experiential learning allows students to reflect on their behavior, to generate insights that increase their self-awareness, that can enhance their self-concept, that can translate into personal growth, and that help them begin to answer the question, "who am I?" Through introspection and dialogue students are given an opportunity to reflect on their behavior, to generate insights that increase their self-awareness. Kickul et al (2010) employed experiential approaches in teaching innovation and entrepreneurship. This was a particularly special context given the difficulty of "teaching" topics that are abstract, highly subjective and not easily transferable via lecture and discussion. Student reflections were a central component of the approach, and allowed Kickul and her colleagues to witness the intrapersonal views that enabled learning. Interestingly, Kickul also examined faculty self-

reflections, yielding greater insight into how to ignite student learning in subsequent use of the approach. Reflexive writing was also used to teach ethics – a topic that can elicit an intellectualized discussion that bears little resemblance to action in the presence of an actual dilemma. For Baden and Parkes (2013), the students' reflections gave space for expression of emotion and thought as students grappled with issues related to sustainability, ethics, and social responsibility. Further, students exhibited a stronger sense of self-efficacy as they emerged from the activity with new and tested perspectives.

Desmond and Jowitt (2012) suggest a dialogical experiential learning model through the Outdoor Management Development (OMD) activity that requires that students attend to their physical and physiological experience while testing and extending ways of discovery. Participants come to know – and to trust what they know – by virtue of an inquiry into their head, body and heart as they complete the EL tasks. The trust carries forward into the uncertain and ambiguous world of work.

Returning to Table 2, we suggest how each type of applicability corresponds to the BEI Model. Being able to identify an ethical scenario is of practical relevance to students; that is, they acquire knowledge and a skill that can be used in the work context. Examining the strengths and barriers is seen as being both practical (problem-solving skills) and personal (insights generated by matching their perspective against that of others). Reporting back is seen primarily as being of social relevance because of the relating to and sharing with others in the group. Group discussion is social and personal in that people often discover some new part of themselves as they engage in collaborative, group conversation.

The impact of experiential learning on undergraduate business schools students can carry well into adulthood. In the Theory of Andragogy four key assumptions about adult learners are presented: (1) adults tend to be more self-directed; (2) adults possess personal histories which define their identities; (3) motivation in adults is directed to more socially relevant learning; and, (4) adult learners have an interest in immediate application for problem-solving (Fulford, 2013). The literature continues on to show the manner in which students learn beyond college. Having a personal history that impacts who you become, being exposed to learning that was relevant and social in nature, as well as possessing a desire to apply problem-solving skills in real time will allow adults to learn nonstop. Experiential learning provides a base for these experiences to occur at the undergraduate business level and they can anchor participants into a pathway of incessant development.

In contrast there are several situations where adults will not perceive learning as life enhancing. Boggs points out when "the learner is provided with answers rather than arriving at them independently, when [they] are not challenged to exceed previous personal performance standards and when information without relevant context is gathered" they are less likely to be interested in interpreting and reflecting. This lack of desire to learn, grow and develop will cap their ability to perform well in the current workforce (Fulford, 2013) In short, exposure to experiential learning in college supports the continuation of adult learning theory and the notion that we all learn best by doing. Learning to close the knowing-gap while a student provides the best opportunity for competing in the workplace.

Learning organizations, as defined by Olsson et al (2007), are more prevalent. Corporations, government agencies and the public sector are all committing to the evolution of an organization that encourages personal and professional competency. Olsson et al (2007) identified the types of "emergent learning that takes place in daily work tasks" for the purpose of expanding experiential learning research in the workplace. It was identified that one's ability to

critically reflect improves learning abilities. Reflecting, as developed through journaling, allows an individual to interpret experiences for the purpose of developing wisdom and competitive intelligence. Both reflection and dynamic learning have a place in undergraduate business education, and as students start their careers they will begin to see the value of these skills in driving cost efficiency as well as organizational development. In the workplace learning organizations are seeking to adapt quickly to change and employees familiar in this technique have great opportunities for growth and longevity. The learning that will undoubtedly occur in the workplace can and should begin in the classroom, and this shift will continue to evolve to meet the various stakeholder demands.

Experiential learning at the core of undergraduate business education

In today's dynamic changing world, the relevance of education is constantly being drawn into question. Experiential learning allows you to demonstrate that you have the skill to learn which gives you a higher probability of getting employed. Experiential learning allows the student to make their education more relevant to potential employers.

Experiential learning engages students in critical thinking, problem solving and decision making in contexts that are personally relevant to them. This approach to learning also involves making opportunities for debriefing and consolidation of ideas and skills through feedback, reflection, and the application of the ideas and skills to new situations. If you combine the above with a strong business foundation, robust skills in technology, a broad global perspective, and a commitment to a higher standard of ethical behavior and social responsibility, the results are undergraduate business school students who are ready to go out and engage in the business world (Kolb and Kolb, 2005). Most importantly, as Hawtrey (2007) suggests, an experiential approach "…makes the student a stakeholder, and that alone significantly improves the ability to absorb knowledge."

Experiential learning represents a viable and practical approach to enhance critical thinking skills in business education. Analysis of the structure and content dimensions of experiential learning offers insights into the specific attributes of a given experiential technique that can directly influence student learning. Deliberate and selective incorporation of these elements into experiential activities provide a means to foster a specified range of cognitive processes and knowledge level, a foundation of critical thinking skills (Hamilton and Klebba, 2011).

Moreover, the effective use of experiential learning approaches yields results beyond the individual. In today's business environment, within which change is viewed positively and often embraced as a necessary characteristic of organization's life, experiential learning can serve as a building block for enabling larger-scale change (Bevan and Kipka, 2012) as well as the individual's adaptation to that change. How will we know when experiential learning has arrived at the core? When doctoral programs both require pedagogy as key elements of their programs and when experiential methods are incorporated as essential techniques to be learned and practiced by graduate students. We are some distance from that endpoint; however, the pace of change is quickening. Those of us who are familiar with what Larsen (2004) describes as "these – not necessarily planned, expected, wanted, or pleasant – methods" that so often generate fundamental and enduring insights for students appreciate the increase in pace.

APPENDIX

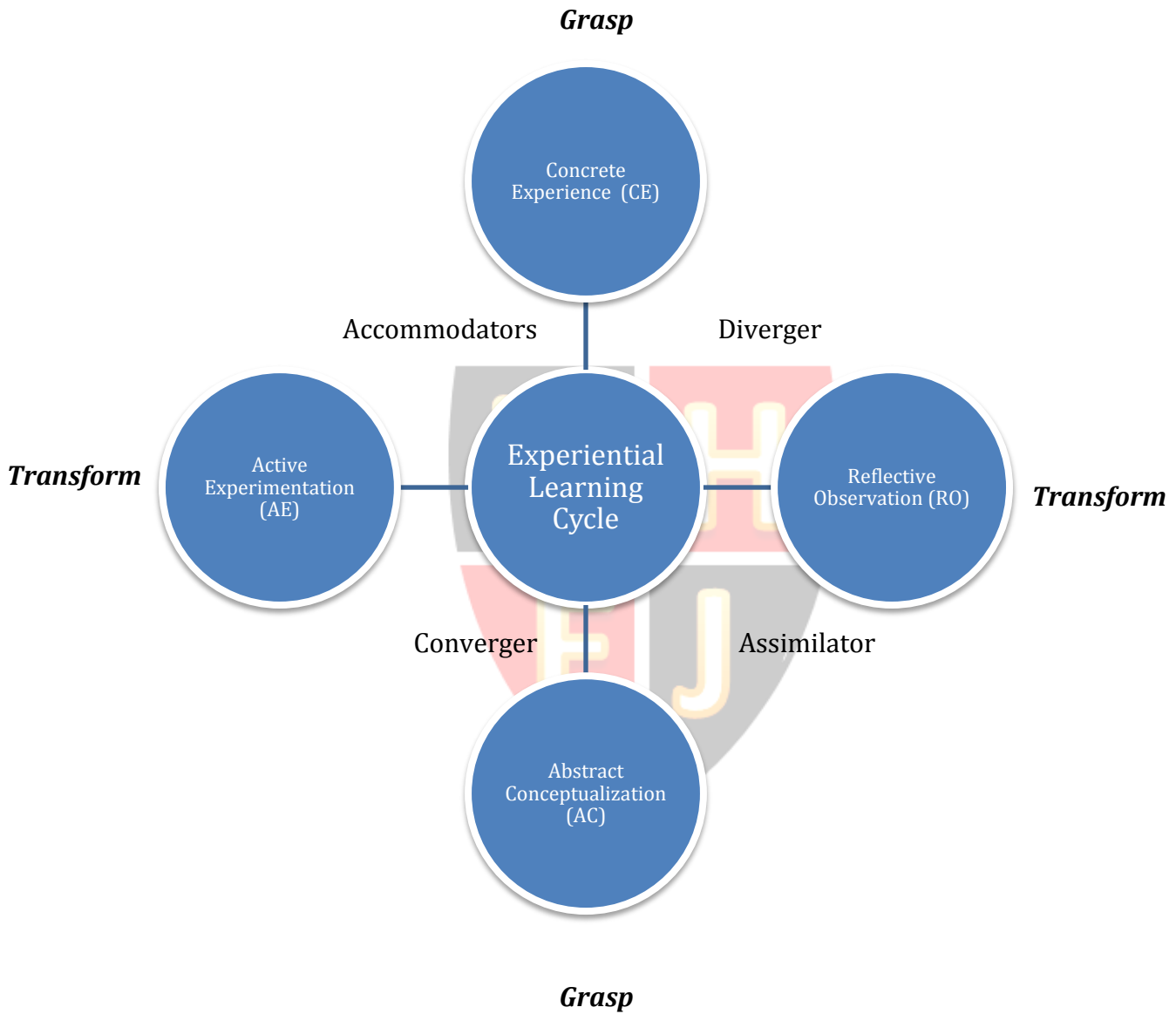Figure 1: The Learning Style Inventory (adapted from Kolb (1984) and Kolb and Kolb (2005))

Table 1: Learning Style Preferences in Formal Learning Situations (adapted from Kolb (1984), Kolb and Kolb (2005) and Smith, 2011)

Learning style	Instructional method in a formal environment
Diverger	Prefer working in groups, listening with an open mind and receiving personal feedback
Accommodators	Prefer working with others to get assignments done, setting goals, performing field work and tend to solve problems intuitively
Assimilators	Prefer readings, lecturers, exploring analytical models and thinking things through
Convergers	Prefer experimenting with new ideas, simulations, laboratory assignments and do well on conventional intelligence tests where there is a single correct answer

Figure 2: Integration of Learning Models (adapted from Schutte and Wetmore, 2012)

Literature
Virtual Resources
Experience
Discussion/Dialog

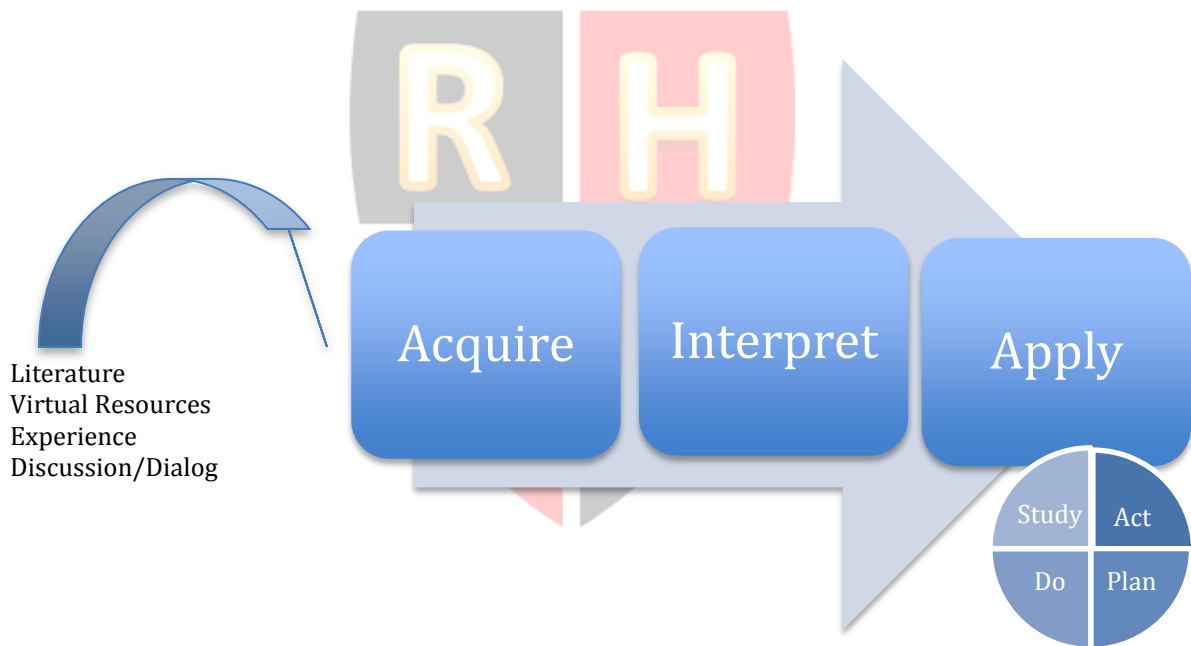Acquire   Interpret   Apply

Study | Act
Do | Plan

Table 2: Balanced Experiential Inquiry (BEI) Process As Related To Adult and Experiential Learning (Sekerka, Godwin and Charnigo, 2011)

Experiential Learning Cycle Phase	BEI Step	Adult Learning Principle	Applicability Type
Concrete experience, drawing upon path ethical challenges	Identify an ethical scenario	Building on personal life experience; self-directed learning	Practical
Reflection and abstract conceptualization regarding thoughts, feelings and behaviors	Examine strengths and barriers	Problem solving and building capacity (deficit and strength based inquiry)	Practical and Personal
Conceptualization about experiences and beginning to apply new concepts/behaviors	Report outs	Immediate application of knowledge	Social
Active experimentation with new perceptions and practices in cooperation with others	Group discussion	Learning related to self-concept and social roles; self-directed practice	Personal and Social

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