

EXPERIENTIAL TEACHING - A NEED FOR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

Dr. Ritu Bhattacharyya , Dr. Sangita Kohli & Mr. Sameer Kulkarni
Mumbai University

¹ Dr. Ritu Bhattacharyya- Professor – Kohinoor Business School, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

²Dr. Sangita Kohli – Principal- S.K. Somaiya –Vidya Vihar , Mumbai, Maharashtra , India

³Mr. Sameer Kulkarni – Asst. Professor- Kohinoor Business School, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

ABSTRACT:

Hindu scriptures say, knowledge cannot be delivered, it has to be acquired. If we had stuck to this traditional wisdom, as a nation we would be far superior in knowledge and would not have to deal with issues of knowledge management. The knowledge deficit in our students cannot be blamed on the students or the teachers. We follow a university system of fixed syllabus which do not change fast enough and does not give a lot of scope for innovation. But there are the brave in the systems, who have tried out innovative methods within the fixed systems to ensure that the learning for the students is more practical, time specific, and relevant to the industry. The aim of the paper was to talk to a few teachers who have tried these methods. A few of these methods were tested through workshop on 100 MBA students, on subjects they had already learned traditionally, and their reactions were noted. Though experiential learning was found to be tougher but, was also better as per maximum number of students who participated in the study. The methods tried were simulation exercises, role plays, workshops and actual do-it-in business. These methods can be successful only if the teachers are ready to put in that little extra for the students and it requires the interest of students without which the exercise will not succeed.

Key Words : Higher Education; Innovation; Need For; Experiential Learning

1. CONTEXT:

India has been home to great scholars and ancient schools of learning like the world's first University in Takshashila, which was established in 700BC, and Nalanda which was established in the fifth century AD. With these presidents India should have the highest number of scholars and world class universities. Unfortunately, the QS World University Rankings, for 2013, of the world's top universities, had no Indian institutes in the top 200ⁱ. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in India for higher education is 13.8% as compared to the global average of 26%. Currently, around 18.5 million students are enrolled in the higher education sector and in order to come to the global standards we need to enroll about 40 million students. This is the first uphill task. Then the next issue is about the quality of students that come out of our universities. Aspiring Minds, an Employability Solutions Company, in a study on employability trends of 2013 has found out that, only 2.59 per cent of Indian graduates were employable in functional roles such as accounting, while 15.88 per cent was suitable for employment in sales related roles and 21.37 per cent for roles in BPO sectorⁱⁱ. Poor language skills, especially English, poor computer skills and very poor concepts learning, deter employability. Application of knowledge for problem solving and decision making is negligible.

All the above data forces us to ponder on what has gone wrong with our education system? A country which was rich in its knowledge base as far back as 700 BC has such a huge knowledge deficit today! There may be many

factors responsible for this situation, but in this paper we shall look only into the Education system and try to find solutions within.

2. INTRODUCTION:

There is a lot of pressure on the education system to improve quality so that the younger generation can be fruitfully employed and can contribute to the economic development of the country. Innovative practices that can assist students to increase their employability have to be found. Traditional approaches have not been very successful. The flag bearers for the Innovative approach have to be ‘Teachers’ who can stimulate students to maximize their learning with the help of newer methods. This is because under the University system change takes very long. Teachers involved in innovative methods of teaching have to involve themselves a lot more in their work; the results could be a huge improvement in the knowledge base of the students, which can empower them for their future. The fixed University syllabus in our country gives very little scope for innovation. Changing of the complete syllabus at the University level has its own set of problems. The onus thus, for any change, lies with the educators/teachers.

The study is conducted keeping in mind the MBA students. The paper tries to establish the importance of new techniques for acquiring knowledge and general development of students. This is supported by an experiment with the help of a workshop. Attempts have been made to derive from students their opinion on the improvement in learning through innovative practices used to bridge the teaching and learning through theory and practice. The focus of the paper is on “Experiential Learning Theory” or ELT.

Experiential learning is learning through reflection on doing, it focuses on the learning process for the individual its aim is learning through observation and interaction. In business school, internship, industrial visits, industrial delegation visiting b-schools, attending business seminars and job-shadowing opportunities are examples of valuable experiential learning. These opportunities are not easy to come by therefore the instructors/teachers have to create a few of these in the institute premises with help from industry professionals.

3. BACKGROUND:

MBA students in Mumbai under Mumbai University take 22 subjects in the 1st year and 16 to 20 subjects in the 2nd year. The focus of the syllabus is on theory, the syllabus is more ‘topic based’ than concept based. Focus on experiencing the matter taught is totally missing, though there is mention in some topic about use of case studies, but the emphasis is missing. Over 360,000 students come out of b-schools every year and only 36% are fruitfully employed all others are underemployed. This is a dismal situation; some measures need to be taken to change it. Keeping this in mind a workshop with 100 students was conducted based on experiential learning. The methods used in the workshop were simulation exercises, role plays, workshops and actual do-it-in business. All the students were voluntarily part of the workshop. The subjects selected for the workshop were Consumer Behaviour & Entrepreneurship Management. These subjects were already covered by these students through traditional teaching methods. The demographics of the students who enrolled for the workshop were:

Table 1. Demographic profile of the students enrolled for the workshop

Gender	
Male	68
Female	32
Age	
21-23	62
24-25	28
<25	10
Educational Background(graduation)	
Commerce	28

Management	40
Science	09
Arts	04
Engineering	12
Others	07

(Source : Primary data)

The students were informed in advance that they would have to devote 6 hours in a week for the workshop and that the whole exercise would last for over 12 weeks. Each subject would be re-taught to the students using experiential learning methods. Each subject would be devoted three hours per week. The methodology would comprise of both group and individual work. It was not easy to get students to sign up for the workshop. What added to the problem was no marks could be assigned to the project, since the system 'does not allow for it'. Though once the workshop started there were many more interested in joining.

A continuous feedback was taken every 4 weeks to assess the learning and improvement in personality of the students. The conceptualisation of the workshop and the basic material required was put together by the authors, for the implementation they were helped by like minded teachers and industry professionals.

4. THE STUDY:

The study basically had two stages, the first being to establish the knowledge and applicability of the knowledge that the students had in the two subjects, the second being to use experiential learning methods and assessing the knowledge and applicability of the same

4.1.1 Part 1: Pre workshop study

Table 2 : Demographics of people involved in the pre workshop study

Gender	
Students	500
Male	386
Female	114
Teachers	100
Male	26
Female	74
Industry Experts	50
Male	32
Female	18
Age	
Students	
21-23	257
24-25	205
<25	38

(Source : Primary data)

The students involved in the pre-study were only to judge their knowledge on the subjects with the help of the teachers and to assess their employability with the help of Industry experts.

Table 3 : Industrial experts rating of the students

Sr. No.	SKILL SET	RATING (%)			
		Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
1.	Communication Skill	47	38	10	5
2.	Domain Knowledge	52	24	18	6

3.	Aptitude	45	30	16	9
4.	Attitude	62	18	20	--
5.	Multi-tasking ability	68	24	08	--
6.	Decision taking ability	72	22	05	01
7.	Risk taking ability	80	10	10	--
8.	Selling skills	60	25	10	05
9.	Ability to define goals	80	20	--	--
10.	Ability and Readiness to work hard	60	20	15	05
11.	Over all personality	50	35	15	--

(Source : Primary data)

The above data proves that the industry rates almost 50% of our MBA graduates as POOR on most skill counts and another 25% as AVERAGE. This is bad because these are the people who will finally decide whether to employ these students or not. The industry experts feel that only around 10-18% of the total population (500 students) viewed by them are industry ready.

The aim of part 1 of the study was also to find how many teachers used experiential learning methods and their experiences with the same and if they did not use it, the reasons for the same.

Table 3 : Teachers using experiential learning (EL) in their classrooms

Teachers using EL	60
Teachers using only theory teaching	40
Methods used under EL by teachers	
Simulation exercises	15% (09 nos.)
Role play	60% (36 nos.)
Do-it-yourself	05% (03 nos.)
Workshops	25% (15 nos.)
Case studies	90% (54 nos.)

(Source : Primary data)

40% of the teachers were involved in traditional teaching methods and did not seem keen to adopt any innovative methods to improve the quality of students.

Table 4 : Reasons for using only traditional methods of teaching

Sr.No.	REASONS FOR STICKING TO TRADITIONAL METHODS	No. of Teachers
1.	Subject does not provide scope for use of innovative methods	28
2.	Students are not interested we tried	40
3.	Nobody does it where is the time	18
4.	If you overwork the students they give bad feedback	26
5.	If students want to learn they will do it themselves	21
6.	Who will bear the cost?	36

(Source : Primary data)

A large portion of those using different methods used case studies (90%) . Among those using case studies 86% (46 nos.) were using cases from books and most were not 'India specific' only a small percentage of teachers were developing their own cases.

Educational theorists such as Dewey (Archambault, 1964), Malone (1981) and Vygotsky (1978) have highlighted the value of active, playful and collaborative styles of learning. Learning and teaching techniques that use a story in which the student becomes directly involved in the action and get involved with the real situation through stories. The script thus becomes very important.

Role plays are used very innovatively by our teachers and since our mythology is full of stories this method is popular and easy to follow 60% (36 nos.) of the sample uses role play in their class rooms.

Workshops are small capsules of training sessions given to the students with the help of practitioners or professionals from the field. Certain aspects of a subject can be learned best when the people on the field can explain the process. Workshops are not a very popular mode of teaching only 25%(15 nos.) of the sample used it. The main reason for not using workshops is that they are expensive.

Simulation Exercises are ‘ an operating representation of central features of reality’ (Gueyzkow , 1963) The difference between a case study a stimulation exercise is that a case study may be recorded history or simply put down to suit a particular issue but a stimulation exercise must represent a real situation and must be on-going. For this type of exercise to be done the teacher requires a lot of help and integration from the industry. A single exercise can cover 4 to 5 topics in the subject. This method of teaching is not very popular with teachers only 15% (9 nos.) use this method.

Do-it-yourself is the ultimate in ELM here the students have to do the business either in the virtual world like a mock stock or virtual business plan submissions or getting actual venture capital sanctioning after approval of business plan, developing of business idea or actual setting up of business under an incubation programme on a small scale. This requires a lot of guidance from the teachers it may also require an industry mentor. It involves a lot of hard work both from the student as well as the teacher and mentor. It is hardly popular because it cannot be used in all subjects and the efforts to be put in are too much. Most students tend to avoid this exercise. Only 5%(3 nos.) of teachers from 60 use this method

Table 4: Reasons for using different innovative methods for teaching

METHOD	REASON FOR USING
Case Study	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Simple to use 2. Easily available 3. Does not take long time 4. Can be given to students as home task 5. Helps the students to learn from industry related examples 6. Enduses students to think and analyse a situation 7. Helps students to do industry related analysis
Role Play	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Simple to use 2. Grabs the students interest 3. Bring out the talent of the students 4. Fun way to learn 5. Can get involvement of large groups
Workshops	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Best way to get practical knowledge 2. Latest knowledge in the sector can be acquired 3. Students get the latest industry perspective
Stimulation Exercises	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A good way to practically cover several aspects of the subject 2. Help in developing decision making ability of students 3. Enables students to work on several aspects of business together
Do-it-yourself	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ultimate learning skill 2. Help students to learn the smallest aspects of how business is done 3. Best source to developing knowledge in a subject

(Source : Primary data)

Industry Experts were asked to assess the students on a few parameters the most important being their ‘industry readiness’. Some of the industry experts were employed professionals while some were entrepreneurs. Students were also checked on their readiness to set up their own ventures. The first part of the study lead us to the second part where a workshop was held for 100 MBA students and after 12 weeks the feedback by the students were mapped to gauge their learning and the industry experts opinion on changes seen by them in the students.

4.1.2 Part 2 – Experiential Learning Workshop

As part of the work shop six contact hours per week were dedicated, three for each subject. The subjects undertaken were Consumer Behaviour and Entrepreneurship management. The total conceptualisation, planning and monitoring of the workshop was done by the researchers. Help was taken from a few facilitators from the department and also from professionals in the industry. The schedule for the twelve week was:

Table 6: Schedule for the workshop:

TIME		CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR	ENTREPRENEURSHIP MANAGEMENT
3 hours each classroom	Week 1	Introduction -	Introduction
3 hours each classroom 3 hours home task	Week 2	Concept clearing	Concept clearing
6 hours each classroom	Week 3 & Week 4	Workshop with Industry Expert Report preparing on the workshop and preparing a case study on any personal experience as a consumer (Resource – teachers)	Workshop with Industry Expert Idea development and preparation of a business plan (Resource – teachers)
1 hour each classroom 2 hours field 3 hours hometask	Week 5	FEEDBACK Concept clearing and voicing of difficulties in last 4 weeks. Industrial Visit and Preparing report on the same (Resource – teachers)	FEEDBACK Concept clearing and voicing of difficulties in last 4 weeks. Industrial Visit and Preparing report on the same (Resource – teachers)
3 hours classroom and 3 hours field	Week 6 & Week 7	Presentation on their field visit and give practical and live suggestions to the business visited Resource : Teacher and Field Person)	Presentation on their field visit and give practical and live suggestions to the business visited (Resource : Teacher and Field Person)
3hours classroom	Week 8	Role play on family consumption	Role Play on New Business Venture
1 hour classroom 2 hour field visit	Week 9	FEEDBACK Concept clearing and voicing of difficulties in last 4 weeks. Self assessment on learning and knowledge gained so far. Field observation visit. Hand over simulation exercise to be presented in group of 10 in week 11	FEEDBACK Concept clearing and voicing of difficulties in last 4 weeks. Self assessment on learning and knowledge gained so far. Visit to a cluster of micro women entrepreneurs. Hand over stimulation exercise to be presented in group of 10 in week 11
1.5 hours classroom 1.5 hour field	Week 10	Live Project	Live Project
3hours classroom	Week 11	Discussion on simulation exercise	Discussion on simulation exercise

3 hour +	Week 12	Converting Live Project into business process	Converting Live Project into business process
	Week 12	Final feedback and assessment of Students by Industry Experts	Final feedback and assessment of Students by Industry Experts

(Source : Primary data)

The schedule set was followed without any hitches and fortunately did not see any dropouts during the 12 weeks, though there were a few tantrums by the 5th week on the number of hours to be put in, since the students were not used to putting in such long hours for a subject. The success of the workshop can be measured by the attendance; 100%, on weekends. The feedback taken and reviewed through the workshop helped the students to express their thoughts about the workshop.

5. REFLECTIONS:

Reflection and feedback from student and teachers were taken to gauge the effectiveness of ELM method versus the traditional methods.

The comments from students speak of the general climate of the classroom and during the outdoor activities. The comments were collected from the first lecture onwards and reflect the excitement initially to the dismay by the fourth week on realizing the volume of work they had to put in and that they would not be spoon fed, to the exuberance on meeting professionals and learning through their experience and the ultimate thrill on realizing that they had the confidence to set up a venture and earn profit ,however small.

5.1.1 Student reflections:

The early entries about the 'innovative' workshop were based more on thrill and curiosity;

- *'it looks like a great idea'* most students said
- *'it will give us the opportunity to learn things practically'* said many
- *'we are told we will need to apply our knowledge in real life situations, that is great'* said a many more
- *'we think this will be fun'* said many
- *'I feel I will benefit by being a part of this study'* reflected many

As the programme progressed some of the enthusiasm began to fade, though the progressed with curiosity on what was to come next some of the reflections after four weeks were:

- *'Do we need to work so much for one subject'* said many
- *'I have never read so much in my whole life'* opined others
- *'the workshops were awesome got to learn in one lecture what I did not in one full term'* said many
- *'These four weeks have changed the way I look at education and learning'*
- *'can this be done for all subjects?'*

By the eight week the class was fully charged, they were coming up with suggestion on material to read and activities that could be undertaken. Feedback after the eight week were:

- *'It felt great when we spoke to entrepreneurs and told them about our observations and they took us seriously and wanted to know more'*
- *'Role Play was awesome'*
- *'helped me get in touch with our epics and the management learning in them'*
- *'read the Mahabharata for the first time, was not asked to, but enjoyed the experience'*
- *'for the first time felt worthy of calling myself a MBA, developing and thinking like a business person'*

The project was completed in the twelfth week and the feedback after that was most rewarding

- *'Boss you know! I have made a 46% profit in my venture. I now feel I can do anything. If I don't get a good job I will survive I am not stressed out about placement'*
- *'The knowledge part was great but what was more important was that we learned to look deep into things, research, ponder, take risks, listen and then take decisions'*

- *'we learned that it is a tough world. There is no short cut to success and if you are ready to work hard and smart nobody can stop you'*
- *'I think that the learning we had will not only be useful in the workplace but has also developed our personality, our attitude and our take on life'*
- *'I feel a lot more confident after completing the project.'*
- *'Every week I felt I had learned something very valuable, though we had covered the syllabus earlier this was a whole new experience'*

All the reflections were not positive some were not very charitable like:

- *'If this much time and energy, and of course money, is wasted on all subjects the course will be too long exhausting and give the youth no time to even breath'*
- *'This is not possible for all subjects'*
- *'Bachee ke jaan loge kya'*
- *'Every one studies from text books so what change will a hand few bring – give up won't succeed'*
- *'Toooooo much work not for me'*
- *'Leave it mam or split it into 8 subjects'*
- *'Home task a no no'*

5.1.2 Teachers reflections:

The teachers initially were reluctant to participate in the workshop once they warmed up to the idea they also wanted to get involved in the use of innovative learning strategies. The key reflections of the teachers were:

- *'The link between the Teacher and student was much stronger than in traditional classroom teaching though the teacher is spending lesser time instructing.'*
- *'All students are bright but the problem is in factors that motivate them. A boring lecture does not motivate the students to learn'*
- *'The project helped in upgrading our knowledge too'*
- *'It was surprising the same students who do not participate in class were thinking out of the box and coming up with wonderful solutions'*

5.1.3 Industry Experts reflection:

Table 7 : Industrial experts rating of the students post workshop

Sr. No.	SKILL SET	No change	Some Change	Visible change	Good change
1.	Communication Skill			√	
2.	Domain Knowledge				√
3.	Aptitude			√	
4.	Attitude				√
5.	Multi-tasking ability				√
6.	Decision taking ability			√	
7.	Risk taking ability			√	
8.	Selling skills				√
9.	Ability to define goals		√		
10.	Ability and Readiness to work hard				√

(Source : Primary data)

The industry experts had judged these students prior to the workshop and after 12 week of attending the workshop then reassessed them on the same parameter and found that there was an improvement in all skill sets. They believe that the students were more employable and that 75-80% of these students were definitely employable and the rest would be placed but needed to work further.

6. CONCLUSION:

Since its inception in 1971 (Kolb, 1971; Kolb, Rubin & McIntyre, 1971), there have been many studies using ELM to improve the way knowledge has been imparted and managed. There are two goals in ELM, one is to have the concepts of subject very clear, and the other is to learn to apply the knowledge acquired. Applying ELM is very challenging both for the students and the Teachers. ELM requires longer time and commitment both by the teacher and the student. The class size may also have to be reduced for effective application. The assessment methods will also have to change. The teaching/learning cycles, styles, space and development will all need relooking.

The key challenges in applying these changes are:

Funds: funds required for implementation of the ELM method are considerably higher than those required for traditional learning

Teachers Training: initially a whole set of teachers will need to be trained to use the method and this too requires resources.

Teachers willingness: Teachers will have to work much harder than what they do now. Most teachers take their professions as part-time and do a lot of outside coaching, training and consultancies along with teaching. These teachers will never accept ELM methods because they will have to commit a lot more of their time to their jobs at least initially till systems are set.

Industry Integration: Industry professionals and managements must sign up for help. If the industry wants better product from b-schools they must help b-schools in training them.

Experiential Learning Methods can form a major part of the improvement in the learning and knowledge imparting and application process in b-schools. It assists students to be abreast with latest technology, methods and ideas. The ability to think out-of-the-box is very essential in the world today, helping students to think differently and apply their knowledge differently is what the educators must do.

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Endnotes

ⁱ www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings

ⁱⁱ *Aspiring Minds – National Employability Report - Graduates-2013 (page 6)*,