

THE HASKAYNE REPORT



Experiential Learning: A Hands-On Approach to Business

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The Experiential Approach: Learning Through Doing

Everyone is subject to learning, but to learn is not to be taught but to be done. Learning in educational institutions has always been practiced as a repetitive method of visual and auditory sessions led by a teacher to a group of students. Recently, an innovative experiential approach to learning has broken the status quo of passive learning to create an engaging environment for students to be able to apply and comprehend concepts in a methodology that maximizes career readiness. Through deconstructing the current learning methods practiced in the educational system, the importance and effectiveness of an experience-based approach prevail. Findings on the 'learning through doing' theory conclude with the recommendation to reduce the emphasis on Grade Point Average (GPA) among students. Additionally, it suggests that an increase in experiential opportunities within educational

facilities will maximize the retention of learned material, as shown through the success of leading Canadian business educational institutions. Through the introduction of experiential learning, context and understanding are prioritized to maximize retention and future application of the material.

Modern Learning

The modern approach to Canadian learning was adapted from the French regime of the 15th to 18th centuries. At this time, children and families were instilled with the values of learning as a means of productivity and wealth prosperity. Weaving, carpentry, and gardening were emphasized as core competencies to learn by children to provide economic support to their families (Gaffield, 2015). Despite the tactical evolution of curriculum and legislated education over the past four centuries, the core

values of education as a driver for productivity and success remain today. Early schools measured proficiency by the adequacy of performance of practical skills, whereas current institutions equate numerical grade point averages, GPAs, with student understanding and success.

In the 21st century, students, recent graduates, and professionals are expected to prove the quality of learning they have accomplished by providing transcripts and resumes to employers. Learning is quantified by a count of credits accumulated through coursework but is rarely qualified through demonstrating knowledge retention and application. Learning is proven through standardized testing, objective assessment, and cookie-cutter deliverables to be accomplished by all students. Universal teaching methods are understood as a requirement by students to succeed in modern educational institutes.

Mitigating Risks of an Innovative Approach to a Timeless Practice

Educational institutions pressure students to learn through teaching, a cost-effective, low-risk, and low educational outcome alternative to adopting the “learn by doing” experiential approach outlined above. Teaching methods utilized by educational institutions have become the status quo for learning. Adopting a new approach to learning requires disruption in current methodology. Approaching traditional and outdated teaching methods through an innovative lens risk low adoption among older generations. However, this can be mitigated through the proven effectiveness of an action-focused process of learning. Although adopting the doing-based approach increases the risk of failure among learners, because of their lack of experience, it presents the opportunity to strengthen their understanding of context and problem solving within

topics, generating a dichotomy between failure and growth.

Away with GPA

For 16+ years of primary and secondary education, students are ranked against each other on an arbitrary graded scale and assigned corresponding letter grades. GPAs are calculated through average class rankings and develop into many students’ definitions of confidence and success. With GPAs often drawn from standardized assessments, the scale is an inaccurate representation of a student’s ability to utilize, transform, and comprehend skills. The standard of learning is based on a grade point scale that does not allow individuals to prove their understanding, explore surrounding concepts, or take creative approaches to solve problems. As students progress into professionals in the workforce, problem-solving environments simulated through assessments inadequately represent the reality of work. Primary elements of corporate culture revolve around collaborative and creative environments (Coleman, 2013). Neither of these elements is reflected in the formation of learning processes through a standardized quantitative approach. While GPA serves as a baseline of aptitude to various topics, it can not fairly adjudicate a student’s ability to excel in a business environment. Where employers seek technical abilities in conjunction with soft skills and workplace fit (Coleman, 2013), GPA standardizes skills into a singular number. GPA serves as an inaccurate metric of a student’s true learning, per the “learning by doing” theory and employer recruitment credentials.

Experiential Learning in Business

The diverse ecosystem of businesses cannot be defined by

standard processes, so the adoption of experiential learning allows individuals to solve unique problems and complete diverse jobs methodically. The integration of experiential learning supports individuals with an authentic business experience by teaching realistic requirements for success (Gotto, 2016). Globally, post-secondary business institutions have developed experiential curriculums to replicate business in the real world. Case studies, internships, and business simulations are popular methods of exposing aspiring business professionals to experience learning (Gordon, 2021). Ivey Business School at the University of Western Ontario emphasizes an experiential learning based curriculum. Through exposing undergraduate and graduate students to a plethora of cases and business projects, students experience the dynamics of business beyond the confines of traditional textbook learning. Similar approaches have been integrated into the values of other leading Canadian business schools including the Rotman School of Management and the Haskayne School of Business.

Opening the doors of elevated learning through internships, case studies, and project-based assessments allows learning to form as an experience, to which students recall and apply to real-life scenarios. Readily available experiential learning opportunities prove employability among students. Beyond employment and institutional education, learning is a lifelong process utilized from the cradle to the grave. To learn is not to *be taught* but to *be experienced*.

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