

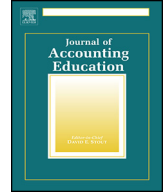


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Teaching and educational notes

The field as our classroom: Applications in a business-related setting



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ABSTRACT

The 'field-trip' as part of the educational experience is not new, and issues associated with it have been explored in the literature from a variety of perspectives. Site-visits and work experience-based placements provide the potential to add value to the educational experience of students across and within multiple sectors. But not all field-trips are equal, both in terms of their nature and their learning outcomes. In this teaching note, we document the use of the *field as our classroom* in two distinct settings, both of which are full subjects in themselves: one at the undergraduate level, the other at the postgraduate level. The first is an International Accounting Study Program conducted twice a year to Europe and the United States. The trip is shared with another university in Australia and includes three weeks of travel, visits to host organizations, and presentations to students by senior executives and representatives of business, the accounting profession, regulators, academics, and standard setters. The second subject is a Business Practicum subject whereby students spend two weeks on a 'consulting-type' assignment for a host organization. In particular, we focus here on one of these practicums, where eight students and two staff traveled to the remote mining town of Weipa in Far North Australia in the Cape York Peninsula to work on a business and marketing project with Rio Tinto Alcan and the local indigenous communities. This exposed

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staff and students to a business environment whereby a set of specific deliverables were expected of the students in an environment of cultural sensitivity. Using the theoretical lens of Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Model (ELM) as a framework to guide our discussion, this paper details each program, before highlighting the students' learning experience with respect to the four stages of the ELM. We draw on student reflections, assessments and host feedback to illustrate the enhanced and varied learning and educational experiences of such field-based settings. Moreover, we provide practical guidance for others wishing to pursue similar experiential learning experiences for their students.

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1. Introduction

Exposing students to a diverse set of experiences both inside and outside of the traditional classroom is often viewed as facilitating a wider learning experience (Dickie & Jay, 2010; Jakubowski, 2003; Lee, McGuiggan, & Holland, 2010). Higher education teaching pedagogies are increasingly moving toward using methodologies that better link theory to practice, and in particular, in the case of business education, facilitate a stronger integration between universities and industry partners and practices (Donovan, Manzin, Savage, & Lee, 2010; Govekar & Rishi, 2007; Lee et al., 2010). Experiential learning theory is an active learning pedagogy whereby students develop and deepen their knowledge through problem solving, concrete experience and critical reflection, often within the context of competing demands (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Lee et al., 2010; Zuber-Skerritt, 1993).

The nature of experiences outside the classroom may take a variety of forms but commonly involve field trips, site visits and work placements (Lonergan & Andresen, 1988). The use of these student experiences to promote learning is not new. Previous studies examining field trips as a pedagogical tool in higher education have tended to fall into one of two categories. The first category includes those studies that have looked at guidelines to successful implementation of field trips (see, for example, Donovan et al., 2010; Jakubowski, 2003; Koernig, 2007; Rone, 2008). The second category incorporates studies focusing more on shorter-term field trips that form a component within a subject rather than those field trips that are essentially the subject (see, for example, Dellaportas & Hassall, 2013; Scarce, 1997; Wynne & Filante, 2004). Our objective here in this teaching note is to document two recent examples of the use of field-based experiences for students in the tertiary business education context, both of which have provided a unique set of learning experiences and outcomes. The two examples include a three-week International Accounting Study Program conducted twice a year to Europe and the United States, and a Business Practicum subject whereby students spend two weeks on a 'consulting-type' assignment for a host organization.

Our contributions to the expanding literature in this area are as follows. First, in the two examples discussed in this teaching note, the field trip is the central focus of the subject. Consequently, we are able to document a set of learning experiences over an extended period (relative to the one-day or short field trip). Second, we have positioned our field-based experiences within the experiential learning literature generally, and Kolb's (1984) four-stage experiential learning cycle model more specifically, although we have only used the Kolb model as a framework to guide our discussion. While a few earlier studies have looked at class assignments that incorporate the learning outcomes of Kolb's (1984) four stages (e.g. Frontczak, 1998), to our knowledge, we are one of a few papers (e.g. Dellaportas & Hassall, 2013) to anchor – within a robust theoretical underpinning (i.e. Kolb, 1984) – the learning experiences of students participating in a field trip where the field trip is the subject. However, a note of caution. Our ambitions with the use of the Kolb model are relatively modest. We are not employing the Kolb learning style inventory here, but instead are using the broader model as a framework to guide our discussion around assessment and learning. Given the increased push both for experiential learning methodologies within and greater globalization of business education curricula (Duke,

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