

Getting Creative When the World Shuts Down: Moving Experiential Learning Online

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Literature/Framework

- In agricultural education, many teachers implement the strategy of learning by “doing.” However, one of the greatest challenges for today’s teachers and students of agriculture is to move beyond the “doing” and ensure that all learning is connected to thinking and knowledge that will be easily remembered and applied later in life (Knobloch, 2003)
- Ideally, experiential learning takes place in a practical setting such as a classroom or laboratory. Students get to practice and experiment applying their knowledge in a real-world way. It is critical that students then take this knowledge with them into the future
- Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) provides a cyclical approach that helps take learning to a deeper level. Experiential learning provided higher scores in creativity, practical knowledge, and richer learning experiences. ELT is widely embraced as a true learning methodology in Agricultural Education (Clark et. al. 2010, Baker & Robinson 2016)
- In the fall of 2020, pre-service teachers would have normally been observing in-person classes at a local high school agricultural classroom. Students are required to learn through observations, reflections, teaching, interviews and other experiential learning opportunities. However, due to COVID, those experiences were moved online.
- What happens when the ideal experiential learning environment now moves into a virtual, stagnant location?

How It Works

- Instead of pre-service teachers observing only one classroom at one school, pre-service teachers were now able to view multiple classrooms. School-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers from around the state volunteered to allow pre-service teachers to observe their classrooms and laboratories.
- The next virtual ELT strategy came by students expressing the desire to learn from each other’s observations and experiences. Three virtual meetings were offered for students to share observations, ask questions, and provide resources to each other. They were also able to present challenges to each other and discuss potential solutions.



Working together for a common goal



Building Relationships with Students and Teachers

Conclusion/Implications

- Students found benefits in observing multiple schools and getting views from different locations.
- While the physical environment was removed, students were persistent and motivated to find success.
- It was challenging for some teachers to provide a meaningful experience through a screen.
- Future observations could include a combination of in-person and virtual learning for diversity.
- Holding students accountable could become a challenge. Making sure they are present and engaged is difficult behind a screen- especially with poor internet connectivity.

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