

A Comparison of Experiential Learning Educator Preferences

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Introduction

When experientially educating, young agricultural educators tend to take on the coach role and feel the expert and evaluator role are traits they never become (Baker & Cline, 2019). Kolb's Theory of Experiential Learning poses four modes of learning a student takes on while learning through experiences. When teaching through experiences, the educator should ideally take on four roles of teaching to help students throughout their learning cycle: coach, facilitator, expert, and evaluator (Kolb, 2014; Kolb et al., 2014). Teachers should express each teaching role throughout the learning cycle to scaffold students to achieve higher order learning (Knobloch, 2003). The teacher's role in experiential education requires the teacher to match teaching styles to learning styles. Educators must also balance a stage for reflection to allow for the students to take in all the information over the subject matter (Kolb et al., 2014).

In the early stages of research over Experiential Learning Theory, researchers believed that supervised agricultural experiences were the only area in agriculture education that experiential learning takes place (Roberts, 2006). Researchers have now found all learning in agricultural education is experiential due to the locations of the lessons and the many concrete experiences that take place in an agriculture classroom (Baker, et al., 2012).

Research has yet to determine if the preference for a specific role is only seen in agriculture educators or all educators. The purpose of this study was to investigate if the preference from agricultural educators is unique to the field or by all teachers. The findings of this study fill a gap in the literature as very little research exists comparing agricultural education teachers and core classroom teachers based off Kolb's Theory of Experiential Education. Experiential education is important because it benefits all types of learners.

RQ1: What differences exist between agriculture and other teachers at Aledo High School?

RQ2: What differences exist between teaching groups in Aledo High School and agriculture teachers' preferences?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical basis for this study is Kolb's Theory of Experiential Learning and Educator Role Profile. In Kolb's theory, there are four stages that each align with a certain mode of teaching. The first stage is a concrete experience, such as when students watch and learn how to do a task. At this time, the teacher is taking on a facilitator role. Next is reflective observation. In this stage, students might be answering higher level thinking questions or completing a thinking map, and the teacher is taking on a subject expert role. The third stage is abstract conceptualization when students might be analyzing a scenario and creating a plan to solve the problem given. In this stage, the teacher is taking on an evaluator role. The fourth stage is active experimentation. Students might be conducting a presentation or completing the concrete experience on their own; the teacher is taking on a coaching role (Kolb, 2012; Baker, Robison, & Kolb, 2012). There is no true beginning or end to the cycle because it is continuous. Educators tend to have a preference for one or two roles because of their "educational philosophy, their personal teaching style, and the requirements of their particular educational setting" (Kolb, 2015, p. 305). However, with practice, educators can adapt and develop the flexibility to use all four roles with proficiency (Kolb, 2015). Flexibility creates "a more powerful and effective process of teaching and learning" (Kolb, 2015, p. 306).

Methodology

First, Kolb's Educator Role Profile was converted into a digital copy on Qualtrics. Demographic questions that describe the sample including age, gender, subject taught, and years in the profession were added to the questionnaire. Then the instrument was distributed to the potential participants: all high school educators within Aledo School District via email. A convenience sample was utilized for this study. After three weeks, the questionnaire closed with 83 respondents ($N = 83$) for a total response rate of 74%. Data were exported into SPSS to generate descriptive statistics. Data were then compared to data collected on agricultural educators' preferences collected by Baker and Twenter (2016).

Findings

Table 1 represents the total mean score and standard deviation for all teachers who participated. This table shows that Aledo High School teachers have similar preferences to the agriculture teachers as researched by Baker and Twenter (2016). The highest preference was for the coaching role ($M=8.16$, $SD=2.05$) and the least preference was for the expert role ($M=6.02$, $SD=2.31$).

Table 1: (School) Data

<u>Sample</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Coach</u>	<u>Facilitator</u>	<u>Expert</u>	<u>Evaluator</u>
Total	83	8.16 (2.05)	7.17 (2.57)	6.02 (2.31)	7.34 (2.18)

Table 2 is from Baker and Twenter's research on agriculture teachers' preferences for experiential roles (2016). The number in the parentheses represents the standard deviation. They found that coach was the most preferred role of agricultural educators ($M = 12.26$, $SD = 2.09$) and the least preferred role was the expert role ($M = 4.99$, $SD = 2.30$).

Table 2: Agriculture Educator Data from Baker and Twenter (2016).

<u>Sample</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Coach</u>	<u>Facilitator</u>	<u>Expert</u>	<u>Evaluator</u>
Total	116	12.26 (2.09)	7.17 (2.24)	4.99 (2.30)	7.27 (6.02)

Conclusions

Like Shoulders and Meyers (2013), we found teachers both in agricultural education and all teachers were not balanced in their preferences for roles. This can be a problem if it translates into their lesson design (Kolb, 2015). Students benefit greatly when they receive scaffolding throughout the entire learning process, and these teacher roles serve as the major form of support for students through experiential learning. This gap should be addressed in teacher training for the betterment of their students. This will allow educators to address many different learning styles and a well-balanced educator will ensure all learners are benefiting from the lessons.

The researchers recommend additional training to help teachers learn about Kolb's theory, either in the collegiate classroom or through a workshop. The different modes of teaching can help students benefit most from experience-driven education. As Kolb stated, balance is key to successfully teaching through experience (2015). Further research should go into the classroom to evaluate the teacher as they are going through a lesson so that a comparison between how a teacher actually teaches and their preferred teaching role can be analyzed.

References

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