The authors report continued belief in the experiential/modular approach, but regret that increasing class sizes have forced modification of the technique.

Experiential/Modular Approach

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1977

The experiential/modular approach can serve many purposes. The major objectives are to involve students through direct experience in learning situations and to divide the course into modules, putting temporal limits on topics of interest presented through diverse materials. Both objectives allow an immersion in the topic through assignments, speakers, tours, discussions, films, tapes, structured exercises, and so forth. The instructor is thus freed from the idealistic ogres of an overemphasis on cognitive learning and continuity.

These objectives mean increased responsibility for the instructor to articulate all the material so that the topics relate, dovetail, build on one another, and culminate in a complete and accurate portrayal of the area. With the experiential/modular format, more of the responsibility is shifted to the students, both individually and as a group. It is particularly suited to sociology, since the community serves as a natural laboratory for experiential learning and students can see the relevance of the subject matter in their own lives.

The following is a typical two-week segment of a three-hour, one-semester course taught in a MWF format. In the six periods, there might be two regular lecture/discussion periods, one period for a "related" lecture (a chance for the instructor to integrate new

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material into the course), an outside speaker for one period, a tour, and one period at the close of the module devoted entirely to discussion and the sharing of ideas in small groups or as a whole. A written assignment with learning objectives stated is given during each module.

Preliminary results indicate that students who are more willing to be flexible respond best to this format. A semi-controlled experiment comparing the experiential/modular format to a traditional lecture format indicated that cognitive learning was equal and that class evaluations were equal, but that achievement motivation showed a significant increase in the experiential/modular class only. Other results were better class attendance, fewer drops, more interest in class discussions, increased student/student and student/teacher contact, and the development of group cohesion. Drawbacks or weaknesses are more grading (8-12 pieces per person per semester), extra work in planning and administration, and feasibility only if the class size is less than 60 or 70 students.

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A university grant in 1973 provided the base for launching an experiment in teaching—a comparison of a traditional, lecture-format course with a course using the experiential-modular approach. The following ten years included the *Change* publication, a presentation at the Midwest Regional Meetings in 1978, moderate diffusion of the idea locally, and change in professional focus for the author. In the same decade, changes in student values and orientations (Yankelovich, 1974) paralleled the conservative drift of the nation. The experiential-modular approach was born in a time when "involvement" and "relevance" were important student concerns. Ten years later, sociology majors still maintain similar values, while general student interest in out-of-class learning wanes. Modifications in the experiential-modular approach were responses to these structural and interpersonal dimensions of academic life.

MODIFICATIONS IN THE EXPERIENTIAL-MODULAR APPROACH

In the upper division classes where enrollments are small (15-30 students), the approach is used as it was developed originally and described in the preceding *Change* publication.

Modifications have occurred in other circumstances, however. First of all, where classes achieve a size greater than 40 or 50 students, the administrative demands of (1) arranging tours, (2) speakers, (3) grading, and (4) planning in-class activities for large numbers made the approach unfeasible. Experiential learning assignments, a part of the original approach, have been retained in classes that number less than 150 students. (A brief description of such assignments has recently been published in *The Directory of Teaching Innovations in Sociology,* 1982.) The written assignments are less frequently given and not used as the culminating activity for a learning module. Second, the modularized structure has been dropped in classes where enrollment is large (over 50 students). Coordination of diverse in-class and out-of-class activities is extremely difficult, really impossible, for many, many students. Without the modular structure and regular experiential assignments, alternate learning experiences can still be encouraged and discussed.

The experiential-modular approach has not been adandoned totally in any course. Classes currently taught, varying from introductory level with 300 students to graduate level with six students, all include aspects of the original idea. The approach has been adapted to meet the different structures of classes and interests of students.

LEGITIMACY

To be sure, some of the techniques employed in my classes were and are unusual. Some are questioned by other faculty as "valuable" and "acceptable." Any added measure of legitimacy provided by the publication was really unnoticed by the author.

Even invitations to publish other ideas on teaching and invitations to share ideas with other sociologists on the topic were unable to create perceptible differences in the responses of colleagues to my methods. Actually, the growing number of students in my classes provided greater local legitimacy to the approach during periods of general decreases in Liberal Arts and Science enrollments. In any event, the legitimacy of the approach or my teaching methods was never a major issue during 12 years of professing.

By far the most important consequence of these professional activities related to teaching is the personal affirmation the author felt and feels for choosing to focus his career around teaching—a focus sometimes achieved at the expense of more "legitimate" (research and publication) activities during the pretenure phase.

DIFFUSION

The diffusion of these ideas has taken numerous turns. On the regional and national level, the invitations to and participation in the "Teaching Day" activities of the 1978 Midwest Sociological Society meetings was an opportunity to share ideas with other professional sociologists. Some minimal interest in the approach was generated and communicated to a few others. During the existence of the Teaching Information Exchange (TIE), other inquiries about the approach were processed. On the local level, diffusion was less formal and emanated from spontaneous discussions about techniques for achieving teaching objectives. Other colleagues in the department and students who subsequently became professors have adopted and/or adapted specific ideas for their classes. Many of these adaptations remain in use today and, in some cases, have led to changes in the way I originally used the techniques. Hybrid versions now exist because of this diffusion-and-feedback process.

IMPACT

Assessing the impact of such a lengthy and diverse diffusion process is difficult. On a personal level, I believe my sole contributions to the improvement or change of teaching in sociology have been minimal indeed. On the other hand, I see myself as a part of a significant minority in the discipline of sociology committed to and participating in a movement to enhance the knowledge people have of the social world as encountered in university learning environments. This improves my integration with the discipline and, one hopes, the understanding students have of their lives and society.

The recognition received from the *Change* publication and professional support for teaching did bring about a new career focus. Teaching, always the author's primary interest, was able to be integrated with the professional norms of my discipline and the university as well. This set of events created a cohesiveness in my career where separate categories of activity had previously existed. With the advent of such integration, new parallels between teaching and research/publication were pursued. This pursuit led to an interest in curriculum innovation and more professional activity in this area. Curriculum innovation was valuable to the department, the discipline, and me personally and is the second stage of a newly discovered coherence in the multifaceted academic career. Maurice Stein (1972: 165) put it eloquently when he wrote that instead of segregating aspects of one's life and career, "the humanistic sociologist tries to explore, expand, and transform these personal dimensions through his work" in search of that long desired but little understood circumstance where integration between personal commitment, professional acceptance, and educational value have been achieved.

Inception of the idea, its diffusion, modification, and the impact of the experiential-modular approach to teaching have all provided the unification of interests and activities that invigorate a career. Over the ten years, and more recently in the last five years, the most significant impact of the experiential-modular innovation has been the personal perception that as a teacher I am an integral part of sociology.

—R.R.M.

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