

Assessing the Adventure

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***Editors' Note:** A significant series of prior writings in the Rethinking Negotiation Teaching project has focused on adventure learning. Here, the authors tackle a knotty series of assessment problems which adventure learning creates. Experiments at four different universities show that the practical problems are significant, but that they can be overcome. The authors offer a series of tools respectively suited to evaluation of the adventure learning experience itself, its outcomes, or a resulting but separate assignment.*

Introduction

The use of adventure learning has been explored in great detail as part of the Rethinking Negotiation Teaching Project (see Alexander and LeBaron 2009; Ebner and Kovach 2010; Coben, Honeyman, and Press 2010; Manwaring, McAdoo, and Cheldelin 2010; Panga and Grecia-de Vera 2010; Kamp 2010; Larson 2010; Press and Honeyman 2010). Lynn Cohn and Noam Ebner (2010) describe adventure learning in the context of a negotiation class as an activity falling into any of the following categories:

- 1) A classroom experience with real implications for the student;
- 2) A role play set in a real-world setting, in which students engage with professional negotiation opposites;
- 3) An assignment in which students negotiate on their own behalf;
- 4) An assignment that involves the student applying a key concept from the course out-of-class;

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- 5) An opportunity to observe or participate in real-life negotiation of others; or
- 6) An out-of-class experience not involving negotiating directly, but which allows the student to transfer learning from the adventure to their understanding of negotiations (Cohn and Ebner 2010).

Of course, as the use of adventure learning expands, so too will the variety of adventure learning activities. As teachers gain experience with adventure learning, and this method gains traction in the field as a recognized (rather than a novel or experimental) pedagogical tool, the next step will logically be to consider its role in student assessment. The more teachers invest students' time and effort in adventure learning, the more it will make sense to incorporate this activity into the grading system. The good news is that using adventure learning for assessment does not limit the options for its use.

Adventure Learning Assessment in Practice

Assessed adventure learning assignments have been used in: 1) law school classes, both in first year classes with law students, and upper level courses which involved a mixed enrollment of law and other graduate students (Fox and Press 2012); 2) the European Master in Transnational Trade and Law (EMMTLF) which involved graduate level students from a range of backgrounds and nationalities (Press and Honeyman 2010); and 3) with graduate students in a conflict analysis and resolution program in Washington, D.C. (Manwaring, McAdoo, and Cheldelin 2010). An assessed adventure learning assignment also has been incorporated into courses for undergraduate negotiation students studying education in Israel, who were offered the option of completing the assignment for bonus points in the course. We will expand on these below:

- In the International Business Negotiation Certificate program taught at Hamline University School of Law in 2011, students were assigned to fictitiously "join" two different (real) companies at the beginning of the program. They conducted several exercises in which they relied on the companies' real-life data as the basis for their strategizing and decision-making. They remained identified with the companies throughout the course of the program, during which they engaged in negotiation activities designed in such a manner that the students seemed to be conducting actual negotiations for the companies. During the preparation for, and in the conduct of these negotiations, students developed for themselves a strong sense of the corporate culture and the priorities of their com-

pany, allowing for a full range of real-world interests to play out in a way that cannot easily be imitated or simulated in a classroom. These served as excellent lead-ins to the adventure learning assignment; indeed, by the time the students were sent out for their adventure learning assignment, they had already participated in five different negotiations “on behalf of” their company or as an “employee” of the company. Some of these negotiations were internal (within the company) and some were external (between companies). For the adventure learning assignment, each company was split into two teams, and each team visited three buildings which their company was considering leasing as the corporate headquarters. Each team had to decide on the building it would recommend for the company, and then meet with the other team from the same company to select between the two options. The two teams had to reach consensus on a single recommendation for corporate headquarters, which would be presented to the Board of Directors (the instructors) during the following class period. The team whose location was chosen by the Board of Directors received gift certificates. The students were informed of the incentive in advance.

- At the University of Deusto in Bilbao, Spain, when a graded adventure learning assignment was utilized, a more oblique approach to adventure learning was used for an assessed exercise: small groups of students were asked to take five pictures, the content of which they had to negotiate: (1) representation of the crossroads of the sacred and the secular; 2) the most dangerous thing the group saw; 3) the entryway which the group agrees is most likely to be the “unmarked” CIA headquarters in Bilbao; 4) a self-portrait of the group that best captures how that group was different from other student groups; and 5) a photograph of one thing that should not be where it is. Each group was also instructed to bring back a snack for the end-of-class celebration which was “different from what all other groups bring” – without discussing it with any other group. Finally, each group had to determine a process for how decisions would be made, prior to leaving the classroom and embarking on the adventure. Teachers informed the students that each group would be graded as a group by the rest of the class, based on the quality of the decisions made by the group (best choice of photo subjects, best snack, most creative, etc.), as well as on how consistent the group was in its use of the group’s own chosen decision-making process (Press and Honeyman 2010).

- At Northwestern University School of Law, adventure learning has been used in an advanced negotiation course for law students and in LL.M. programs for foreign lawyers from a variety of countries. The learners are charged with two assignments: bring back a treat for the class employing the negotiation skills taught in the class, and take a picture of “justice.” The treats brought back to the classroom have included an opera singer to serenade the class; a masseuse; and lots of food. The idea of agreeing on what constitutes justice encourages the group to discuss their values, perhaps one of the hardest things to experience in a typical classroom. The groups make presentations to the class and are given feedback by their peers and professor. While no formal grade is given for the assignment, these presentations are included in the assessment of class participation.
- At Tel Hai College in Israel, undergraduate students of education studying negotiation were offered the opportunity to earn up to five bonus points on their final grade, in return for engaging in assessed adventure learning.¹ In order to do so, they went through four stages: (1) coming up with an individual plan for engaging in a real-life negotiation; (2) receiving the teacher’s approval for the plan and individualized pointers for what the teacher would look for in grading;² (3) conducting the negotiation; and (4) writing a short reflective paper on the experience, including elements of reflection and course-material-related analysis.

In this chapter, we will explore ways in which instructors can utilize adventure learning activities as an *assessment* opportunity, rather than merely as an instructional tool.

Why Assess Adventure Learning?

Having made the determination that experiencing a “real” negotiation will provide students with a better understanding of how theory works in practice, one primary rationale for assessing the adventure learning assignment is to encourage students to take the assignment seriously. If this is the goal, the instructor must give serious consideration to creating an assessment which creates sufficient incentive for students to care about the negotiation or have some stake in the outcome.

Beyond rewarding students’ serious attitude towards their learning, assessing adventure learning provides important insight into students’ performance in the course and supports development of the important skill of self-reflection (Nelken, McAdoo and Manwaring 2009). Reflection assignments on real-world experiences, we believe,

offer a good window into students' ability to apply acquired concepts, analyze situations and demonstrate reflective practice. Assessing achievement of real-life outcomes might be a good way to measure whether students have achieved preset benchmarks, gained practical skills, or developed their abilities. This form of measurement might be more valid than, for example, assessing simulation outcomes.

Second Thoughts: Should We Assess Adventure Learning at All?

There might be downsides associated with taking a close look at performance on an adventure learning assignment. Summative assessment of a learning activity entails a particular type of observation, of a quantifying nature. Might this type of scrutiny have negative effects? Indeed, we must examine whether conducting the assessment is wise or beneficial.

Clearly, issues that need to be considered as counterweights to the advantages of assessing adventure learning include pedagogical considerations (is this getting in the way of learning?), as well as teacher/student relationship issues (will this assessment measure induce negative student reactions, which might have a disruptive effect on class?). While these factors must be considered for any assessment, the more unusual or less common the assessment method, the more likely that these concerns will surface.

Freeing students from the confines of meeting grading criteria for the adventure learning module might inspire creativity and experimentation. Once grade-conscious students view the activity as part of what stands between them and the job market or graduating with honors, the activity becomes a means to that end. This often leads to trying to figure out what the professor wants, rather than focusing on the experience itself and less-prescribed outcomes, for fear that they might not meet the criteria of the professor assessing the assignment. This might also lead to unnecessary and counterproductive student anxiety, particularly in those types of adventure learning termed oblique, disorienting, associative or creative (for example, some of those described in Manwaring, McAdoo, and Cheldelin 2010; Coben, Honeyman, and Press 2010; Press and Honeyman 2010).

Furthermore, the decision not to formally assess and compare the outcomes of adventure learning assignments does not preclude the opportunity to provide formative assessment in the form of peer and/or faculty feedback or for the students to engage in personal reflection on the task.

Finally, adventure learning can be used for many purposes other than assessment: to introduce participants to a locale and its customs, to build rapport and connection between students or to spark a dialog on a topic through experiential learning. If focusing students on

grades might get in the way of these purposes, and if they are high on a teacher's priority list, the teacher might consider refraining from assessing the activity.

Approaches to Assessment

Once the instructor determines that the benefits of assessing an adventure learning assignment outweigh the drawbacks, three different approaches might be taken, including:

- Evaluating the adventure learning experience itself;
- Measuring the practical outcomes of an adventure learning assignment; and
- Assessing a submitted work describing or analyzing the experience.

If the adventure learning assignment is completed as a group, the instructor must decide if each student in the group will be assessed individually or if the group will receive a single assessment. If an individual assessment is considered optimal in a given situation, the instructor should consider utilizing the third option (assessing a submitted work), which lends itself to individual assessment more than the other approaches (given that it might be difficult to assess individual contributions on team efforts or outcomes).

We will explore each of the approaches separately, with some suggestions for how each might be implemented.

Evaluation of the adventure learning experience itself

The adventure learning can be evaluated by assessing what happens during the actual adventure. Assessment may be based on a review of the steps taken in connection with the adventure or by providing feedback from peers. The peer assessment could be based on how the participants perceived each other while on the adventure or after the fact by students in other groups. Some examples for evaluating the adventure learning itself as an assessment include:

- Checklist/Questionnaire: Students complete either a checklist or a questionnaire before, during and after the adventure. For example, depending on the context, tasks could include: getting to know each other; creating a decision-making process; brainstorming methods; roles of individuals; managing conflict; and best approach for presenting the outcome. If a task list is given before the adventure, however, the students might use it as the "how to" guide to adventure learning rather than devising their own approach. If the checklist is given after the adventure, the students will be reflecting on how the adventure *as they shaped it* included or fulfilled

the tasks on the checklist, perhaps in a more reflective way. Giving a questionnaire with open-ended questions such as “were you ever unhappy with the decision of your group and if so, how did you deal with this?” will likely create an even deeper consideration of the experience than a checklist.

- Peer assessment: Students can be asked to assess each other based on pre-determined criteria. For example, criteria to be assessed could include creativity or adherence to a decision-making process to which the group had previously committed (Press and Honeyman 2010). Peer assessment can be done individually or by the entire class after an oral presentation by each group. Criteria could include: originality; cultural awareness; and how well the outcome met the challenge given in the assignment. Additional criteria for assessing the adventure learning itself could tie the adventure learning back to the general subject of the class, and could have the groups assess each other based on how well each group employed the skills and techniques taught in the class. For example, in a negotiation context, did the group consider the perspectives of all parties, and did they analyze and manage their best alternatives to a negotiated agreement (BATNA), information flow and ethical issues effectively? This creates a clear tie between the adventure and the learning done in the classroom. One drawback of peer assessment is the risk that factors other than those on the assessment list (e.g., the existence of a positive or negative personal relationship, the fear of upsetting a classmate, or expectations of reciprocity) might taint the assessment.

Evaluating adventure learning assignments based on practical outcomes

A simple way to assess student performance is to link this directly to the student’s demonstrated achievements, in a very practical sense: students are evaluated based on the level of success they achieved in their assigned out-of-class interactions. Indeed, one might argue that this is the *only* suitable way to assess adventure learning: as opposed to the class, in the real world, *outcomes matter*, and often matter *more* than analysis or reflection. Adventure learning is intended to bring students into the real world – and as a result, modeling the approach used to measure skills in the real world is appropriate.

There are different ways to structure the translation of particular task outcomes into grades. Here are some examples:

- Students negotiating for grades: Having students negotiate with their teacher for points on their grade, or with

each other regarding the distribution of a pool of points which will count towards their grade (see Cohn and Ebner 2010), are probably the purest examples of connecting adventure learning to grading. Students are not graded “on” their outcome, their outcome *is* their grade.

- **Binary successful/unsuccessful:** Students might be assigned a list of tasks to engage in, in which the only two options are failure or success. Their grade will be a tallying-up of their success, or their failure, at completing these tasks. For example: students are assigned to return an item to a store and receive a refund – despite the fact that they have no receipt (Volkema 2007).³ Students who receive a refund will receive a point, and those who do not, will not. Of course, teachers need to try and foresee, and pre-assign value to partial performance (for example, deciding whether achieving a refund in the form of store credit will earn the student a point, half a point, or no points at all).
- **Percentage of a set goal:** Students might be assigned a task with a goal, which is achievable at different degrees. Their grade will be a mathematically calculated portion of the full grade, based on the proportion of the goal they achieved. For example, the teacher might identify an item being offered by a vendor or a group of vendors for \$10. She can assign her students to negotiate the price down, with one hundred percent being awarded to a student able to seal the deal for \$5. A student who managed to receive an offer of \$8 will receive forty percent of the points, and a student who received an offer of \$6 will receive eighty percent.⁴
- **Benchmarks:** Similar to the previous method, students could be assigned a task which might be achieved at different degrees. In this approach, students achieving a certain, preset, degree of success will receive full points for the exercise (for example, achieving an outcome which is better than a predetermined BATNA).
- **Awarding points to individual elements:** In this system, negotiation involving multiple issues can be used to build a scoring system. One way to implement this is to identify, with each student, a real-life negotiation they are involved in or seek to initiate, in which more than one issue is at hand. A list of issues can be identified, and a way to calculate points should be predetermined. For example: if a student is about to engage in a conversation with her boss regarding her hourly wage, working hours and use of an employer-provided cell

phone for work purposes, the teacher might inform the student that for every ten cents per hour raise, the student will receive X points, for securing significant flexibility in working hours another Y points, and for agreement to provide a cell phone, Z points. Based on these criteria, the student can engage in the negotiations with redoubled motivation.

Assessing a separate assignment

A third option for assessing adventure learning is to require students to submit a paper, reflective essay, or journal entry about the experience. In this approach, the assessment is not of the adventure learning *per se*, but rather of the student's ability to reflect on and articulate what he or she learned from participation in the activity. It is important to note that this form of assessment, as opposed to either of the other two approaches, will inevitably result in the instructor assessing such non-negotiation skills as the students' ability to be self-reflective and their ability to write clearly and effectively, in addition to negotiation skills. Depending on the purpose for which the activity is used, this broader assessment may or may not appeal to instructors. (For more on use of reflective journals as an assessment method, see McAdoo, *Reflective Journal Assignments*, in this volume.)

Different prompts may be used for this type of assessment. For example, in Hamline University School of Law's *Practice, Problem-Solving, and Professionalism (P3)* course, first year law students were asked to form groups of three or four students and as a group, outside of class, to: 1) "negotiate something"; and 2) produce a photograph that reflects the intersection of the secular and the sacred. After completing both tasks, the students were instructed to discuss the assignment with their adventure learning group and then to write "an individual reflection about their feelings, reactions, observations and judgments during this assignment." The students were asked to consider what relevance they believed the assignment had, if any, to being a law student or lawyer. Finally, the students were asked to tie the experience to readings and class discussions.

Challenges in Adventure Learning

Ethical Issues

There are a number of ethical issues that arise when adventure learning is being assessed. These issues go beyond the ethics of adventure learning itself, although one option for addressing the ethical issues which arise in adventure learning is for the assessment to include analyzing how the group managed issues of honesty, candor, and misrepresentation.

The most significant potential ethical issue arises when the students are assessed on the actual outcomes and the instructor relies on student reports of the outcome. Unlike scored role play simulations which take place in the classroom under the supervision of the instructor, by definition, in adventure learning students are out on their own without any instructor supervision or observation. Assessing the adventure learning may result in the unintended consequence of providing incentives for students to inflate their self-reported outcomes or to accuse others of having done so.

In addition, if students are asked to assess themselves and others in their group or in the class, instructors must be aware of the possibility that students may intentionally choose to inflate or deflate their assessments to help themselves or their friends or even to negatively impact a student they do not like. Given the effects of self-serving bias, some students will have a difficult time providing an accurate assessment, even if this is not intentional. Creating safeguards such as anonymous reporting of assessments can assist in this regard. In addition, if the professor also has a role in assessing the group, at least in terms of the presentation and outcome, this neutralizes the unreliability of student assessments. When adventure learning was utilized in 2010 as part of the ADR Module of the European Master in Transnational Trade Law and Finance (EMTTLF) program at the University of Deusto (see Press and Honeyman 2010), the initial assessment was done by the class – but the instructors reserved the right to modify the grades provided by this peer assessment. Perhaps the fact that the class knew this in advance influenced the students to act responsibly; but in any event, the instructors examined the results closely, and saw no need to exercise this right. (See also Lee, *Negotiating the Assessment Criteria*, in this volume.)

An interesting ethical issue arose in the context of an adventure learning assignment given to students at Northwestern University School of Law in a three-day advanced negotiation course offered in December 2010. A group of students, including several from Asian countries, brought back a cricket in a plastic bag, with a twig, for each student as a treat, since the cricket can be a symbol of good fortune in some cultures. The initial reaction of much of the class was delight and a positive assessment of the treat. Several students, however, raised concern for the crickets' well-being and future. What would happen to the crickets after the class? It was very cold outside, so letting them go was guaranting their quick death. Leaving them in the school in a garbage can seemed unethical as well. The group that brought the crickets realized that they had focused solely on the impact that the crickets would have upon their presentation, not on what would hap-

pen to the insects after the presentation and assessment were completed. The discussion that followed, as well as the ultimate solution of returning the creatures to the store where they came from, provided the most interesting discussion of the adventure learning experience.

Capacity

Using adventure learning activities raises issues related to participants' physical or mental capacity to participate, as well as their comfort in doing so based on their cultural background (Larson 2010). Inability to participate (for whatever reason) becomes even more significant when the assignment is graded and used in the assessment scheme for a course. At a minimum, instructors faced with students who are unable to complete the assignment as designed must consider an alternative method for completing the activity and receiving a grade. In addition, instructors should develop in advance what constitutes an acceptable reason for non-participation. For example, there will be some obvious exceptions from participation, such as when someone physically cannot participate. However, what about students' inevitable attempts to avoid the assignment, for reasons ranging from discomfort to financial difficulty to plain laziness? Teachers should predetermine whether, and for what reasons, students might be allowed to opt out or given an alternative assignment.

If an alternative exercise is needed, the instructor must develop one that roughly meets the same learning objectives as the original assignment. Sharon Press and Christopher Honeyman describe an alternative activity which was used at the University of Deusto when two students were unable to participate fully in the adventure learning assignment due to physical unavailability (2010). Instead of the picture taking activity described above, the students who were unable to participate were asked to submit a short paper describing a "real-world" negotiation *related to their needing to leave campus early* (the reason why they could not participate in the planned activity). In the paper, the students were to analyze how the teachings of the course applied or did not apply to the negotiation. In addition, each student was to meet with an instructor to discuss what she had learned. That instructor then decided the grade.

Cultural Issues

While cultural issues certainly arise in the process of *participating* in adventure learning, none of the authors experienced any cultural challenges relating to their *assessment*. However, that is not to say we do not anticipate issues will arise. Here are three cultural issues which might affect assessment:

- 1) Cultural comfort/discomfort with different types of dishonesty: Delineating honest and ethical behavior, and comfort with behavior that pushes the boundaries of these behaviors is, in part, affected by culture. This has been shown in business (see, e.g., Lu, Rose, and Blodgett 1999; Sims and Gegez 2004) as well as in academia (see, e.g., Rawwas, Al-Khatib, and Vitel 2004; Grimes 2004). Some types of adventure learning might involve students negotiating with an unknowing outsider without real intent to seal a deal. Others might involve other types of leading people along, speaking half-truths, inventing and sharing interests which are not necessarily true. Students' achievements on these exercises might be affected by cultural beliefs, which might skew the grading of outcomes-based assessment.
- 2) Cultural comfort/discomfort with imposing: Even situations which do not require lying or misleading someone else, might require "using" that person – taking up their time, or asking them for more material favors. We can easily imagine such an exercise being seen as "good sport" by people from one culture, yet as wrong or improper by people from other cultures. For example, some students (and, in our Istanbul experience, teachers as well!) might shy away from engaging in hard positional bargaining with vendors who they perceive as less well-off than themselves. Here, too, skewed outcomes might occur, with the very nature of the assignment challenging some students' ability to do their best at it.
- 3) Cultural expectations as to classroom settings and institutional norms: This issue might be particular to Western teachers teaching abroad, particularly those from North America. There still are some places in the world in which learning is a one-way channel, conveying knowledge from the teacher to the student, in a traditional classroom lecture model. Any deviation from that model is met with raised eyebrows at best (or whatever the quizzical expression/gesture is in that part of the world), and results in confusion or discomfort in more extreme cases. Any teacher who has tried using classroom simulations in settings like these knows the challenge of implementing such a culturally foreign method. Sending students *out* of the classroom might involve an even greater deviation from norms in some places. In venues like this, basing a part of the students' grades on this exercise might be particularly unsettling. In places where institutional norms might prevent full participation in such exercises, for cultural or other reasons, this may be even more

true (for example, in Beijing, we learned that students participating with us in adventure learning exercises as part of their own classwork were not permitted to leave the campus). We strongly recommend consulting with local faculty on implementing the method, when using it away from home.

Conclusion

Assuming that one accepts that there is value for students to engage in real-life experiences to foster their learning of key negotiation concepts, assessing adventure learning can promote this learning by motivating students to engage in the activity seriously. In addition, such assessment rewards student competency based on the student's ability to conduct real negotiations, as opposed to simulations which may or may not translate to actual competency. Ideally, any assessment will measure mastery of skills needed to negotiate successfully in the real world as opposed to negotiating in a typical classroom experience. After all, the goal of every negotiation course is to produce students who can negotiate successfully in the real world.

In order to achieve these benefits, instructors who incorporate assessed adventure learning activities must carefully consider the challenges posed by assessing adventure learning activities, as described above, and develop a plan for managing them. In addition, prior to adding an assessment, instructors should determine whether the potential drawbacks of stifling creativity or hindering learning outweigh the benefits. In those circumstances, assessment should not be utilized.

At this early stage of using adventure learning for negotiation teaching, assessing students' performance is an important measure for evaluating the usefulness of the method itself, as well as for improving its use. By focusing attention on the method through incorporating it in their assessments, adventure learning will be subjected to scrutiny by teachers, students and external evaluators. This, we expect, will serve to inspire creativity among teachers as well as to enhance efficacy in the use of this innovative learning method.

Notes

¹ This early exercise in adventure learning was not included in the original course syllabus; rather, it was offered by the teacher in response to students' suggestions to incorporate real-life activities. Hence, the points were bonus points and not part of the original one hundred percent grade. While only a few of the students took the teacher up on the offer, they engaged in the tasks with great motivation, and completed them in a highly satisfactory manner. In general, the teacher notes that the offer to include student-requested elements as part of the grade had a beneficial effect on the course. For more on this theme, see Lee, *Negotiating the Assessment*

Criteria, in this volume, as well as Nelken, McAdoo, and Manwaring (2009).

² Continuing the previous note's theme, the decision on grading focus was also reached after discussion with the student. Students were initially told that their grade would not be based on their actual achievements in the negotiation, should they prefer it that way, in order not to discourage participation in the exercise. Some students chose this route, in which case their grade was based wholly on their paper. Other students requested the teacher to take the negotiation outcome into account, in order to motivate and focus them in the negotiation itself. In these cases, target outcomes were set, and assessment was based on students' achievements as well as the quality of the reflective papers.

³ Volkema's assignment involved having the students return a package of sponges without a receipt to a retail store. He did not tell them from which store he had purchased the sponges so "in all likelihood [the store to which the sponges were returned] was not where the sponges had been purchased...". (see Volkema 2007) This exercise raises some interesting ethical issues which at a minimum should be considered in the design of the exercise. A minor modification, such as disclosing the store where the item was purchased or providing the students with an expired receipt could lessen the ethical concerns. If the instructor opts to conduct the exercise as Volkema suggests, the instructor should, at a minimum, discuss the ethical implications during the debrief of the exercise.

⁴ This approach is likely to require some advance knowledge on the teacher's part of the conditions in the relevant market (see Coben, Honeyman, and Press 2010).

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