

Experiential-Learning with Authentic Assessment: Informational Interviews

Brief description of the learning scenario to be taught with one of the learning approach models (you can create one of your own or use something you have experienced first-hand):

This scenario is an update of an assignment I used with college juniors and seniors in a business-communication class. Students were assigned to conduct informational interviews with X number* of professionals whose industries, employer, and/or job function aligned with the kind of job or career the student was interested in. The idea was for students to explore, using the real-world technique of informational interviewing, actual jobs and employers of interest to see what they were really like and how well they matched up with the student's interests, skills, personality, and so forth.

*The number of individuals to be interviewed varied at different points during which I taught the course, influenced, in part, by the length of the semester in which I was teaching.

Describe the authentic assessment that could be used to assess the learning scenario. Be sure it is clear how this assessment is student centered and authentic and ties to the model discussed this week:

The assessment I used was a reflection paper or series of papers, usually resulting in a summative reflection and analysis paper combining observations from all the interviews. Experiential learning was attained in that students had an informational-interview experience first, then reflected on it via a written paper to draw conclusions, before launching on another round of experiencing (interview, reflection).

While a written paper might not seem like the most appropriate authentic assessment, I believe I can make a case for its appropriateness in a business-communication class given that practice in writing is always valuable.

However, if I were implementing this assignment today, I might change up the assessment. For example, I might ask students to create each reflection in non-written formats, such as podcasts, presentations, or other forms of written reflection such as blog posts, which would also provide business-communication practice.

I found that students sometimes experienced positive outcomes from this project that were outside the academic realm. Some attained clarity on career choice. I especially recall a student who, before conducting the interviews, was 100 percent sure he wanted to be a stockbroker. After conducting the interviews, he was 100 percent sure he did not want to be a stockbroker. Another student realized her ambitions to be an attorney did not align well with her plans for having a family. One semester, I did some quantitative research on outcomes and found that 21 percent (out of about 100 students) had received job or internship offers as a direct result of conducting the interviews. While this number is not large, it is impressive given that gaining an offer was not the goal of the assignment.

Describe or include connections to the learning theory or theories best represent your design and why:

- **Constructivism** is part of this learning, in that the student and interviewee are socially constructing knowledge during the interview.

- **Connectivism** is part of this learning in that students make choices about their learning (choosing whom to interview).
 - **Andragogy** is part of this learning in that it is experiential and of immediate value to the learners.
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Appendix:

Details of Experiential-Learning with Authentic Assessment: Informational Interviews

Business Communication Informational Interview Paper Assignment

This paper is designed to help you learn more about your chosen career field or to explore career options if you are undecided about your career goals. After submitting a proposal describing your interviewees (see below), you will conduct in-depth interviews with [1, 2, 3] individuals in a career field in which you have an interest. If you are undecided about your career goals and are interested in more than one field, you may interview people in different fields. The people you interview do not have to be people with hiring power; they can simply be people working in the type of job that you think might interest and that you could expect to obtain you upon or shortly after graduation.

NOTE: You may not interview family members even if you plan on joining the family business, and you may not interview faculty or staff.

The entire project — in five phases as described below — will conclude with a thorough report on what you learned about those jobs and how your informational interviews have influenced decisions about your job search as you approach graduation.

The five phases include:

Phase I: You will submit a Proposal for Informational Interview Paper (see below) during the third week of class.

Phase II: You will turn in a draft of your first informational interview, following the format described on next page, during the fourth week of class.

Phase III: You will turn in a draft of your second informational interview, following the format described on next page, during the fifth week of class.

Phase IV: You will edit the drafts of the first and second informational interviews, according to instructor's suggestions, and write a detailed analysis (as described on next page) of what you learned about your career goals based on those two interviews. You will submit both revised interviews, along with your analysis, as an integrated, coherent paper, on the last day of class.

Phase V: You will present your final paper, which doubles as your final exam (see next page), at the time appointed for your final exam.

Proposal for Informational Interview: Write a few sentences about your current career goals and then provide the names, titles, and company names of the 2 individuals you plan to interview for your

informational interview paper. Provide a rationale for why you have chosen these particular people. In part, this exercise is to help you get an early start on your paper, but if you decide to change your list of interviewees after submitting your proposal, don't worry; it's not set in stone. Please check with the instructor, however, if you wish to change your interviewees. A length of 200 words is a good goal to shoot for, and your proposal should be in narrative form (not merely a list). Due third week of class.

The Phase IV Final Paper: Your final paper will be a report, synthesis, and analysis of these two interviews. Your paper should be written in formal academic-paper style. The paper should follow the style conventions of the American Psychological Association (APA), as found in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, current edition, which is available as hard copy.

Write approximately three pages for each interview with a page or two of analysis (total of about 6-8 pages), and your paper should follow the format described below unless you have proposed a different format to instructor:

Suggested Format for Final Paper Integrating Both Interviews

I. A description of your career goals before you conducted the interviews

II. Brief (1 paragraph) description of company (size, location, type of business it's in, etc.)

- A. 1st Company
- B. 2nd Company
- C. 3rd Company

III. What you learned about the jobs that your interviewees held that reinforced what you already knew

- A. 1st Company
- B. 2nd Company
- C. 3rd Company

IV. What you learned about the jobs that your interviewees held that surprised you

- A. 1st Company
- B. 2nd Company
- C. 3rd Company

V. What you liked about the jobs that your interviewees held

- A. 1st Company
- B. 2nd Company
- C. 3rd Company

VI. What you didn't like about the jobs your interviewees held

- A. 1st Company
- B. 2nd Company
- C. 3rd Company

VII. **VERY IMPORTANT:** A detailed analysis of whether your ideas about pursuing this field have changed now that you know more about it and, if you still want to pursue the field, how you will go about seeking a job in this field. Some questions to consider (you need not answer all):

What did you get out of the informational-interview experience?

What did you learn overall?

What did you learn about yourself?

What did you learn about what you value in a job and in a workplace?

What did you learn about how to break into your preferred field?

What did you learn about how to succeed in your preferred field?

How do your skills/grades/experiences measure up to what's required for entry or success in your preferred field?

Have your ideas about pursuing your preferred field have changed now that you know more about it?

If you still want to pursue your original career direction, what is your strategy for seeking a job in this field?

If you have decided against your original field, what fields are you now considering, and how will you go about finding out if another field suits you better?

Presentation of final paper: This presentation, which is actually your final exam, should be designed to report to your classmates what you learned from your informational interviews, how the interviews affected your career goals, and what you learned about how to enter into your chosen field. Presentation should be 3-4 minutes long and include a "creativity" element.