

## **KOLB'S EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION MODEL EFFECTIVENESS IN TEACHING MARKETING THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The practice of service-learning is founded on John Dewey's work in the early 1900s that initiated dialogue examining the role of higher education in citizenship development (Dewey, 1938). In 1984, David Kolb transformed Dewey's six-step inquiry process into a four-component learning cycle for experiential learning, and his model has been used widely to develop service-learning curricula (Kolb, 1984). Service-learning as a pedagogical process allows students to academically partake in meaningful community service intended to augment their learning experience.

A learning model that has previously been applied to service-learning within a marketing framework is Kolb's (1981) model of experiential learning (Klink & Athaide, 2004; Petkus, 2000). Kolb's model (1981) identifies four learning stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Specifically, the concrete experience stage relates to direct practical experience which the students receive through their service-learning. The reflective observation stage focuses on what the actual service-learning experience means to the student. When the student can integrate the theories presented in the classroom setting the abstract conceptualization phase occurs. Active conceptualization represents the stage in which the student can test the conceptual theories in a service-learning experience. Kolb (1981) stated that the stages in the model which further emphasizes a continuous cycle. For example, the concrete experience is translated into the reflection stage and then into abstract concepts, thus providing new direction for active experimentation leading to a choice of new concrete experiences.

During a service-learning experience the student may simultaneously reflect upon the experience as they search to achieve real objectives for the community and deeper understanding and skills for themselves. The service-learning objectives for the sport marketing research class reflected the

application of Kolb's experiential education model through the following steps.

1. Develop an understanding of marketing research and connect with a sport-related agency to conduct a service (concrete stage).
2. Develop the student's ability to critically think and analyze about marketing-related issues with other members of the group (reflective stage).
3. Develop the ability to apply marketing research theories and concepts to practice (conceptualization phase).
4. Develop the written and verbal ability of the students by offering alternative suggestion of action to the cooperating agency (active experimentation stage).

### **METHODOLOGY**

The problem-based learning (PBL) model was adopted for this graduate class as the scope which required the students to identify marketing problems of the cooperating agency, develop a survey to ascertain the level of these problems (lack of fan identification), and to make recommendations regarding the problems. The objective of the market research project ultimately selected was narrowed to determine if and how the fans identified with the local American Football League2 (af2) team. The project was conducted in teams of 3 members. One team conducted market surveys to identified areas of target populations in the general community (i.e. families residing in a particular area). A second team conducted survey research among another population targeted by the af2 team of students at the local university. The third had the responsibility of surveying individuals attending af2 contests. The student groups were responsible for classifying relevant marketing concepts for the project, evaluating the marketing efforts the af2 team employed, and developing possible solutions to address the marketing-related issues. The student groups were required to write a report of 6-8 page single-space pages detailing the specific needs of the team regarding the targeted population surveyed, analysis of the problems faced by the af2

team, analysis and interpretation of the survey for each population and a set of recommendations for the team's marketing department to consider. Each student group submitted a draft of the report two weeks before the final written and oral report was given to the af2 team.

## RESULTS

Students were asked to voluntarily complete short questionnaire of ten items to determine whether they perceived service-learning was effective. The questionnaire was designed using a five point Likert-scale (1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Unsure, 4 = Disagree; 5 = Strongly disagree). The results indicated a mean value of 1.67 which related to a favorable perception of the students evaluation to the service learning experience. Other results indicated that the students perceived that their ability to critically think increased (M=1.50) as did their ability to evaluate alternatives (M=1.67). Interestingly, the students believed that their written communication skills became better (M=1.58). However, they did not believe that their ability to orally communicate progressed (M=3.75). The results indicated that student leadership skills increased (M=2.16) as did their interpersonal skills (M=1.75). Importantly, the students felt strongly that they were better able to apply sport marketing concepts and theories to a "real-life" environment (M=1.58).

A qualitative assessment was also conducted through which four major themes emerged from the data: 1) ability to think in a critical manner; 2) ability for written communication, 3) ability to integrate sport marketing concepts and theories to a "real life" setting, and 4) cyclical nature of research marketing. The students indicated that discussions within the group created an atmosphere that promoted critical thinking and helped them evaluate alternatives because they were placed in teams for a service-learning problem-based project. It is when critical thinking occurs that the student may be considered to be in the reflection phase of Kolb's model. This phase is characterized by making a connection across the experience without actually having to integrate the academic concepts or theories. An important and unique finding from this investigation was the notion that students reported, in both

assessment forms, that although their writing ability got better, their oral presentation ability did not. Service-learning as an experiential form of education may enhance knowledge and skills that support contextualizing cognitive learning by the student. By applying their knowledge and skills gained through a service-learning experience students may transfer learning to practice which apply to the active experimentation stage of Kolb's model. The effective employment of Kolb's model of experiential learning may assist in the preparing future professionals in bridging the gap between marketing theories and their application in the "real world" with their communities.

## CONCLUSION

By providing students practical training opportunities such as in service-learning, they may be more motivated to learn about marketing concepts which would allow them to reflect and conceptualize more information permitting them to have a better understanding of marketing. This was especially brought out as the students indicated a greater understanding of the cyclical nature of research marketing, after they were able to discuss and reflect on their suggestions with other students. The use of sport marketing service-learning further substantiates Kolb's experiential learning model as being cyclical.

## REFERENCES

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