

Rock – Paper – Scissors: Utilizing Problem-Based Learning Teaching Techniques in Sport Management

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Problem-based learning is a powerful classroom process, which uses real-world problems to motivate students to identify and apply research concepts and information, to work collaboratively and to communicate effectively (Duch, Groh, & Allen, 2001). It is a strategy that promotes life-long learning habits. Additionally, problem-based learning instruction directly addresses many of the recommended and desirable outcomes of both undergraduate and graduate education. This process or cycle of instruction includes (a) developing an authentic problem and allowing the students to work in permanent groups, (b) utilizing discussion to allow the students to delineate aspects of the problem, (c) researching and gathering information, and (d) incorporating each student's findings into the framework of the problem. Developing an authentic problem involves unique characteristics to ensure a successful learning environment. Some characteristics of an authentic problem include establishing a real-world situation that is complex in nature, encouraging the students to move beyond Bloom's lower cognitive levels to the higher cognitive levels (i.e., analyze, synthesize, evaluate), and allowing for cooperative learning and group discussion as opposed to individual compartmentalized learning (Duch, 2001). Once the problem has been established, permanent groups are formed and the learning process begins. The ideas and hypotheses are discussed within the group and disseminated for further research and information gathering. Individuals bring findings to the following class sessions for additional discussion, action and research. This learning process continues until the final project is complete. Linking both content and process together allows for the evaluation of critical thinking skills, communication skills, research skills, and life-long learning skills.

Expanding these skills into the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy is critical to problem-based learning. From a practical standpoint, sport managers in the field execute numerous functions when fulfilling the demands of their jobs (Barr & Hums, 2008). Some of these primary managerial functions include planning, organizing, leading and evaluating (Chelladurai, 2005). Planning includes defining organizational goals and determining the appropriate means by which to achieve these desired goals (Hums & Maclean, 2008). After planning, the sport manager next undertakes the organizing function which means putting the plans into action (Barr & Hums, 2008). The leading function allows the sport manager to participate in a variety of leadership roles to manage changes and differences that may take place, including delegating, motivating, communicating, and problem-solving (Barr & Hums, 2008). And finally, evaluating ensures progress of the organizational goals were accomplished (Barr & Hums, 2008). By utilizing the experiential and service-learning teaching strategies and incorporating these functional areas, theory and practice can be merged by supplying sport management students with knowledge, critical thinking skills, and expertise before sending them into the industry (Cuneen & Parks, 1997).

This session presents an overview of a successful problem-based learning problem in sport management which incorporated scholarship and applicable experience. The problem was jointly established between sport management faculty members and a large statewide organization. As part of the process, the students were asked to plan, organize, lead and evaluate an annual event. The outcome fulfilled a critical need for the experiences facing them as future sport managers. The students gained innumerable experiences in event planning, sponsorship, risk management, and media/communication skills. This assignment not only helped sport management students learn skills in these fundamentals areas, but it also provided the following benefits: (1) students developed public speaking skills through a professional presentation to board members, (2) students learned to increase research skills and knowledge of industry standards and guidelines, and (3) students utilized a tangible project to add to their academic portfolio. The authors will conduct a workshop designed to offer suggestions and guidance on utilizing problem-based learning teaching techniques within the sport management curriculum. Additionally, the authors will provide participants with information on methods for developing and conducting authentic problems and as well as discussing the challenges and lessons learned. Problem-based learning encourages students to become continual learners and challenges them to learn to learn. And, as the sport industry continues to grow, sport management programs have focused on developing strategies to prepare students to enter and successfully navigate this rapidly evolving field of sport management (Southall, Nagel, LeGrande, & Han 2003). These teaching techniques will provide students the skill sets necessary to be successful in this career field.