Leadership and Experiential Learning: A Workshop and Sharing Session on Exercises for Teaching Leadership in Sport Management

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There has been a culture shift in the teaching of leadership in undergraduate education from traditional lecture design, Socratic dialogue, and case study scenarios, to in and out of classroom experiences. Experiential learning and service learning have become popular pedagogical techniques and evidence for the effectiveness of these classroom practices is consistently supportive (Fink, 2003). These experiential learning exercises provided the student with “hands-on” training in developing leader behaviors.

Case studies have been an important pedagogical technique in the development of leadership. When used effectively, one can develop hypothetical scenarios or use actual events in which students can propose action or learn from the action of others. Ideally, this provides a platform for which discussions take place that elaborate upon the concepts being presented. However, there is a limitation in the ability to prepare students, and develop leader behaviors and styles. Case studies however, cannot provide immediate and relevant feedback, problem solving in both relationship and subject content areas, and provide students with actual leadership experiences in the same way as experiential learning. Thus, case studies cannot replace the valuable learning that takes place with experiential learning (McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006).

Based on Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) learning a new behavior results from experiencing a transformational event or series of events. According to this theory two intersecting continuums exists; Concrete Evidence to Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation to Reflective Observation. These provide the theoretical framework for understanding the various learning styles in ELT and a strategy for implementing experiential learning in the classroom.

The purpose of this presentation is twofold: 1) provide successful classroom experiential learning exercises in a workshop format, 2) create a sharing session in which attendees provide examples from their own experiences. The workshop will introduce two types of experiential learning exercises, the first are short 10-20 minute exercises that exemplify classroom theory. Exercises generally begin with a lecture on theoretical or conceptual leadership content. Students break into groups, and a brief overview of the exercise is introduced. Groups then elect a leader who meets with the instructor and who will guide the group through a challenging exercise. Finally, the exercise concludes with a reflection of the leaders behavior and the group’s experience. The second type of learning experience is semester long projects in which groups work independently on events, websites, fundraisers, and sport tournaments. These production focused exercises force students into situations in which independent problem solving, peer mediated guidance, and self-reliance behaviors begin to take form. These exercises are group directed initiatives in which the instructor plays a minimal advisory role.

These exercises are interesting, useful, and enjoyable techniques that require minimal preparation time, yet return immense results. However the techniques presented herein are not an exhaustive presentation of all the possibilities. Therefore, a sharing session will take place to allow for attendees to express their own experiential learning success.

