"In-Class Time": The Most Under-Utilized and Under-Leveraged Resource in (Many) Sport Management Programs

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On average, college students spend between 100 to 200 minutes inside the classroom for each class per week. This adds up to between 1000 to 3000 minutes per course per semester—depending on the number of credit hours assigned to that specific course and whether the university is on a quarter or semester system. If a student takes 12 credit hours, assuming a 15 week long semester, then she spends approximately 180 hours inside the classroom per semester. Who else has such a captive audience? And most importantly, are we as sport management faculty taking advantage of this time spent with our students? Unfortunately the common perception, heard more and more consistently from students, parents, media and even some of us, is that we are not taking advantage of this time spent with students. Further, many sport management faculty, and faculty in general, are starting to feel the pressure that comes from the disappointment and frustration of graduating students, their parents, as well as employers regarding our graduates’ level of preparedness to handle and thrive in today’s professional world. This concern has generated much discussion on college campuses about how to better prepare students for the increasingly complex, chaotic and global environment in which they will live and work.

Students must be able to think critically about multi-layered intractable social issues and problems. In such a context, Barr & Tagg (1995) argue that “a college's purpose is not to transfer knowledge but to create environments and experiences that bring students to discover and construct knowledge for themselves, to make students members of communities of learners that make discoveries and solve problems” (p. 5). Several authors (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Doyle, 2008; Light & Cox, 2001; Weimer, 2002) have suggested that this shift from knowledge transfer to the discovery and construction of knowledge can only happen when colleges, universities, and faculty implement new approaches to student learning.

One of these new approaches to student learning focuses on the creation of a learner-centered classroom environment. This kind of learner-centered environment focuses on the development of deep learning and is characterized by a student's ability to think critically. Deep learning occurs when students “…are primarily concerned with understanding, with how to apply their ideas to consequential problems, with implications, and with ideas and concepts” (Bain & Zimmerman, 2009, p. 9). Deep learning allows students to more readily transfer knowledge and skills learned in one context to a completely different and unique context (Light & Cox, 2001). Conversely, Weimer (2002) argues that the teacher-centered approach to learning creates passive learners whose “…motivation, confidence, and enthusiasm for learning are all adversely affected when teachers control the processes through and by which they learn” (p. 23).

In a learner centered environment power and control in the classroom shifts from the teacher to the student as students become actively involved in the learning process. This active participation in the process allows students to better encode knowledge and ways of thinking. Yet, this shift from a teacher- to learner-centered environment is perhaps one of the most difficult changes/transitions for faculty to make because it challenges underlying beliefs and assumptions about learning and the role of the teacher as well as authority and power positions in the classroom.

Accelerated learning is one way of moving toward a more learner centered classroom environment and is a method that allows for deep learning to occur. “Accelerated learning is an integrative method of learning, combining both sides of the brain to strengthen a student’s relationship with self, teacher, subject matter, and other students, and so assists students to achieve deep, rather than surface, learning” (Harker & Perry, 2007). Accelerated learning builds on Kolb’s (1984) four stage learning cycle and is intended “to awaken learners to their full learning ability” (Meier, 2000). Originally developed by Dr. Georgi Lozanov (1978) this approach to teaching and learning has been used successfully in foreign language instruction, education, business, and corporate training.

The main purpose of this symposium then is four-fold: (a) to have participants fully experience accelerated learning; (b) to demonstrate that utilizing accelerated learning techniques can be done in any class, does not take much more time, and will add energy and ‘aliveness’ to our teaching and therefore to our students; (c) to share relevant research that explains the main tenets of accelerated learning and its benefits; and (d) to start/continue the inquiry regarding how to best utilize/leverage the in-class time we already have with our students.
In addition, during the workshop participants will: (a) experience first-hand accelerated learning; (b) learn the specifics of the techniques utilized and presented by the facilitators as the techniques are being used; (c) explore and discuss in both small and larger groups potential applications of the techniques in their own classrooms; (d) have the opportunity to apply the techniques they have learned in the workshop to the class content of their choice using a template that will be provided, present their ideas to the group, and receive feedback.

The accelerated learning approach is based on the assumption that learning is social and most effectively occurs when individuals are actively involved and take responsibility for their own learning. This type of approach to learning takes into consideration the whole individual and seeks to actively engage a student’s intellectual and emotional capacities. When an instructor intentionally chooses to use accelerated learning techniques--like the ones that will be used in this workshop-- he/she has the opportunity to shift the attention (energy) from himself/herself as the presenter to the audience. When the delivery of the information is centered on the audience (i.e., students) then the potential for learning is highly increased. This will be a highly experiential workshop which will be entirely conducted using the accelerated learning approach!