EXTENDING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Experiential learning is based on application, i.e. using knowledge to solve problems and analysis, i.e. understanding relevance of information to situations encountered (Dwyer and Klebba, 2001). It has been widely demonstrated to enhance student learning, although many accustomed to traditional lecture-based teaching consider it more demanding by the need to actively engage with students by monitoring and mentoring chosen methodologies. However extracurricular organizations afford additional experiential opportunities beyond classes that enhance academic experiences of member students by engaging with community, business and professional organizations. Nonetheless there is scant literature addressing challenges and benefits of experiential learning opportunities that do so. Acknowledging the varying degrees of time and energy commitments to mentor students and student teams that may be involved by faculty who also serve as advisors to student organizations, the recent experience at one university offers compelling evidence for collaboratively engaging student members in experientially based client-based projects and in collaboration with a professional marketing association.

Experiential Learning beyond the Classroom

Literature associated with experiential learning suggests that traditional lecture methods focusing on knowledge (recall) and comprehension (understanding facts) may be less suited for the purpose of enhancing learning outcomes in other courses, suggesting instead experiential strategies based on application, i.e. using knowledge to solve problems, and analysis, i.e. understanding relevance of information to situations encountered, especially in professionally oriented disciplines, such as accounting (West, 2010) and marketing, where the goal is to enable students to apply concepts or use the same material in a practical situation (Dwyer and Klebba, 2001). Active learning instead posits instructors to be designers of a learning environment in which students actively participate in the learning process (Camarero et. al., 2010; Bobbitt, Inks, Kemp and Mayo, 2000), in which experiential learning now stands as an exemplar. This viewpoint is echoed by the assertion of education being a "co-created" experience (Lusch and Wu, 2012).

Traditional "goods dominant logic" (GDL), on which marketing thinking has been based for decades, postulates "people exchanging for goods (products)" as the primary unit of exchange (Vargo and Lusch, 2006). This perspective would posit the teacher as value creator in higher education. By contrast, "service-dominant logic (SDL)" advanced by Vargo and Lusch (2006) declares, "people exchange to acquire specialized competencies (knowledge and skills)." Thereby value creation no longer attributes exclusively from teachers, instead by a process involving providers (teachers) with consumers (students) who apply acquired knowledge and skills to solve problems and achieve desired outcomes, i.e. "co-creating" value."

At many institutions experiential teaching has been equated with service learning (SL) that has also grown in popularity and advocates (Waldstein and Reiher, 2001). Defined as "learning through service" (Chisholm, 1997), or otherwise as "…a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs…to promote student learning and development" (Dwyer and Klebba, 2001), it links community-service with academic goals through critical reflection. Literature associated with service learning variously speaks of "joining" or "connecting" the student to the community (Cotton and Stanton, 1990; Valerius and

Hamilton, 2001), creating a reciprocal relationship between community and academic institution (Valerius and Hamilton, 2001) by integrating community service with academic study (Easterling and Rudell, 1997). Numerous academic courses have provided a foundation for partnerships between campuses and communities, including nursing (Vickers, Harris and McCarthy, 2004; Shiber and D'Lugoff, 2002), accounting (Gujarathi and McQuade, 2002), psychology (Kretchmar, 2001), economics (Hervani and Helms, 2004), and marketing (Prentice and Garcia, 2000).

Students, faculty, academic institutions and communities benefit from experiential learning, including service learning. Among benefits, it promotes student learning and development (Jacoby 1996); students acquire skills, e.g. critical inquiry, communication, and problem-solving, and social skills (Yoder, et. al., 1996) that complement classroom learning, as well as providing leadership experiences (Astin and Sax, 1998), and consistent with the earlier described service-dominant logic. Knowledge gained is found to enhance experience and reflection (Vickers, Harris and McCarthy, 2004; Astin and Sax, 1998), perhaps contributing to Strage's (2001) assertion that students in the "service-learning" focused classes out-performed students in the non-service-learning classes overall and on final exams.

Service learning also empowers students (Rosenberg, 2000), as students assume greater responsibility for defining the educational experience (active learning), while developing a higher sense of civic, social responsibility (Cadwallader et. al., 2013; Waldstein and Reiher, 2001; Yoder, et. al., 1996), further reflections of "co-creation," while preparing them for employment upon graduation (Kluth, 2000). Despite these reported benefits, the pace of service learning adoption has continued to be characterized as slow (Geringer, et. al., 2009).

However experiential learning alternatively includes class projects to stimulate student involvement and action, incorporating client-based projects with business enterprises, case studies, simulations, and business audits to enhance learning outcomes (Leat and McCarthy, 1992; Gremler, et. al., 2000; Drea, Singh and Engelland, 1997). Students in such activities accomplish a task and develop new skills and ways of thinking (Lewis and Williams, 1994), including communicative skills, critical thinking and teamwork. Strengths of the alternative experiential learning methods vary, e.g., compared with case studies, client-based projects appear to offer communicative skill advantages by virtue of teams having to develop a "deliverable" to a client (Cooke and Williams, 2004). Stutts and West (2005), recognizing student to have various goals and motivations, considered class project-based competitions to contribute to student skill development goals and career needs, and providing workplace relevant skills.

In the case of real-world projects, e.g., working with local businesses or non-profit organizations, students accept responsibility for planning and executing the project, but still requiring ongoing collaboration between teacher and students to co-create value. Among the advantages of such pedagogy, Anthony Fruzzetti, a professor of marketing at Johnson and Wales University opined: "(Students) learn about deadlines with clients, client expectations, and redoing their work when it doesn't meet customer expectations. There's only so much you can do with a classroom of 30 kids…the one-on-one interaction they get in this program is incredibly valuable…. It's as real-world as it gets" (Andruss, 2002). Organizations also benefit from the marketing knowledge that students have acquired in earlier courses; they are not merely volunteers, they are partners, sharing their marketing knowledge for the needs of the organization.

However such client-based projects do have limitations, as reported by Camarero et. al. (2010) and Devasagayam and Taran (2009), e.g. student motivation (discovering that the project demands more of them than they are willing to engage), accurate faculty understanding and definition of the assignment, student ability to interact with company/organization managers in a

timely and effective manner, as well as instructor mentoring and monitoring effort required, as further documented by. The author (here) further testifies to these challenges, all of which have been experienced during the course of teaching marketing and strategic management courses.

Nonetheless client-based projects have been seen as creating long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationships between universities and businesses, some of which have included creating formal academic consultancy services, in which students are paid for their work with for-profit businesses (Cooke and Williams, 2004).

Extending Experiential Learning to Extracurricular Organizations

Beyond such course-engaged client-based projects and consultancy services, the endeavors of extracurricular organizations appear well positioned to reinforce and extend the benefits of experiential learning, such as those engaged by the University of Washington student chapter of the American Marketing Association, and mentored by a Board of Advisors consisting of local marketing executives and their faculty advisor. Although the chapter has been affiliated with the American Marketing Association for 35 years, it had shrunk to a small membership in recent years; however in the past two years it has grown dramatically and recognition for excellence by virtue of dynamic leadership, proactive faculty advisor guidance and support, and very well organized and student-driven executive board. By the close of the 2012-13 academic year, chapter membership had grown from less than 20 to more than 90 students. Well-conceived, developed and implemented programs that support student academic goals and future aspirations, and facilitated by their involvement in various community and collaborative business endeavors increasingly attracted those who joined the chapter. Chapter achievements earned honors from the Dean of the Michael G. Foster School of Business as the Most Outstanding Student Organization during the 2012-13 academic year (2012-13 UW AMA Annual Report), as well as honors at the 2013 national AMA Collegiate Conference. Its notable achievements reflect many of the student, university and community benefits documented in experiential learning literature.

Community Service Involvement

The chapter's community service achievements included member team-based involvement in Donate Life America, (Seattle) Holiday Carousel Volunteering, and Foster (School of Business) Week of Service. Consistent with service learning (SL) philosophy, the chapter initiated a partnership with a Donate Life America to increase member philanthropic giving through its involvement in the Intercollegiate Case Competition; confronted by very low donor rate amongst its target donor group, the chapter team's research and presentation to the organization facilitated an increase in donors and community awareness. In collaboration with the Business Ethics Association, the AMA chapter also hosted a "Saving Soles" philanthropy event during the Foster Week of Service to motivate university students to contribute shoes for the needy.

Fundraising

The chapter engaged in diverse fundraising activities in the business community to support club operations, e.g., ability to attend the annual AMA Collegiate Conference and networking events for member professional development. The chapter hosted two corporate events (Mary Kay tour stop and Dodge/Fiat Slacklining), partnering the sponsors with chapter promotion and marketing teams to raise $2250 in sponsorships; the chapter also separately exceeded its $1000 fundraising goal from community business partners for chapter member t-shirts in return for UW AMA promotions. The 2nd Annual AMA Etiquette Dinner, serving professional development for university students at large, attracted more than 130 students and community business people, raising more than $2300 in corporate sponsorships and $1900 in event profits

to be reinvested in chapter operational expenses and student scholarships. The dinner featured guest speakers including the Nordstrom Strategic Marketing Manager who spoke about fashion etiquette, a concern for student job and internship opportunities.

Community – Business Community Collaboration

The chapter has actively collaborated with the Puget Sound Chapter of AMA (PSAMA) leadership to develop a professional mentorship program for chapter members, a highly valued benefit to members that is ongoing as well as student-centric networking events. Student leaders worked with PSAMA collegiate relations committee to attract the notable business leaders to chapter meetings, e.g., the Key Bank VP Marketing and Communications, a Microsoft Vice President and the Chief Marketing Officer and VP of PEMCO Insurance that further attracted involvement of chapter members as well as other Foster School students.

The chapter hosted quarterly networking events, e.g., the Google Networking Night with the UW Foster School Career Center to support its internship program, as well as a marketing, advertising and public relations industry focus night with representatives from the Wunderman, Agency, Atlas Networks, Edelman Public Relations, and other advertising/public relations agencies. The UW AMA chapter also organized and hosted a Super Bowl Ad Replay night attended by numerous agency representatives, marketing managers and students. An equally successful Winter Mixer attracted more than 150 students and 50 marketing professionals. Most recently the student chapter organized and managed the first Northwest Regional AMA Collegiate Chapter Conference that attracted 150 student members from six university chapters in Washington, Montana and British Columbia.

The Future

The very progressive 2013-14 UW AMA agenda reflects a focus on community engagement, most prominently establishing "Husky Creative," a formal academic consultancy service (Cooke and Williams 2010) involving small student member teams, each constituted of marketing research, branding, marketing strategy, and promotions, to work with business/non-profit clients. Shell Oil was sufficiently impressed by Husky Creative's proposal to become its first client.

Further initiatives include establishing a chapter board of advisors of community business leaders and university representatives, securing major corporate sponsors to support the chapter's extensive programs and goals, including its annual Winter Mixer, and continuing to compete in the various AMA International collegiate case and special event competitions. Each of these initiatives, most strongly reflect the goals of experiential learning.

Conclusions

A compelling argument can be made for extending experiential learning principles beyond the classroom to engage marketing students in an extra-curricular marketing club/AMA-affiliated marketing chapter, and comparable organizations to enhance marketing understanding, skills and capabilities via community engagement. Increased numbers of marketing students at the University of Washington have joined the student AMA chapter, motivated by engaged student leaders a robust program of community/business client projects, company visits, internships and further collaboration with the PSAMA chapter, to further advance skill sets and future aspirations. Student leaders attest to the increased command of marketing course content gained by virtue of their involvement in these programs, inspiring "Husky Creative" to address client company marketing challenges, large and small, and learning more about the realities of business world marketing than would be the case otherwise by traditional in-class methods.

Although this paper addresses community, university student and business benefits afforded by extending experiential learning principles to extracurricular organizations, there remains scant literature suggesting or addressing the challenges and benefits of such an effort, pointing to the need for research by marketing academics. It further suggests the value of AMA international chapters to foster active relationships with university marketing clubs and chapters that further contribute to the next generation marketing leaders and managers.

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