Bridging the Gap Between Academia and Industry in Hospitality: Using Real Life Case Studies

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a detailed description of the successful use of Experiential Learning Techniques in a hospitality classroom setting. The authors argue that the use of such instructional approaches will bridge the existing gap between hospitality education and the competencies employers expect from graduates of hospitality programs.

INTRODUCTION

In colleges and universities, teaching serves an important vehicle for achieving institutional goals of increased effectiveness, efficiency, and the enhancement of student learning (Hsu, 1999). Hospitality education is an ever-emerging field in higher education in terms of both the increase in number of programs and in student enrollment (Bosselman, 1999). Numerous studies in hospitality education explore and provide suggestions for effective teaching through the use of a variety of instructional methods in the classroom (Sivan, Wong Leung, Gow, & Kember, 1991; Smith & Umbreit, 1990; Beck & Adler, 1997; Harris, 1997).

A 2007 study on stakeholders in hospitality education documented that several significant gaps and interesting differences on perceptions about hospitality education exist between educators and employers (Cho, Erdem, & Johanson, 2007). In order to understand the gap between hospitality higher education and the business industry, one needs to study the needs of what employers really want from current hospitality graduates. Information on what employers' seek can then be applied to the instructional design of the curriculum, hence, matching those needs of the industry. In the hospitality industry, industry professionals expect students to be prepared for not only skills and competencies at the front line level, but to also have critical thinking skills, emotional intelligence as an outcome of a four year degree (Ogbeide, 2006). The authors of this study propose to lessen the perceptional gap between educators and industry by immersing the hospitality student in real life case studies that have the underpinnings of experiential learning, instructional technology, meta-cognition, and communication skills need in the business industry. Real-life case studies on successful implementation of experiential learning techniques in a hospitality course are presented in this article to serve as an example on how to bridge the aforementioned gap in hospitality education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

HOSPITALITY EDUCATION- PROGRAMS ACROSS THE U.S.

There are many programs, colleges, and universities across the globe that are now teaching under the umbrella of hospitality and tourism (www.chrie.org). These programs focus on preparing students for a career in the industry after graduation. It is the combination of theory and practice in the hospitality programs that makes the student a success, and that is why the programs mandate inter/externships in the field before graduation. Ultimately, the goal is to produce students that fit the industry; graduates who can apply critical thinking, and emotional intelligence to the career they choose to pursue in the hospitality industry.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING TECHNIQUES (ELT) IN HOSPITALITY EDUCATION

Effective teaching calls for the realization that different people have different styles of learning based on their past experiences (Kolb, 1984; Svinicki, & Dixon, 1987). Several researchers suggest that the key to successful instruction is to recognize the varying learning styles of students and offer experiential learning techniques to enhance the learning environment for students (Kolb, 1984; Svinicki, & Dixon, 1987; Fox & Ronskowski, 1997; Beaty, 1998; Vince, 1998). Teachers serve as a knowledgeable decision makers for choosing the optimal instructional methods that meets students' learning needs (Lalley & Miller, 2007). Research on experiential learning in hospitality education has been rather limited. After reviewing existing practices across several hospitality programs, Kiser and Partlow (1999) concluded that the need for experiential learning is recognized by hospitality educators but the implementation and variety of experiential learning techniques are limited in scope. A learning model by Green and Sammons (2014) focuses on the hospitality learner from a holistic base, which incorporates ELT in active learning. An ideal outcome for hospitality education learners is to be in a class where instruction is cooperative and collaborative, where each student learns from one another (Wurdinger & Carlson, 2009).

CASE STUDY

THE CLASS, EXPECTATIONS, AND THE CASE

The learners are hospitality students in an undergraduate Bachelor's program, situated in an AASCB accredited College of Business. The course is human resources (HR) in hospitality, and the curriculum is designed to investigate human resources at a 10,000 foot view level, covering the basics of what is needed in a real life hotel or restaurant, and what current managers need to know about HR.

The 16 week face to face course is situated in a student centered approach that incorporates experiential learning, active engagement, collaboration, and employs the flipped classroom approach. The learning outcomes align with the overall curricula, mission, and goals of the college and the University. A large component of the structure of the class is the online, real time collaboration tool in Google Drive.

The case is a real life restaurant located in Tucson Arizona, and has an issue of high turnover, which is affecting the overall topline revenue. This case includes financials for an entire year, 2014-2015, as well as a narrative outline of the current problem of the restaurant which was gathered in May 2015, when the instructor was invited to interview the ownership group, and set up the case. The case is presented from a consulting standpoint, where the students are the consultants in HR, and are there to help with the overall turnover of the restaurant.

The case works on the one common issue of turnover, but also takes the topic from each week and produces a tangible document that will be later shared with the ownership group. Each week a folder is created, the student's work is deposited into the folder, and before the semester ends, the students will reflect and refine the work they have done before uploading the documents into a website.

INSTRUCTOR ROLE

The instructor's role is to set the stage for the learning, stepping the students through each area in the learning cycle. In addition to understanding about the design of the course, the instructor needs a working knowledge of the case study, and a strong command of the subject by having consulted or worked in the industry. This gives the real life business behind the case, as well as how to shape the case for a client.

There is extra prep for the instructor with regards to technology, setting up a Google account for the class, facilitating the Google drive, and monitoring the information in the Google drive. In the first weeks of the class, the instructor leads the students in the learning, and then after the students

grasp the concept of this teaching style, the instructor is part of the solution. There are many moments for teaching on the fly, and personal learning.

SETTING UP THE CASE

It is essential for the instructor to set up the case study before the start of class. There are several items to prep:

- Folder in Google Drive
- Participation from restaurant owner
- Presentation from restaurant owner recorded, or a Skype call scheduled
- Financial statements for the year
- Current organizational chart

STUDENT PARTICIPATION

The students work on the case by using the scaffolding technique. Scaffolding introduced by Wood, Bruner, and Ross in 1976, and defines how children learn by building on processes. This idea then was applied to adult education by Vygotsky's (1978) idea that adults collaborate with their peers when relying on the two parts in solving problems. These two parts are "actual development level" and "potential developmental level" (pg. 86). In the current situation, the students attend a class in which they learn the elements of the theory, and then the following class is applying the theory to reality. Students can elect to work in groups, individually.

The students are expected to do the following:

- Read material, watch videos, research about the case outside of class.
- Apply what they have learned, in class assignments.
- Collaborate in teams, with different class members each week.
- Understand the basic adult learning theory, where they are ultimately responsible for their own learning.
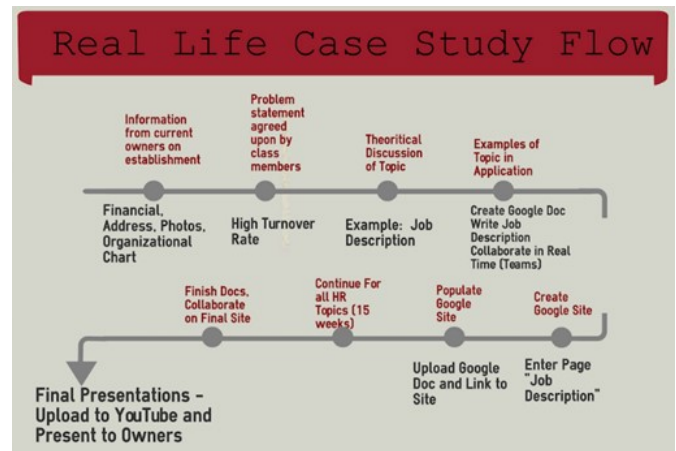
TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNICATION

There is one Google drive created for the entire class, and

EXHIBIT 1
THEORY, PRACTICE, COLLABORATION
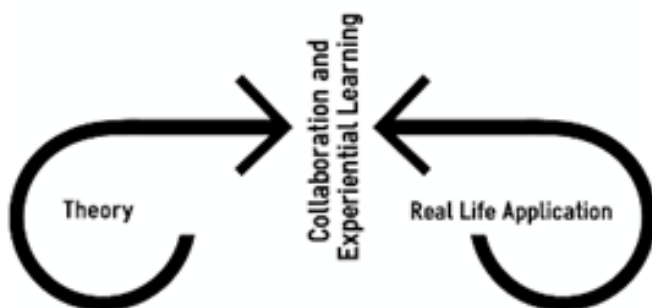
EXHIBIT 2
FLOW OF CASE.

the students work in that space when applying the theory to the live case study. The students meet in a computer lab, log in to a computer, and enter into the Google drive, where there is documentation to supplement the assignment for the day. Instructions are given, and the work starts. At that time, the students can use internet searches to aid in the formulation of the application for that class period.

The Google drive is divided into topics, in that each week, a topic will be discussed related to the restaurant. The students will produce an artifact for the actual restaurant in the folder. At the end of the semester, the folders are then cleaned up for the "best" artifacts, and then a website is created to assist with the presentation of materials. This website is located in Google Sites, which then gives links directly to the documents in the drive.

The students also employ YouTube as the channel in which to do a "live" presentation of the material at the end of the semester. The students give the presentation to the owners, and then the recording is uploaded so the owners can view at their leisure. Each student has the opportunity to participate in the presentation, by using small group techniques.
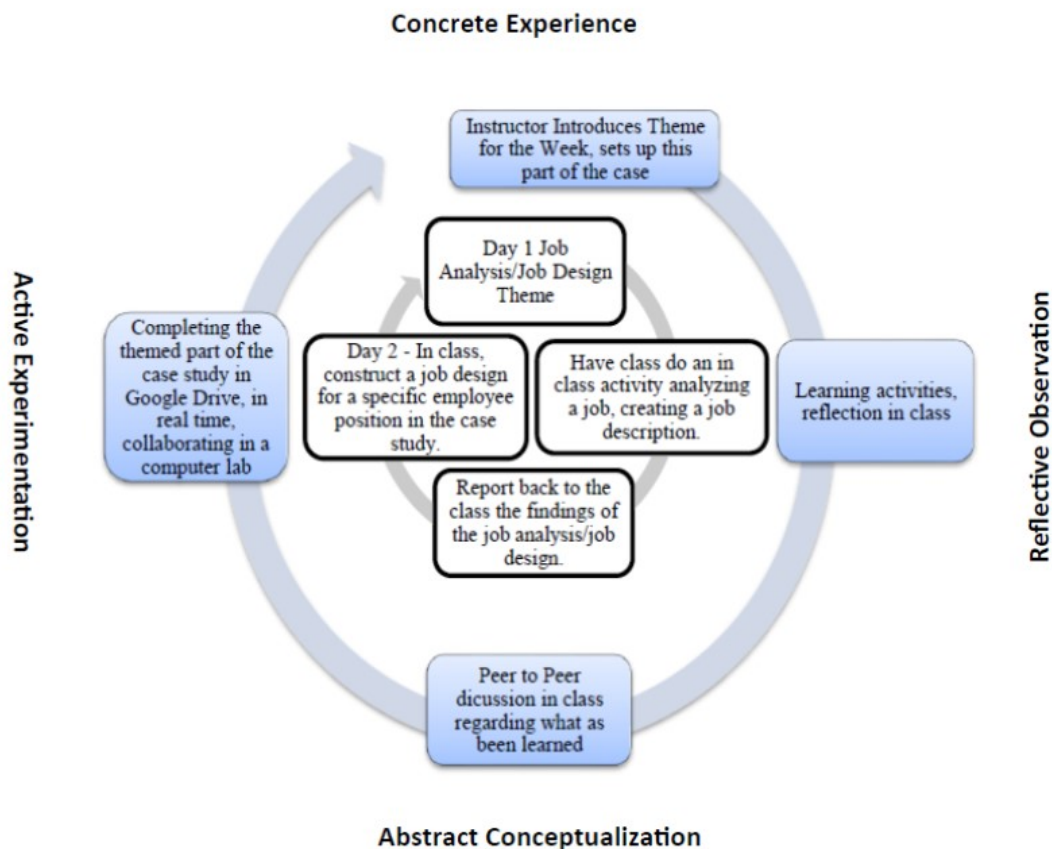
CONCLUSION

The outcome of the case study, allows the student to experience the four steps in the experiential learning cycle as seen in exhibit 3. Overall, hospitality students are engaged and see value in participating in classes that offer such type of teaching.

Feedback from students include: "Looking back then, we could learn, assess, apply and develop new ways to learn", or "I like how you get everyone involved and make it a comfortable space for everyone to open up". And the metacognition that is the result of ELT application in the classroom is found in another student quote "This is truly the most special class I have ever taken. Other than the lecture, and the knowledge in the book, we also learned a new way to think".

In addition to the solid instructional design of the class, there is an undertone of learning, rather a learning on top of learning that occurs in this environment. At the end of the semester, the students have a clear understanding of the Web 2.0 tools available to them through many channels, especially Google applications. As a 21st Century learner, we expect them to be on top of how to use the technology offered, yet, many students do not know the tools of the trade. The learning happens when they collaborate in real time on a document, across the room in this case, but it could be across the world. They can work on presentations that go far beyond the standard PowerPoint that many instructors still "grade" as a presentation. The grades earned in the class also speak to both the introvert and extroverts, those that like to work in teams and others that would rather work individually. Thus, setting up a platform of equality in the classroom, similar to how managers and leaders

EXHIBIT 3.
KOLB'S LEARNING CYCLE APPLIED TO LIVE CASE STUDY.

Concrete Experience

Instructor Introduces Theme for the Week, sets up this part of the case

Day 1 Job Analysis/Job Design Theme

Completing the themed part of the case study in Google Drive, in real time, collaborating in a computer lab

Day 2 - In class, construct a job design for a specific employee position in the case study.

Have class do an in class activity analyzing a job, creating a job description.

Learning activities, reflection in class

Report back to the class the findings of the job analysis/job design.

Peer to Peer dicussion in class regarding what as been learned

Active Experimentation

Reflective Observation

Abstract Conceptualization

should applying this knowledge in the real world.

As Kolb (1984) built on the work by earlier theorists such as Dewey (1916) and Lewin (1957), so can hospitality educators who incorporate the convergence of real life case studies, and technology to engage the whole learner. Once the learner embraces this type of learning, and then is placed in the industry, it will help lessen the gap between academia and industry.

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