Chapter 15

Students’ Learning Experiences in Project-Based Learning (PtBL):
With Pain Comes Gain

Roxanne DuVivier
Wright State University, USA

Carol Logan Patitu
Wright State University, USA

Sheri Stover
Wright State University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the perceptions of nineteen graduate students’ regarding the incorporation of Project-Based Learning (PtBL) in a Student Affairs class. This chapter demonstrates that not all students in the class were prepared to assume the responsibility of PtBL learning and yearned for a “traditional” classroom environment where instructors provide structure and step-by-step instructions. However, through hard work and the support from the instructor, the students were successful in completing outstanding PtBL workshops. While students reported increased levels of stress and anxiety while creating their workshop, students also reported having high levels of pride and validation once they successfully conducted it. Students reported being taken outside of their comfort zones and reported high levels of personal growth once they successfully completed their workshops. The PtBL research supports the assertion, “with pain comes gain”.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0643-0.ch015
INTRODUCTION

In the past, learning was primarily teacher-centered. It was facilitated in a classroom environment where the instructor taught and the students passively listened. Lecturing has been the predominant mode of instruction since universities were founded in Europe over 900 years ago (Brockliss, 1996). “Traditional lecturing and note-taking, certified by periodic examinations, was created for a time when books were scarce and costly” (Boyer Commission, 1998, p. 16). While lecture continues to be an efficient method for delivering content, this teaching methodology will fail to develop the full battery of skills and abilities desired in a contemporary college graduate (Duch, Groh, & Allen, 2001). Hart Research Associates conducted an online survey, which showed that employers want colleges to work harder to ensure that graduates have better skills in “critical thinking, complex problem-solving, written and oral communication, and applied knowledge in real-world settings” (Hart Research Associates, 2013, p. 1). Project based learning (PtBL) has been identified as a teaching methodology that will help students to develop these 21st century skills (Andrés, 2006).

Graduate students majoring in Student Affairs need to take an active role on campus to ensure that services offered and programs designed contribute to student learning. Professional organizations such as the American College Student Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) have identified competencies that Student Affairs graduates need in order to be professionally successful. Among these competencies are the ability to assess, design, and implement training, the skill to teach others, to lead, to create, to assemble and use data, to evaluate, interpret, and to consult and to actively engage with students and colleagues (ACPA Rubric for Professional Development, 2010). ACPA emphasizes the need for Student Affairs graduates to develop and teach others by including references to fostering student learning and development fifteen different times in their competencies (Rubrics for Professional Development, 2010).

In an effort to develop the active skills required for Student Affairs graduates, a professor developed her class using PtBL strategies. Students in this class were divided into five groups, each of which included three or four students. Students were then given an authentic topic and were asked to create a two and a half hour professional development workshop. During the first two-thirds of the semester, students learned how to conduct a well-designed workshop. The last third of the class was used for the student groups to conduct their workshops. From the initial instruction to the design and delivery phase, the responsibility for learning and teaching shifted from the instructor to the students.

Students were given broad authentic topics within which to design their workshops. Students were then responsible for both mastering the topic, creating learning activities, and conducting a high-quality workshop. First, the student groups identified learning objectives for their workshop and developed assessments to measure the success of their workshop in fostering learning among their peers. Students also created a PowerPoint presentation and conducted interactive mini-lectures around the content. During the workshop, the student groups were required to include a variety of activities every 15 minutes to optimize the learning and engagement of their audience. Examples of the PtBL activities that could be included are simulations, structured experiences, practice, self-assessment tests, role plays, case studies, group discussion, participative lecture, independent study, lecture, or film (Davis & Schenk, 1978). Following each group’s workshop, students conducted a robust self-assessment and were given feedback from their peers, guest experts, and the instructor.

This chapter examines the use of PtBL as a method of teaching graduate students preparing to work in Student Affairs in Higher Education. The chapter attempts to identify the students’ perceptions of
Related Content

Negotiating the Boundaries of American Blackness: The Experiences of African Students in the United States
Angellar Manguvo (2016). Exploring the Social and Academic Experiences of International Students in Higher Education Institutions (pp. 79-95).
www.igi-global.com/chapter/negotiating-the-boundaries-of-american-blackness/146766?camid=4v1a

Capstone Experiences: Cultivating the Positive in Undergraduate Scholarship
www.igi-global.com/chapter/capstone-experiences/199423?camid=4v1a

Convergence of Quality Assurance Paths in Romanian Universities: Drafting a Set of Indicators
www.igi-global.com/chapter/convergence-of-quality-assurance-paths-in-romanian-universities/110104?camid=4v1a

Teaching Creative Problem Solving in Engineering Education
www.igi-global.com/chapter/teaching-creative-problem-solving-in-engineering-education/166476?camid=4v1a