Experiential Learning for Effective Knowledge Transfer and Mission Achievement: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Traditional university mission statements are multifaceted. The majority focus on fundamentals: teaching, research, and service. Most core values are holistic learning, freedom of expression, and openness. However, recent trends appear to embrace a consumerist “transactional approach” emphasizing competitiveness, superiority, self-interest, and quantifiable quality with students as primary customers. At a time when students are demanding value for money, universities must endeavor to balance private interests with traditional universities’ values. Hence, consideration of some form of experiential learning and knowledge transfer in universities’ mission statements is expected to enrich student learning, add value to society, and also meet the transactional approach requirements. This paper explores theoretical and conceptual approaches to the learning process including theories, models, and perspectives. The United States International University’s experience is used as a case study with reference to integrative learning experiences in the General Education (GE) courses, the Collaborative Active Learning Model (CALM) Approach to Learning, and the Global Executive MBA Program, and the knowledge transfer experiences in the GAME Center Living Lab, the Agent Net Work, and the Entrepreneurial Simulation.

KEYWORDS

Education, Experiential Learning, Integrative Learning, Knowledge Transfer, Learning Models, Mission Statement, Service Learning, University, University Strategic Plans

INTRODUCTION

Universities develop vision and mission statements to guide the design of their strategic plans. While there is diversity in approaches, most mission statements tend to focus on the component functions of teaching, research and service as observed by Camelia and Marius (2013) in a meta-analysis of literature on higher education globally. University mission statements can range from Oxford...
University’s 21 sets of “aims”, to that of University of Sydney’s seven-word statement: “Leading to improve the world around us”. In mission statements, function components are unequally weighted. Some emphasize strategic social orientation such as in a study of 72 higher education institutions in Turkey where Özdem, (2011), found mission statements equipping a qualified work force more prevalent. Also, based on 110 mission statements and 213 policy documents, Kosmützky (2016) found mission statements with a social orientation dominant and credited for transforming German universities from organized institutions to organizational actors. Some mission statements generated knowledge on social risks and opportunities. A factor analysis by Akonkwa and Lowe (2010) on European University mission statements, identified: Collaboration; Survival Constraints; Sources of Competitive Advantage; and Accepted Academic Values.

Others shone the spotlight on dynamics of the business environment. Arcimaviciene’s (2015) study of the top 20 European Universities based on the webometrics ranking and an analytical framework of Critical Metaphor Analysis found most mission statements skewed toward “Commerce” or “Consumerism”. This echoed the World Trade Organization’s (WTO, 2010) commodification of education in their General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). Robertson (2006), examined why education sectors of national economies were targeted areas of regional and global trade within the WTO/GATS framework and concluded that GATS simply formalized trends already taking place in the education sector with Knight (2002) positing that trade in higher education services is a billion-dollar industry. However, the global Education Commission views the mission of higher education as contributing to the sustainable development and improvement of society and cautions international trade agreements against restricting or limiting this authority (Giroux, Ward, Froment, & Eaton, 2001). To what extend then, do mission statements reflect the philosophies of learning (demand side -learner experience and supply side -educator experience)?

**TYPOLOGIES OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

**Demand Side Approaches**

For Friesen, Saar, Park, Marcotte, Hampshire, Martin, Brown, and Martin (2015), learning is any process leading to permanent capacity change in living organisms but not due to biological maturation of ageing (Ilities, 2009). It involves ongoing, active processes of inquiry, engagement and participation in the world around learners (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000); the moment one is born, in schools, and beyond throughout their lives, with (Malamed, 2016) presenting a compilation of 10 definitions of learning from a variety of sources. The International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education (2016) identifies Bloom’s three domain frameworks: Cognitive, Affective and Psychomotor for knowledge and skill development, through demand side experiential, service, participatory and incremental learning:

1. **Experiential Learning** subjects the learner to real life issues where learning is by doing. Experiential learning is common in physical sciences with laboratory experiments, or agriculture fields. Therefore, for lifelong learning to take place, experiential learning is critical since issues in life are multifaceted and require cumulative knowledge experiences and holistic engagement as conceived by McCaslin and Flora (2013) (Figure 1);
2. **Kolb’s experiential learning theory** focuses on the learner’s internal cognitive processes (McLeod, 2010; 2013) whereby knowledge is created through transformation of experience cumulatively through four levels, i.e., concrete experience; observation and reflection on the experience; formation of abstract concepts (analysis) and generalizations (conclusions); and finally testing of hypothesis which leads to new experiences. Similarly, Race’s *Ripples of Learning Model* argued that the most effective form of learning is experiential learning by doing (Centre for Enhancement of Learning & Teaching [CELT], 1998);
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