

**Reflective Thought and Practice Gains Through Career-Related Volunteering
Opportunities During University Studies: An Exploratory Study**

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Abstract

Adult Education theories and studies related to experiential learning ascertain that career related volunteering opportunities during university studies will generate occasions for reflective thought and lead to gains in practice, in real life work situations, and after graduation. The research question on which the exploratory study for this thesis is based is: What are the benefits and competencies university students develop in and attribute to career related volunteering opportunities and do they feel it promotes reflective thinking? Four recent graduate students from a Bachelor Commerce degree program at a university in Montreal who had participated in a career related volunteering opportunity during their studies were the participants. The students were first asked about their satisfaction with the career related volunteering program they followed. They all said that their goals and expectations were met. The participants found that the program structure allowed for creative freedom, fostered confidence, increased accountability, ownership and skills acquisition among the volunteers. The participants recounted that the skills gained, through the career related volunteering opportunities during their studies, did help them in interviewing for jobs and continue to be useful in the performance of their duties in their work mandate. Although all four students wanted to give back through volunteering activities after they started gainful employment, they were not yet engaged in volunteering activities in their present jobs at the time of the interview. Based on the results of this exploratory study, it is recommended that a more systematic follow up study be designed in order to bring specific improvements to the overall career related program offered and that resources be made available for a greater number of students to benefit from such programs.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents Yvonne and Michael for their endless love, support and encouragement.

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Key Terms

Reflection

"Reflection is an important human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull over and evaluate it. It is this working with experience that is important in learning" (as cited by Rogers 2001, p. 41).

Adult Education

"Adult education is the process whereby adults engage in systematic and sustained learning activities in order to gain new forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values" (Merriam, & Brockett, 2007, p. 7).

Experiential Learning Theory

Kolb defines experiential learning theory as, "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 41).

Learning Styles Inventory

Kolb's Learning styles inventory (1984) is based on four specific learning styles/preferences and work in relationship with the four stages of learning cycles as follows:

1. having a concrete experience followed by,
2. observation of and reflection on that experience, which then contributes to,
3. the formation of abstract concepts (analysis) and generalizations (conclusions) which are then,
4. applied to test hypotheses in future situations, resulting in new experiences.

Competencies

“Competencies can be motives, traits, self-concepts, attitudes or values, content knowledge, or cognitive or behavioural skills - any individual characteristic that can be measured or counted reliably and that can be shown to differentiate significantly between superior and average performers, or between effective and ineffective performers” (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 4).

Career Related Volunteer Work

Personally, I would define career related volunteer work as a student volunteering time to perform a service willingly without any monetary compensation. The tasks involved would be directly related to their field of study and may be similar to what they might experience as part of their future career.

Examples of Experiential Learning Opportunities

Apprenticeship experience, clinical experiences, cooperative education experiences, fellowship experiences, field work experiences, practicum experiences, service learning experiences, student teaching experiences, study abroad experiences and volunteer experiences are all examples of possible experiential learning opportunities.

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Chapter 1

Experiential learning opportunities reinforce the theoretical learning that occurs in classroom settings and allows students to make better connections between theory and practice. The combination of experiential and theoretical learning provides students with real world experiences in which they understand the complexity of working in industry and the markets that will influence their workplace. Furthermore, by combining both education and practice, students are able to make meaningful connections from theory learned in formal education as well as drawing on personal experiences to enrich this knowledge. Ultimately, career related volunteer work coupled with promoting reflective thought generates a praxis that may be applied to all aspects of a student's life allowing them to develop skills and experience which will yield substantial benefits as they venture forth into the workforce or other future endeavours.

My interest in studying the benefits of experiential learning stemmed from my personal experience and the opportunities it opened up for me as a participant in career related volunteer work which made me more employable upon graduation. Although I had over ten years of professional experience, I was lacking directly related career experience in my varying fields of study which are Commerce, Human Resource Management and Education. In order to bridge the gap and make myself a more desirable candidate to potential employers upon graduation I reached out to my university's career centre and offered to volunteer my time to develop training manuals for their department. This experience was an amazing opportunity for me to continue to hone my skills and develop in areas where I had limited experience.

My career related volunteer experience allowed me to explore a career path that I may not have otherwise considered. Furthermore, as a result of my experience, I have gone on to become a Career Advisor as well as Manager for a Volunteer Program where students have the

opportunity to further develop skills and competencies. Since I began working with the volunteer program it has expanded from a team of twelve volunteers and one work-study coordinator to a program of approximately forty volunteers and six work-study coordinators within a two year time frame.

In addition to the interviews with the four participants in this study, I have inserted my voice based on my long experience in managing the volunteer experience programs during the course of the Bachelor of Commerce degree offered to students who would like to benefit from real work experience. Therefore my voice is inserted wherever I wanted to indicate lessons learned from my experience usually introduced with “I believe”. From a professional perspective, I strongly believe in providing students with learning spaces and opportunities that offer a safe platform where students can grow academically, professionally as well as personally while learning from their achievements, challenges and mistakes.

The interest in studying the benefits of reflective thought stemmed from the fact that I truly felt that in my particular circumstance the opportunity to join the volunteer program and gain invaluable experience, which I would not have been able to easily gain otherwise, made me extremely motivated to maximize what I could learn from the opportunity. To be able to achieve this goal I intuitively started to reflect on the various tasks for which I was made responsible. I noticed that if I would spend some time after each task or learning opportunity to reflect on it there always seemed to be some key aspects which I did not initially pick up on as I was either participating in the learning experience or working on the assigned task. This clear benefit caused me to ensure that I would take the required time to reflect on each of my volunteer experiences to ensure that I was extracting the maximum amount of knowledge and experience for each and every single opportunity which was offered to me via the volunteer program.

When we provide students with career related volunteering opportunities, they learn new skills, develop competencies, get to know their community, explore new or existing career paths, use skill sets in new ways as well as building their professional and social networks. Moreover, it helps to make clear and relevant connections between textbook knowledge learned in a traditional classroom environment with real-world practices. I believe this fosters critical and reflective thought among students who are, with this opportunity, able to learn in peer to peer centered learning spaces rather than exclusively instructor centered learning.

I believe that educators need to continue to facilitate dialogue and interactive exercises in a classroom setting as well as encouraging students to explore experiential learning opportunities in conjunction with their courses. This dual faceted approach will generate learning spaces that continue to inspire creativity and allow students to link theory to practice with real-life experiences from their career related volunteer work.

Given that limited research is currently available on the influence of these opportunities on the career orientation of graduates, this study will help to identify and explore the benefits students may gain and competencies students may develop through career related volunteer work. This research will provide an opportunity to evaluate current practices for volunteer programs within higher education and identify areas of strength as well as areas in need of improvement in developing stronger programming to better prepare students for their careers.

Statement of the Problem and Research Question

Due to the extremely competitive nature of the labour market it is an invaluable asset to students who are graduating to be able to have some relevant work experience. This experience allows students to truly gain a grasp of how to apply what they have learned during their studies to actual real world situations which will reduce their learning curve when starting in the

workforce. This experience even if limited in nature will also allow potential employers to be able to better assess how their prospective participants would fit into the position since they would have a more relevant point of reference during the interview process.

I believe that the process of reflective thought is a strategy that helps learners reflect upon their experiences, actions, decisions, and explore in greater detail new experiences in order to gain a better understanding and potentially new insights. This in turn will create an authentic learning experience by using real life examples that encourage and create tangible and meaningful connections between theory and practice.

For these reasons, the overall purpose of this study is to explore the benefits of promoting reflective thought in experiential learning opportunities and ways in which this approach contributes to students developing competencies that will serve them well in their future careers. More specifically, the interest behind this study is to gain a better understanding about whether volunteering in career related opportunities, as an integral part of students' experiential learning while in higher education, would facilitate a more authentic learning experience and further develop students' readiness and successful integration to the labour market. Also, this study can help to gain a deeper understanding of the benefits and challenges of integrating career relevant volunteering opportunities in university programming.

Therefore, my research question is: What are the benefits and competencies university students develop in and attribute to career related volunteering opportunities and do they feel it promotes reflective thinking?

Importance of the Study

In order to meet the increased expectations and competitive nature of academic programs, there has been a movement towards focusing on student outcomes, successes and placement rates. As a result, universities have begun to recognize the importance and value of providing students with a variety of experiential learning opportunities. However, a limited amount of research has been done to study the impact of reflective thought and experiential learning based opportunities within higher education and the influence these opportunities have on students' future careers.

Students are deeply invested in mastering the theories of their field of study during the first few semesters of their degree. Part of the role of education is to couple theory with practice through lectures and practical exercises. Why not take this a step further and integrate more opportunities for students to apply textbook knowledge to hands-on learning and reflective thought? Career related volunteering opportunities provide learning spaces that continue to promote reflection and afford students the opportunity to apply theory into practice in various areas such as: organizational, community, personal, interpersonal, intercultural and international.

Chapter 2

Study Design and Methodology

The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of volunteer experiential opportunities on the participants' reflective thought, competencies and skills, and / or career choice progression. The most suitable way to obtain this information was to conduct in-depth interviews. The type of students targeted were to be within two years of their date of convocation, above the age of eighteen, and from an English speaking university within the Montreal area. These graduates were identified by having already participated in experiential learning opportunities while at university and were asked to participate in this data collection activity on a voluntary basis. To identify the participants for the study a complete list of students who matched the aforementioned criteria, was compiled from one consolidated list and a random selection of participants was made. All the participants who were randomly selected from the list were contacted and invited to participate in the study and share their experiences. A letter of introduction (Appendix A) was given to each participant followed by a preliminary questionnaire (Appendix B) and a consent form (Appendix C), which was read by the participant in the study, completed, signed and returned to me prior to proceeding with the interview. Participants were made aware throughout the process that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time by sending an email to me or to my thesis advisor. Data was kept on an encrypted external hard drive in a secure and locked location that only I had access to.

Once participants had given their consent, an individual in-depth interview was conducted in order to gain insight into their perspectives and experiences (Appendix D). The data gathering for the research was qualitative in nature. The specific method used to compile the qualitative data was via a semi-structured research interview. The set of questions for the

interview were the same for all participants and was phrased so that the focus area for each question was very clear while allowing for flexibility in the response as well as room for follow up questions or clarifications if required. The data gathered through individual interviews was intended to provide insights regarding their personal experience and perspectives in career related volunteer work. Through interviews, I wanted to explore the participants' narratives regarding the ways they believed their experience had contributed to promoting reflective thought, competencies and skills developed, and / or career choice progression. The interview was recorded, transcribed and verified by the interviewee for accuracy. The set of questions were carefully designed to allow the study participants to reflect and tell their story.

During the analysis phase, the narratives collected from the participant interviews were examined with a view to gain insights on their experience and quality of programming offered to them while they were students. The interview results were the corner stone to help gain a better understanding of the research question for which this study was conducted: What are the benefits and competencies that university students develop in and attribute to career related volunteering opportunities and do they feel it promotes reflective thinking?

During my research, I kept a personal journal where I would record both descriptive and reflective notes to document my own observations related to my research. While my personal belief is that career related volunteer work is overall beneficial, I made a concerted effort to maintain an unbiased and open mind to the emerging themes and other unexpected observations. It should be noted that I did not have any expectations for my own journaling and was extremely interested to see what was to emerge from this process.

The objective which I was targeting was to obtain insights from the study which could contribute to an improved quality of programming both professionally and academically for students during their study programs at the university.

Research Assumptions, Limitations and Delimitations

Assumptions

The research study was designed based on the assumptions found in the literature that experiential learning programs, specifically career related volunteer work, are effective and useful in promoting reflective thought, developing competencies and skills which produce a better understanding of the theory learned in higher education. Another assumption was that universities offer experiential learning opportunities that are beneficial to all students within their field of study and that all students will have equal opportunity to participate. Also, it was assumed that the sample of students selected to participate in the study was representative of the overall population since the participants for the study were selected at random from an overall list of students which were part of a career related volunteer program. It should also be noted that since the random sampling technique which was used is very basic it is vulnerable to sampling error, this however should not be an issue since the sample population was meeting a specified criteria. It is relevant to mention that another assumption is that the students which participated in the study answered all questions candidly and truthfully. The students being forthcoming with their responses should be very much the case since the participants were advised that all of their responses would remain anonymous. Since all of the participants had successfully completed the volunteer program it was ideal for them to answer truthfully about their experiences and give all types of feedback which they would have had ample time to reflect

on. Although simply having students take part in career related volunteering opportunities does not guarantee that each student will embrace the opportunity in the same fashion and that reflective and critical thought will occur. However, since the sample of participating students was made up of all those who sought out to participate in the volunteer program of their own initiative, it is assumed that their goal is to be able to get as much out of their experience as possible.

Limitations

The main limitation of this study is that it is not being performed over a long period of time. This does not have a very large impact on the study since the major concern is how experiential learning impacts students as they are completing their academic careers and how beneficial it is for them as they are entering the workforce. A second limitation is that there is no comparison being done to a second set of students who did not participate in an experiential learning opportunity which promoted reflective thought. Since this is an exploratory study these limitations do not take away the value of the initial findings related to the research question.

Delimitations

The delimitation of the study is how experiential learning has benefited adult learners who participated in a volunteer program with particular regard to the impact the experience has had on the participants' reflective thought, personal growth and career opportunity. The formulations of the questions were designed to be able to highlight what the participants believed they were able to improve as a result of their participation in the volunteer program and how that better prepared them for their future endeavours, and also if the experience promoted reflective thought. Additionally, it should be mentioned explicitly that the context of this paper is adult learning.

Theoretical Framework

“The need of forming a theory of experience in that education may be intelligently conducted upon the basis of experience.” (Dewey, 1963, p.33)

The theoretical framework of this thesis is a compilation of interconnected concepts from the perspectives of theorists such as David Kolb, John Dewey, Jack Mezirow and their contribution to the field of adult education. While there are a vast number of opportunities for students to engage in experiential learning programs across various disciplines within higher education, in this thesis I explore the benefits of reflective thought directly related to work experience through volunteering opportunities. In addition, I discuss the options in which an educational institution may select to integrate an aspect of experiential learning into the curriculum.

"Adult education is the process whereby adults engage in systematic and sustained learning activities in order to gain new forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values" (Merriam, Sharan, Brockett, Ralph, 2007, p. 7).

The concept of experiential learning has been an established approach in the long standing tradition of adult learning theory. The advantage of adult learners is that they have accumulated various lessons over the years either through professional or academic experience. These experiences and varying learning styles contribute to a more enriching learning environment when an individual shares with their peers their unique perceptions and interpretations as a result of their experiences. This perspective allows the learner to link the content of a course subject to an experience they had in the workplace.

Literature Review

The literature review focuses on experiential learning theories and the benefits of promoting reflective thought in higher education with the use of experiential learning

opportunities such as, volunteering in career related experiences. Volunteering in career related experiences helps students gain experience, develop their skills and competencies, expand their network or possibly even start to explore a new career path. Additionally volunteering in career related experiences can provide the opportunity to apply the knowledge the students have already gained as part of their academic curriculum in a real work type environment.

Experiential learning is a broad concept and can be adapted to a vast number of disciplines, with multiple objectives and can take place in a variety of settings. The settings and objectives will vary according to a given program and may be established to accommodate various goals such as educational, employment and personal or professional development. Experiential learning programs integrated as part of the academic curriculum would create meaningful learning while increasing a student's ability to link pedagogy to real world processes. I believe that for the most part, these opportunities are designed to provide supportive learning environments where relationships are developed and nurtured across all platforms and foster an engaging environment for both students and stakeholders.

Since the topic of experiential learning and reflective thought in higher education is interdisciplinary, it is not realistic to cover the subject comprehensively; therefore my literature review has been structured to focus on the selected areas identified:

- ❖ Early Experiential Learning and Reflective Thought
- ❖ Experiential Learning
- ❖ Reflective Thought in Learning
- ❖ Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle
- ❖ Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory
- ❖ Dewey's Reflective Inquiry in Experiential Learning
- ❖ Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory

Early Experiential Learning and Reflective Thought

Dating back to the late nineteenth century the pedagogical movement of progressive education has continued in numerous forms until present. The term “progressive” was established to differentiate this type of education from the traditional forms of curriculum and finds its roots in experience. Many forms of progressive education have the following criteria in common, but are not limited to an emphasis on learning by doing, lifelong learning and developing social skills, understanding and action as the goals of learning as opposed to rote knowledge, integration of service learning projects and community service into the daily curriculum.

Dewey was a strong supporter of the school of thought known as pragmatism, which supports a naturalistic approach and the active adaptation of an individual to their environment; he believed that the terms “theory of inquiry” or “experimental logic” expressed a more accurate representation of his own theoretical approach.

In his book *Experience and Education* (1938), Dewey discusses the significance of the social and interactive learning process where concepts of progressive education are as follows; experience, freedom, experimentation and purposeful learning. According to Dewey, all of these concepts are related to experience as well as education and play a critical role in the quality of one’s education. As stated by Miettinen (2000),

In adapting to the environment, individuals form habits - routine ways of doing things.

When these habits do not function, a problem, uncertainty and a crisis emerges and calls for reflective thought and investigation into the conditions of the situation. As in experimental research in natural science, a hypothesis is formulated and tested in practice. The central issue in Dewey’s conception of experiment is whether an authority -bond and routine ways of thinking and action can be replaced by a reconstructive and

reflective way (p.65).

Consequently, this highlights the importance of one's learning environment and how experiences such as volunteering, will offer effective and meaningful learning platforms for reflective thought to occur. This perspective is consistent with Dewey's (1938) approach where he states that we learn not only by our experiences but also through the process of reflecting and analyzing the learning outcomes for a particular experience.

Experiential Learning

Without relevant and directly related work experience, students may struggle with the application of concepts and theories which they have learned in a traditional classroom setting to real world contexts. In an effort to overcome these challenges, students may be given opportunities to participate in experiential learning to gain important hands on experience based learning. Students may then apply these concepts in the workplace, during volunteer activities as well as all other aspects of their lives (Liu & Olson, 2011).

Rodgers (2002) found that a benefit of completing a university degree is that graduates develop discipline, specific competencies, soft skills, and dispositions throughout their academic career. With the development of dispositions as well as cognitive skills, we are developing effective citizens, leaders and future educators that are valued within society.

By offering students experiential learning activities such as volunteering in career related work, they are provided with the opportunity to learn in peer to peer environments rather than merely instructor-centered experiences. As a result, peer to peer experiences generally promote self-confidence, while developing a better understanding of theory, communication, interpersonal skills, decision making, as well as problem solving skills. This process as a consequence promotes the integration of textbook knowledge to address any potential issues that

may arise through the hands-on learning that occurs. The combination of academic and experiential learning opportunities better prepares students for their future career path while reinforcing content and theory.

Experiential learning programs may be integrated into a broad range of disciplines and offers numerous benefits to students, the community at large as well as the immediate stakeholders. Given the vast nature of opportunities available, this paper focuses on gaining career related experience through volunteer opportunities.

As a Career Advisor and having worked directly with university students, my experience has been that upon graduation students are faced with the challenge of finding employment within their area of study. Students will graduate with a theoretical foundation as a result of their university credentials, however, some may be lacking in practical experience. I therefore believe that participating in career related volunteering experiences throughout their degree, will allow students to gain valuable experience in their area of study. For example, business students studying Human Resource Management may decide to volunteer their time at the school's career centre and assist in providing feedback to their fellow students on how to improve a résumé and cover letter for their applications or help prepare students for upcoming interviews. This opportunity allows the student to directly gain human resources experience which will contribute to their success in finding employment upon graduation.

The literature I have referenced in this study suggests that as a result of participating in such opportunities students become more engaged intellectually, socially, and emotionally which in turn produces an authentic learning experience. Furthermore, it brings added value to the community while simultaneously contributing to the student's individual effectiveness and motivation.

Below is a list of the various experiences that would qualify as experiential learning opportunities as part of an experiential learning program within higher education as noted by Northern Illinois University's faculty development and instructional design center (http://www.niu.edu/facdev/_pdf/guide/strategies/experiential_learning.pdf).

Apprenticeship Experiences provide students an opportunity to try out a job usually with an experienced professional in the field to act as a mentor. Apprenticeships are a type of on the job training which may lead to certification. Many skilled labourers learn their trade by doing an apprenticeship.

Clinical Experiences are hands-on experiences of a pre-determined duration directly tied to an area of study such as nursing students participating in a hospital-based experience or child development and teacher education students participating in day care and classroom settings.

Cooperative Education Experiences are more extensive than internships and will usually span two or more semesters of work. Co-ops are paid professional work experiences and are tied very closely to the student's academic work. During the co-op experience students will receive ongoing advising and the co-op will be structured to meet the student's academic and/or career goals. Co-op experience usually is included on a student's transcript in addition to being awarded designated credit hours for its completion.

Fellowship Experiences provide tuition or aid to support the training of students for a period of time, usually between 6 months to one year. They are usually made by educational institutions,

corporations, or foundations to assist individuals pursuing a course of study or research. Post-graduate fellowships assist students at the graduate level while postdoctoral fellowships provide monies for those who have already achieved their doctorate degree.

Field Work Experiences allow students to explore and apply content learned in the classroom in a specified field experience away from the classroom. Field work experiences bridge educational experiences with an outside community which can range from neighbourhoods and schools to anthropological dig sites and laboratory settings.

Internship Experiences are job-related and provide students and job changers with an opportunity to test the waters in a career field and also gain some valuable work experience. Internships can be for credit, not for credit, paid or unpaid.

Practicum Experiences are often a required component of a course of study and place students in a supervised and often paid situation. Students develop competencies and apply previously studied theory and content such as school library media students working in a high school library or marketing majors working in a marketing research firm. Practicum experiences also allow students to design and develop a project in which they apply knowledge and develop skills such as a doctoral student preparing the components of an online course.

Service Learning Experiences are distinguished by being mutually beneficial for both student and community. Service learning is growing rapidly and is considered a part of experiential education by its very nature of learning, performing a job within the community, and serious

reflection by the student. Service learning involves solving some of society's issues; such as, homelessness, poverty, lack of quality education, pollution, etc. One of the goals of service learning is to help students become aware of these issues and develop good citizenship in learning how to help solve some of these problems.

Student Teaching Experiences provides student participants with an opportunity to put into practice the knowledge and skills he or she has been developing in the preparation program. Student teaching typically involves an on-site experience in a partner school and opportunities for formal and informal participant reflection on their teaching experience. The on-site teaching portion of this experience can range from ten to sixteen weeks, depending on the program.

Study Abroad Experiences offer students a unique opportunity to learn in another culture, within the security of a host family and a host institution carefully chosen to allow the transfer of credit to a student's degree program. Students studying a foreign language will perfect the accent and greatly expand their vocabulary, a skill retained for life. Making new friends, traveling and decision making, are also key parts of the study abroad experience.

Volunteer Experiences allow students to serve in a community primarily because they choose to do so. Many serve through a non-profit organization, sometimes referred to as formal volunteering, but a significant number also serve less formally, either individually or as part of a group. Because these informal volunteers are much harder to identify, they may not be included in research and statistics on volunteering.

Reflective Thought in Learning

When students participate in formal education, educators may assume that reflection is effectively occurring with all students at the same rate. However, since students learn at different rates and with varying learning styles, this assumption may not be valid. As noted by Anderson (1992) and Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985), the need for reflection may be often overlooked during the design phase of workshops or seminars. Therefore, Boud et al. (1985), suggest that facilitators must go beyond the assumption that reflection is occurring equally and at the same rate for all students. A conscious and continuous effort must be made by facilitators to integrate planned activities into lessons that foster reflective thought. Furthermore, adequate time must be allotted for structured activities that facilitate a student's thought process, understanding of theory as well as draw on their previous experiences and knowledge for meaningful reflective learning to occur.

Another important aspect of reflective thought was illustrated through the research of both Schön (1983) and Argyris (1978), in which they challenged the traditional notion of how we learn best and the implications on the depth, context and problem resolution skills we gain from what we learn. As such, they have come up with the terms Single Loop Learning and Double Loop Learning. Single loop learning is the aspect of learning where you simply repeat the same action, without questioning why this situation is occurring and how you could improve on a strategy. Double loop learning, is a more in-depth and reflective aspect of the learning process. Its main focus is on learning that integrates asking *why* in order to discover the underlying assumption. Therefore, by examining the consequences from a broader perspective we are promoting a reflective learning process that contributes to a deeper understanding and more effective problem solving strategies for both the individual as well as the organization.

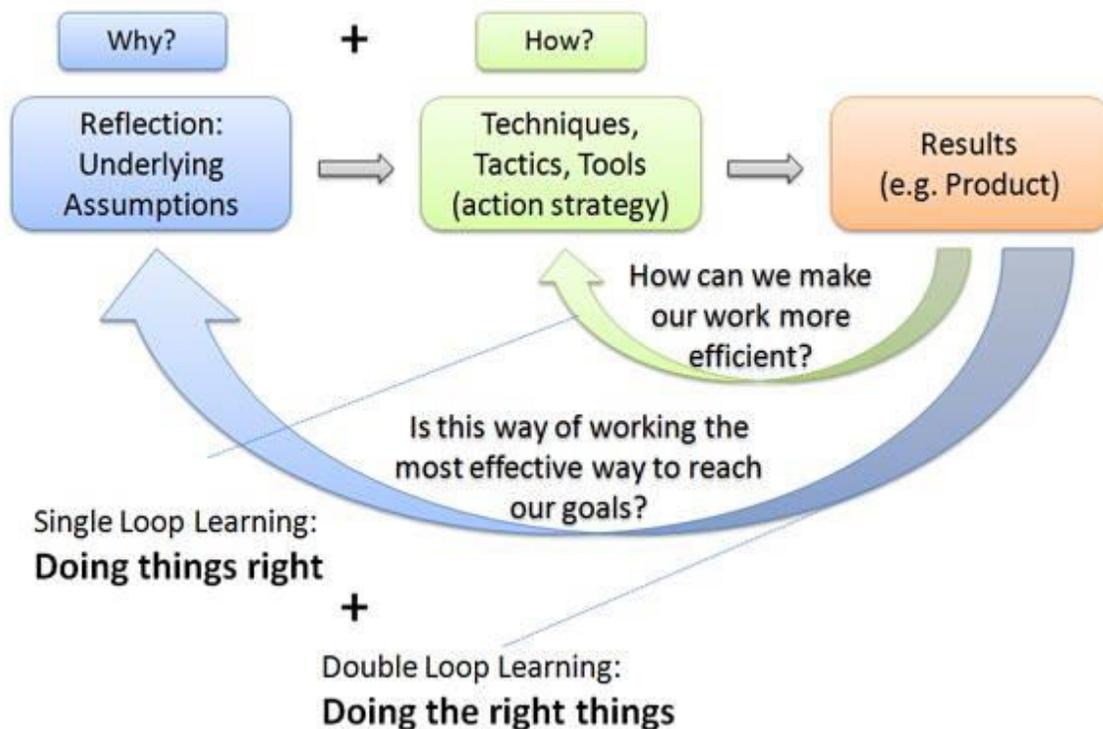


Figure 1: Single Loop Learning & Double Loop Learning

<http://bsix12.com/double-loop-learning/>

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

"Learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984, p.38).

Kolb is one of many theorists who have contributed to the field of adult education. His theory of experiential learning was derived from the contributions of prominent 20th century scholars whose theories focused on a central role in human learning and development. A few of these theorists include, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget and John Dewey, as well as other theorists of the experiential learning paradigm (Miettinen, 2000).

According to Kolb (2005), the process of experiential learning relies on creating an opportunity for students to apply the concepts and theories learned within a formal classroom to direct experiences. Kolb (1984) suggests that there needs to be a link between a student's classroom knowledge and their future career, and that this link will "translate abstract ideas of academia into the concrete practical realities of these peoples' lives" (p. 6). His theory focuses on the learner's cognitive processes as well as the notion of the acquisition of abstract concepts that may be applied in a myriad of situations. The Experiential Learning Model was originally developed in part from the work of Kurt Lewin and is widely influential for its use in the field of adult education. His experiential learning theory is based on the two main areas, the first area is the individuals' learning styles/preferences and the second area is the four stage cycle of learning.

The Experiential Learning Model (ELM) has been recognized for its pedagogical implication within higher education and was developed by Kolb and is composed of four elements:

1. **Concrete Experience** - (a new experience of situation is encountered, or a reinterpretation of existing experience).
2. **Reflective Observation** - (of the new experience, of particular importance are any inconsistencies between experience and understanding).
3. **Abstract Conceptualization** - (Reflection gives rise to a new idea, or a modification of an existing abstract concept).
4. **Active Experimentation** - (the learner applies them to the world around them to see what results).

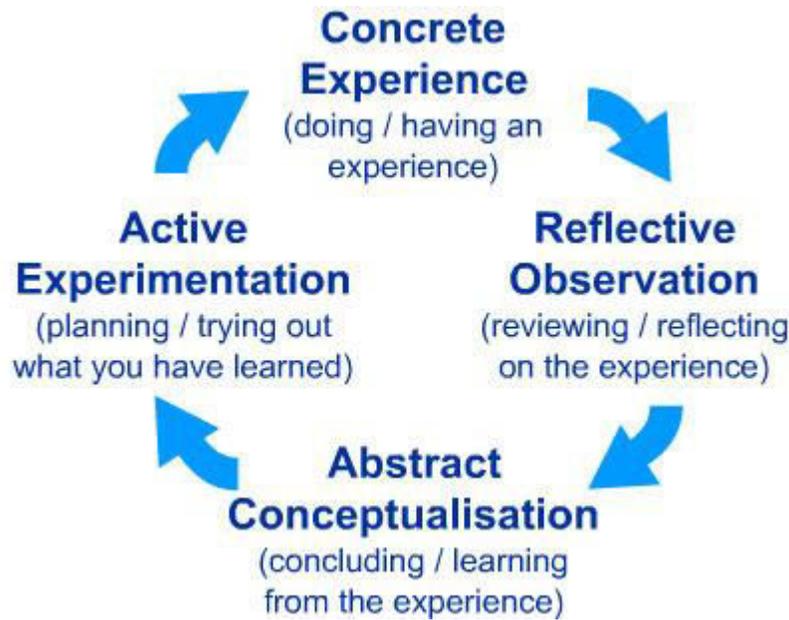


Figure 2: Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

<http://www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html>

Kolb suggests that learning typically begins with the stage of Concrete Experience and promotes continuous learning throughout the remaining three elements. Additionally, he states that effective learning truly occurs when an individual experiences all four stages within the experiential learning model.

Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory

Kolb's (1984) Learning Styles Inventory (LSI) is based on four specific learning styles/preferences and work in collaboration with his four stage learning cycle. The four Kolb learning styles are:

1. **Diverging (feeling and watching - CE/RO)** - These people are able to look at things from different perspectives. They are sensitive. They prefer to watch rather than do, tending to gather information and use imagination to solve problems. They are best at viewing concrete situations from several different viewpoints. Kolb called this style 'Diverging' because these people perform better in situations that require idea-generation, for example, brainstorming. People with a Diverging learning style have broad cultural interests and like to gather information. They are interested in people, tend

to be imaginative and emotional, and tend to be strong in the arts. People with the Diverging style prefer to work in groups, to listen with an open mind and to receive personal feedback.

2. **Assimilating (watching and thinking - AC/RO)** - The Assimilating learning preference is for a concise, logical approach. Ideas and concepts are more important than people. These people require good clear explanation rather than practical opportunity. They excel at understanding wide-ranging information and organising it as a clear logical format. People with an Assimilating learning style are less focused on people and more interested in ideas and abstract concepts. People with this style are more attracted to logically sound theories than approaches based on practical value. These learning style people is important for effectiveness in information and science careers. In formal learning situations, people with this style prefer readings, lectures, exploring analytical models, and having time to think things through.
3. **Converging (doing and thinking - AC/AE)** - People with a Converging learning style can solve problems and will use their learning to find solutions to practical issues. They prefer technical tasks, and are less concerned with people and interpersonal aspects. People with a Converging learning style are best at finding practical uses for ideas and theories. They can solve problems and make decisions by finding solutions to questions and problems. People with a Converging learning style are more attracted to technical tasks and problems than social or interpersonal issues. A Converging learning style enables specialist and technology abilities. People with a Converging style like to experiment with new ideas, to simulate, and to work with practical applications.
4. **Accommodating (doing and feeling - CE/AE)** - The Accommodating learning style is 'hands-on', and relies on intuition rather than logic. These people use other people's analysis, and prefer to take a practical, experiential approach. They are attracted to new challenges and experiences, and to carrying out plans. They commonly act on 'gut' instinct rather than logical analysis. People with an Accommodating learning style will tend to rely on others for information than carry out their own analysis. This learning style is prevalent and useful in roles requiring action and initiative. People with an Accommodating learning style prefer to work in teams to complete tasks. They set targets and actively work in the field trying different ways to achieve an objective.

The literature suggests that individuals each have their own preference of learning style which is influenced by various factors, such as basic cognitive structure, educational experiences, and environment. Kolb suggests that regardless of what influences our individual choice of learning styles, our learning styles are a product of two choice decisions; the processing continuum (the manner in which we approach a task) and the perception continuum (our emotional response).

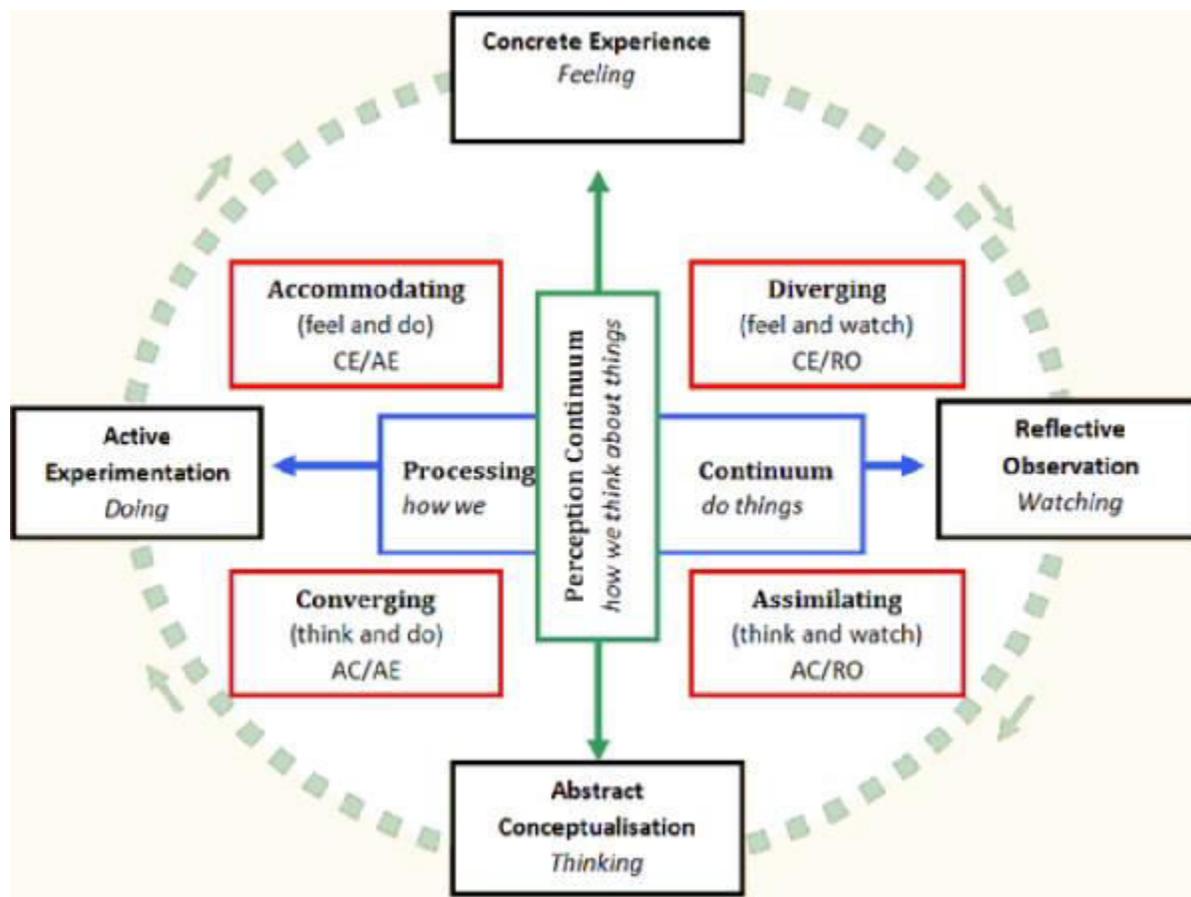


Figure 3: Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle & Learning Styles Inventory

<http://squareone-learning.com/blog/category/gregory-bateson/>

The educational implications to implement Kolb's experiential learning theory and learning styles inventory within the context of higher education is that educators have the opportunity to critically analyze their resources, pedagogy, curriculum and develop more effective learning opportunities for students. By doing so, educators are able to develop activities that will promote learner engagement while fostering individual learning style. Furthermore, this reflective assessment will contribute to the identification of learning styles that are less preferred, which in turn offer the opportunity for the learner to further strengthen these areas.

According to Liu and Olson (2011), a way in which learning styles can be identified and developed into transitional skills is having a professor who encourages the process of reflective thought in students. They suggest that with all experiential learning processes, educational institutions should integrate into the curriculum the use of reflective learning summaries that may be written on a weekly basis. This exercise fosters reflection and the sharing of knowledge and perspectives among peers.

The concept of reflection with the form of written learning summaries is consistent with Moon's (1999) approach and suggests that in fact, written summaries are a thorough analysis of the mental processes that occur during a learner's reflection process. Therefore, in order to analyze reflective thought through experiential learning opportunities, the organization will have an opportunity to evaluate the students' progress, achievements and challenges by requiring formative and summative narrative accounts of their volunteer experience. This requirement will encourage students to become reflective regarding their volunteer experience and the learning gained and personal development achieved that go beyond the integration of course concepts.

Dewey's Reflective Inquiry in Experiential Learning

Reflective inquiry is an essential process for both educators and students. Incorporating reflective inquiry and critical thought as part of an experiential learning program should be a standard that we all strive to meet.

Dewey (1929) suggests that in order for reflective thought to occur there must be a disturbance in the habits and ways of doing things. In his book, *Experience and Nature* (1929), he distinguishes between primary and secondary experience. The difference being that cognitive experience or reflection "be traced back to their origin in primary experience, in all its

heterogeneity and fullness;" (p. 36) and secondary experience; "that the secondary methods and conclusions be brought back to the things of ordinary experience, in all the coarseness and crudity, for verification" (p.36).

John Dewey put forward that individuals should pass through the following five phases of reflective thought and action for effective learning to occur;

John Dewey's five phases of reflective thought and action:

- 1) The indeterminate situation: the habit does not work
- 2) Intellectualization: defining the problem
- 3) Studying the conditions of the situation and formation of a working hypothesis
- 4) Reasoning - in a narrower sense
- 5) Testing the hypothesis by action

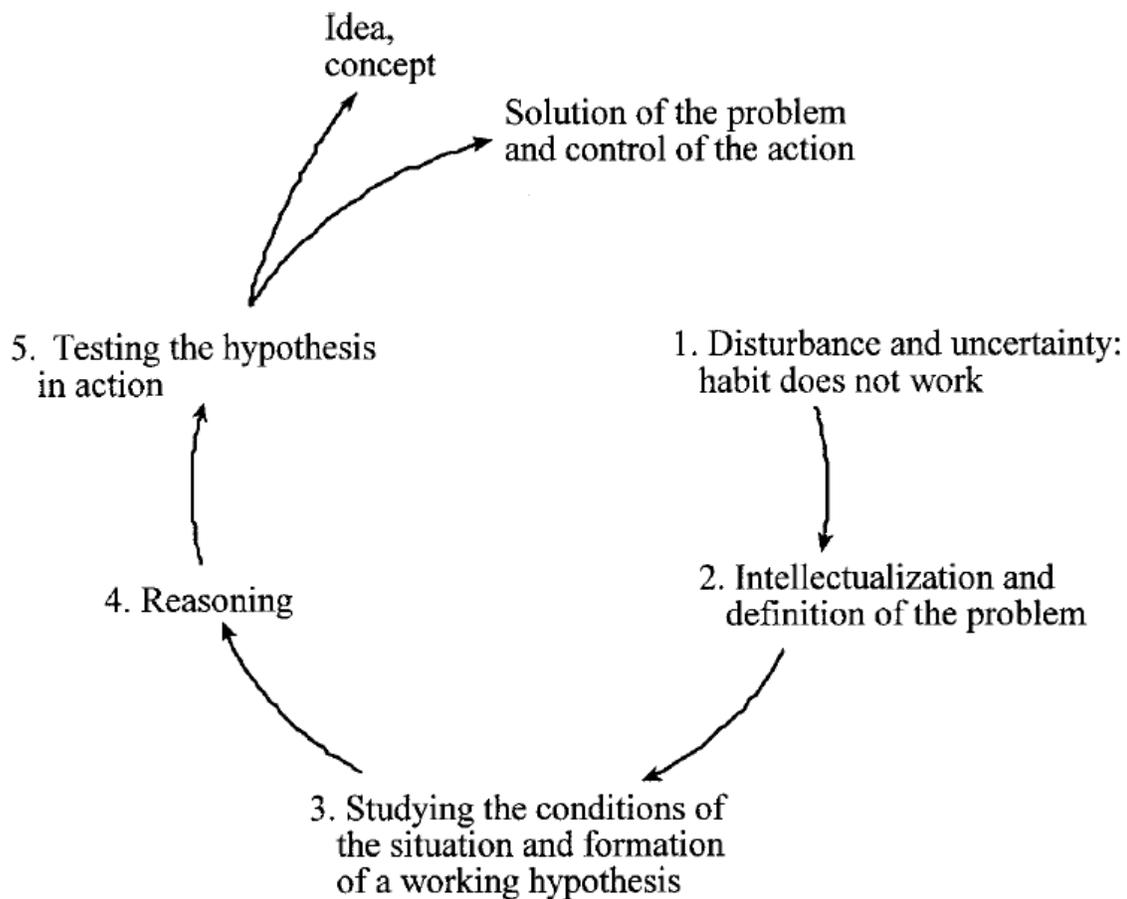


Figure 4: John Dewey's five phases of reflective thought and action

<http://matthewstevens.co.nz/deweys-concept-of-inquiry-and-experimental-learning/>

Dewey's five phases of reflective thought and action offer an opportunity for students to become more invested, engaged and accountable for their own learning, which in turn increases their overall knowledge, development and performance.

Without career related volunteering experiences, a student may simply transition from course to course as in a traditional classroom situation; this approach lacks the opportunity to apply the acquired knowledge in a practical setting. As a result, this may lead to less knowledge retention since some students may be less focused or unmotivated. Collaborative learning experiences and reflective thought and action allow students to engage in direct experiences through career related volunteering that are linked to real world situations or problems.

Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory

Jack Mezirow's research has brought him recognition as the founder of the concept of transformative learning theory. Transformative learning theory is defined as according to Mezirow (1995) as;

A defining condition of being human is that we have to understand the meaning of our experience. For some, any uncritically assimilated explanation by an authority figure will suffice. But in contemporary societies we must learn to make our own interpretations rather than act on the purposes, beliefs, judgements, and feelings of others. Facilitating such understandings is the cardinal goal of adult education. Transformative learning develops autonomous thinking (p. 5).

His research brings awareness to the rise of an era that increasingly depends on technology; work has also become more conceptual and requires an in-depth understanding and manipulation of the material rather than simply acquiring the knowledge, where all citizens would become socially responsible and autonomous thinkers. Furthermore, he suggests that often

from a learner's perspective, adults focus on obtaining the necessary skills or competencies that will allow them to achieve practical short term goals. For example, an individual may want to achieve a job promotion and further develop themselves by gaining competencies that will allow them to achieve this goal.

Educators also play a key role in helping learners achieve success by identifying the learner's objectives and goals while fostering a learning environment that allows for an individual to engage critically about their own assumptions and beliefs, as well as the experiences of others.

It is important to note that simply acquiring knowledge, skills, and competencies as in a classroom setting does not necessarily translate to the understanding of applying these skills, competencies and dispositions to autonomous thinking.

Mezirow states that children typically develop eight foundational learning concepts that are required for independent thinking and are listed as follows (Mezirow, 1997, p. 8);

- 1) recognize cause-effect relationships,
- 2) use informal logic in making analogies and generalizations,
- 3) become aware of and control their own emotions,
- 4) become empathetic,
- 5) use imagination to construct narratives,
- 6) think abstractly. Furthermore, adolescents may continue to develop and acquire the ability to;
- 7) think hypothetically,
- 8) become critically reflective of what they read, see and hear.

As such it is a necessity that adults develop the foundation that is learned in childhood and adolescence in order to assist the adult learner to conceptualized new content while;

- 1) become aware and critical in assessing assumptions-both those of others and these governing ones' own belief, values, judgements, and feelings,

- 2) more aware of and better able to recognize frames of reference and paradigms (collectives frames of references) and to imagine alternatives,
- 3) more responsible and effective at working with others to collectively assess reason, pose and solve problems and arrive at a tentative best judgement regarding contested beliefs (Mezirow, 1997, p. 8).

Critical reflection begins with analysing one's assumptions and beliefs, recognizing frames of reference, and discovering alternate perspectives of problems. An effective discourse around topics creates the opportunity for learners to engage, validate, understand and come to a personal judgment regarding a belief. Since learning is a social process and individuals each possess a unique way of learning and may excel in a variety of subject mastery, competencies or job-related objectives, becoming critically reflective of one's own assumptions is essential in the transformative learning process.

Chapter 3

In this chapter, I will describe the structure of the volunteer program in which the participants in this project took part; I will review the interview profiles, discuss any emerging themes as well as provide links with the theories explored in this thesis.

As previously discussed, reflection in learning is essential for students to fully grasp a concept versus simply repeating verbatim the theory. Fortunately for the participants who were interviewed in this project, the design of the volunteer program in which they participated was structured in such a way that it catered to a variety of learning styles and rates as well as a major focus on reflective thought. The program offered planned structured learning activities, many resources and materials which foster both formal and informal learning as well as reflection. The combination of learning resources and materials with a component of continuous feedback provides an atmosphere where continuous reflection in learning was a key aspect of this program. For instance, in order to cater to different learning styles and promote reflection, novice volunteers were provided with an in-depth training manual that serves as a guide to ensure that a consistent message is being delivered. Additionally, new volunteers are given the opportunity to take notes while they observed an experienced volunteer deliver a workshop. Another training resource was audio-visual, where volunteers could access pre-recorded online training videos that could be watched at any time, at their own pace and as often as they wanted to. This allowed for the volunteer to assimilate information at their own rate and provides an opportunity for reflection to occur.

Another important aspect that created an opportunity for reflection in learning is the continuous feedback that was given through a 360 degree performance evaluation approach. This approach provided volunteers with feedback from peers, students, staff and managers. The aspect

of continuous feedback promoted reflective thought was a key element of the volunteer program. Having continuous feedback opportunities increased the probability that the volunteer would have a period of reflection, the very nature of giving feedback caused the individual to reflect on the items which were being highlighted since the students were participating of their own choice; it followed then that they would be eager to reflect on all improvement items which were being discussed with them. Moreover, the feedback was not exclusively focused on improvement items but also highlighting items which were being done well so that the student would be aware of areas in which they were strong and did not need to spend as much time to develop as in the ones in which further improvement was needed. Therefore, the continuous feedback phase promoted reflection while learning which further contributed to developing a volunteer's understanding of material, theories learned in the classroom, skills, and competencies. I believe that this approach was instrumental in the reflection process and contributed to the success and progress of the individual. The by-product of continuous feedback was the promotion of reflection and learning. This process allowed for the volunteer to grasp the material and facilitate their own workshop in a shorter time frame than it would otherwise be the case.

The student participants in this study were placed in a setting where multiple facets of learning and reflective thought were provided. They had the opportunity to observe multiple advisors deliver workshops, as well as their peers, and had access to pre-recorded training videos they could refer to at any time. In addition to their own notes, the students were provided with extensive training manuals to ensure a consistent and high quality message was being delivered to all volunteers. Also, providing a variety of learning platforms allowed students to observe and reflect on the material presented at their own pace. Having several media sources would again increase the likelihood that students would be able to assimilate the material regardless of

learning velocity and would again be more inclined to have periods for reflection on the information they were assimilating. All of these elements created a learning environment for the participants with structure and a level of flexibility which nicely adjusted to the various learning styles of the students ensuring that their learning experience was positive, supportive and allowed them to develop.

In addition to the academic and professional development that took place, this program held regular meetings with the team and organized regular team bonding activities. This was done in order to create a spirit of camaraderie among the team and to allow volunteers to feel a sense of inclusion with their peers. Furthermore, these activities were undertaken to contribute to the diverse attributes and skill sets being developed such as gaining confidence, learning about other cultures and experiences, and expanding one's network.

The volunteer program that all four participants in the project presented here took part in was designed with multiple platforms of learning with individuals who have diverse and varying levels of expertise. What is pleasantly unique to this particular program is that the organization has found a way to incorporate interactive training with peers from different cultures and backgrounds. A personal observation of mine during the data collection phase was that I noticed through this experience, all the participants interviewed developed a better appreciation and sensitivity for others. This was due to the mosaic of the volunteers' backgrounds, bringing varying perspectives which increased the learners' capacity to synthesize information emanating from diverse points of view as well as variety of ways of doing things.

Interview Profiles

The sample for the study consisted of four graduates from a Bachelor of Commerce program who each studied one of the following disciplines, Human Resource Management, Marketing, Accountancy and Supply Chain Operations Management.

The following data were generated through in-depth interviews with participants who sought out career related volunteer work while studying at university. The data collected examines their motivations, expectations, reflections, learning outcomes and benefits, as well as the overall impact this opportunity had on their employment and career path. The interview process helped to understand a participant's outcomes, the progress they made, interest and benefits of volunteering in career related experiential learning opportunities while studying at university.

The following subsections contain the key points from each of the four in-depth interviews. This distilled view of the responses from the participants lays the foundation for the further in-depth analysis to elaborate on the common themes which are seen as a result. It should be noted that a short form of the questions asked to the participants is used in the tables below. This shortened form is to convey the spirit of the question and is not the question itself. The shortened form of the question is used for conciseness and increased clarity when displaying the data in tabular form. It should also be noted that although not explicitly mentioned in the summarized form of the questions all of these are about the volunteer program in which they participated and their personal experiences.

Participants	Gender	Bachelor of Commerce Graduate - Major	Age	No of years of work experience at time of interview
Participant 1	Male	Major in Accountancy	20's	2 years of work experience that was not career related
Participant 2	Male	Major in Human Resource Management	20's	No prior work experience
Participant 3	Female	Major in Supply Chain Operations Management	20's	Less than 2 years of work experience that was not career related
Participant 4	Female	Major in Marketing	20's	No prior work experience

Participant 1: Bachelor of Commerce, Major in Accountancy

Summarized Question Area	Key Feedback
Target skills to gain.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ expand my network and help broaden my career opportunities upon graduation ▪ meet new people from different disciplines ▪ improve communication and presentation skills ▪ improve public speaking
Areas developed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ interpersonal skills in a business setting ▪ interpersonal skills with a diverse population ▪ value of honesty ▪ learning to listen to others and their perspectives
Culture and learning environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ learning environment was great and the culture is awesome ▪ everyone was there to help support you and succeed ▪ the staff and volunteers are all positive and always willing to help ▪ promoted learning
What were your expectations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ increasing preparedness for landing a job ▪ improve my resume and cover letter ▪ better performance in a real business setting

Were your expectations met?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ yes far more than what I was expecting
Did volunteering contribute to more reflective thought?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ yes
Did the reflective thought carry over to other areas?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ work environment and understanding the organization as a whole ▪ being able to think outside the box and come up with different solution in all aspects of my life ▪ academically I became more focused and improved my grades
What activities triggered reflective thought?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ continuous feedback and performance reviews ▪ delivering presentations
Improvement recommendations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ensure volunteer participants are very motivated
Currently volunteering?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ not currently, would like to in the future

Participant 2: Bachelor of Commerce, Major Human Resource Management

Summarized Question Area	Key Feedback
Target skills to gain.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ improve communication skills ▪ deliver workshops ▪ explore training and development ▪ improve public speaking ▪ sharpen my interviewing skills
Areas developed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ interpersonal skills in business setting ▪ interpersonal skills with diverse population ▪ communication skills ▪ how to tailor messages to different audiences
Culture and learning environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ friendly and positive environment ▪ learning is encouraged
What were your expectations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ improve communication presentation skills ▪ work on a variety of projects ▪ exposed to training and development opportunities
Were your expectations met?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ my expectations were completely met
Did volunteering contribute to more reflective thought?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ yes
Did the reflective thought carry over to other areas?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ yes in all 3 aspects of my life (academically, professionally, and personally)
What activities triggered reflective thought?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ continuous performance feedback and performance 360 degree performance reviews ▪ in class presentations to inform the student body ▪ reflective activities where I could encourage and provide recommendations for better programming
Improvement recommendations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ give more feedback
Currently volunteering?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ not currently, would like to in future

Participant 3: Bachelor of Commerce, Major Supply Chain Operations Management

Summarized Question Area	Key Feedback
Target skills to gain.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ improve communication skills ▪ improve presentation skills ▪ improve public speaking ▪ confidence
Areas developed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ communication, presentation, public speaking and confidence ▪ how to approach an employer ▪ how to network effectively ▪ interviewing skills
Culture and learning environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ lively and positive environment ▪ welcoming ▪ support environment to help you achieve great things
What were your expectations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ expected to learn lessons and teach it to others
Were your expectations met?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ yes all my expectations were met and exceeded
Did volunteering contribute to more reflective thought?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ yes professionally, personally and academically
Did the reflective thought carry over to other areas?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ interview skills ▪ taught me to be a better listener ▪ developed better a critical and reflective thought process
What activities triggered reflective thought?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ continuous performance reviews and peer to peer feedback ▪ group activities designed to promote learning and team work ▪ voicing our opinions as they were valued and taken into consideration
Improvement recommendations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N/A
Currently volunteering?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ currently through monetary donations only but I would like to in the very near future

Participant 4: Bachelor of Commerce, Major Marketing

Summarized Question Area	Key Feedback
Target skills to gain.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ further enhance my communication, public speaking and presentation skills ▪ being a brand ambassador ▪ helping employers at career events
Areas developed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ improve communication, public speaking and presentation skills ▪ improve networking skills ▪ learned how to approach an employer and hold a conversation about their organization, industry and highlight how I would be an added value to the organization
Culture and learning environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ welcoming & supportive ▪ empowering ▪ promoted reflection by challenging my problem solving skills
What were your expectations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ improve interview skills ▪ improve resume skills
Were your expectations met?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ exceeded all expectations
Did volunteering contribute to more reflective thought?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ yes the entire process was very reflective
Did the reflective thought carry over to other areas?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Academically, I applied some concepts from my volunteer work into my academics ▪ taught me to learn more from others, listen and how to convey and ensure that my audience understood the content of a workshop ▪ professionally taught me to listen, reflect and process information in a more efficient manner ▪ personally it taught me commitment and discipline
What activities triggered reflective thought?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ mid-point and end of term performance review ▪ volunteers also discussed their own goals and objectives ▪ regular group meetings a variety of constructive activities that further developed our skill set
Improvement recommendations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ increase program awareness ▪ build a brand to increase emotional involvement
Currently volunteering?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ not currently, would like to in future

Emerging Themes

A first key element which should be examined is to try and understand the reasons the various students decided to seek out a volunteer learning experience in addition to the learning experiences which they have within a classroom setting. There were several areas in which the participants felt that they needed to improve on in order to be more of an asset in their future endeavours. Mainly they were targeting to improve on their communication skills, presentations skills, networking skills, public speaking, and confidence building. We can see that the factors which motivated the participants who chose to volunteer are mainly areas which involve interacting with other individuals or groups in various forms which are more difficult to obtain in the classical classroom setting. These target areas were seen by the participants to be areas in which they needed to improve and felt that they needed to be involved in an additional activity over and above what they were doing in the classical classroom setting. In addition to these more specific areas of improvement it should be noted that this conveys the notion that the participants felt that they needed to supplement their learning by participating in an experiential learning opportunity for both personal and professional development; since they felt, intuitively if not explicitly, that they did not have enough experience in these areas from their academics.

Knowing that the participants in this project had specific improvement areas in mind when joining the program it is important to assess if they felt that they actually improved in those specific areas or any others. Overall, the participants responded that they were able to improve on their target areas and sometimes in areas outside of what they were expecting. For example participant 4 responded to the question of how she felt her experience in experiential learning was influenced in an unexpected way as follow: “I volunteered for a year and a half and I was still learning something every day. It was new experiences from students and questions they had in interviews that made you more knowledgeable. You would hear about your colleagues and if

they went to an event and something funny or interesting happened. You would hear from recruiters themselves and what they looked for in students or past examples they had from students. I was just surprised because I guess at some point I thought it would end and if I did all the workshops that were offered then my knowledge would end there, there would be nothing left for me to learn. That is what surprised me, influenced me in a good way that there was always something new to look for in every single workshop." This single piece of feedback is key; it indicates that the experiential learning opportunity that the participants engaged in allowed them to gain the skills and/or knowledge which they were seeking and felt that they needed. In all the cases the participants indicated that their expectations of the overall experiential learning experience as a volunteer either met or exceeded their expectations. This allows us to see that four participants were able to supplement their academic learning with experiential learning to have a wider skill set and allow them to be more prepared and marketable not only when seeking employment but also during the interview process.

When describing their goals and if they had achieved them, as we have just discussed, we see that overall this was achieved. Was it enough that the opportunity for career related volunteering was simply available to them? A key factor to the success of such a program is the culture and environment. When asked about the culture and environment of the volunteer program only positive adjectives were used, welcoming, supportive, empowering, and comfortable. More specifically participant 1 responded "The learning environment is great, within my six months of volunteering and before I became a coordinator, I learned many different things about the program, how to write a résumé, a cover letter, how to interview, met different types of people, also what interviewers look for in terms of working skills, this is a great opportunity for a student who has no idea what the work industry, or work environment,

outside of school has to offer. They can learn this and be better prepared for what they will be expecting down the line. I believe I learned a lot of great things here and met great people, this experience really got me to where I am today and I believe everybody should go through it." The overall indication from the participants over and above the positive adjectives, were that these conditions promoted learning. While there are very structured aspects of the program and certain goals and objectives are expected to be reached each academic semester, the participants also found that this structure allowed for creative freedom, fostered confidence, increased accountability, ownership and skills acquisition among the volunteers. The culture and learning environment play a significant role in the learning outcomes and success of the participants. With a positive environment and the opportunities to develop skills we can deduce that this is a main contributing factor to the participants achieving their goals.

To this point we have been discussing the experiential learning aspect of the participants career related volunteering experience. In conjunction with this, they were also exposed to the reflective thought process which we will now explore in further detail. When the participants were asked if they believed their volunteering experience contributed to a more reflective thought process the answers were a unanimous yes.

Question:	Did you find that your volunteer experience contributed to a more reflective thought process and if so in what areas, professional, academic, personal? Please explain.
Participant 1	"Yes, I believe since I was so involved with career related activities around students and different activities, when I go to work it's not just about me thinking about the job for today. It's more thinking outside of the box, looking at different departments and see how they are doing, looking at the bigger picture rather than only what I am supposed to be doing on a daily basis because our department, they don't care if you participate with other departments as long as you get your work done. All they care about is that the partner is happy and the work is being done. But for me I see it differently, if you do things for yourself rather than for your employer which I believe should always be the case. The person should go out there and get to meet as many

	<p>people as possible because you never know when the next opportunity might pop up. I believe that my volunteer experience geared me out of thinking in only one way and allowed me think about other things, the big picture- the organization as a whole. This is hard to put into words but when you're talking to different people you have more to talk about, more communication on different topics come up based on your prior experiences."</p>
Participant 2	<p>"Professionally: I am currently working in a family business in Egypt with various generations (more of elderly individuals 50 + years of age). In order to communicate under such a gender gap in an eastern culture, one needs to critically watch for the communication method used within the work environment (i.e. in terms of wording and body language). If I did not readapt my communication methodology, people will not prefer working with me on a personal level."</p> <p>"Academically: I was able to practically apply what I learnt academically. For example, I attended a recruitment course. Throughout the mock interview programme, I was able to practically apply the concepts I learnt throughout my volunteer experience."</p> <p>"Personal: I was able further appreciate and accommodate people's differences and insecurities."</p>
Participant 3	<p>"Yes, I feel that delivering workshops I definitely gained better listening skills, before when I spoke I didn't always process everything but the fact that you're the one delivering the workshop and students are asking questions. You have to process that and come up with a clear answer they will understand."</p> <p>Clarifying Question: Was it only during your volunteering experience or did it help you personally or professionally as well?</p> <p>"Yes I would say it helped during my interviews, listening better and processing my thoughts, I am pretty sure that it came out during my own job interviews."</p>
Participant 4	<p>"Definitely, because it was different from other experiences because it involved the students as well. You would sit down in the workshop and if you would see the student day dreaming or doodling on the paper. Automatically right there in those 10 seconds you would think to yourself ok how am I going to make this more engaging for them or help them better understand or to be able to pay attention. So I guess in that sense it was it was always a reflective process. Not only that you would read the manuals and everyone has a different style of learning, everyone has a different way to communicate the information so you would reflect on if you were the student how would you want this information communicated to you. So you would go back and talk to your peer who will co-deliver the workshop with you or the coordinators or supervisors to reflect as we could how the process could be better and to constantly improve it. Throughout the whole time it was constantly a reflective process and eventually even personally it allowed me to reflect on how I am studying, am I getting the</p>

results that I want and if not clearly I did something wrong so I would go back and fix it. Yes it was reflectively both personally and professionally.”
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The activities which were mentioned as triggering the reflective thought process, the delivery of workshops and the continuous feedback and performance reviews. These aspects are areas which are much more interactive than the traditional classroom setting and much more representative of a real work environment. The reflective thought activities seemed to yield several benefits. One direct benefit highlighted by the participants was that via reflection on either the feedback received while delivering workshops or from the continuous performance evaluations including feedback from students, peers, supervisors as well as program managers allowed them to continuously improve on their tasks. The fact that they were taking the time to go over the work that they had done and evaluate what was done well and areas in need of improvement allowed them to deliver a higher quality of work after each reflective iteration. This continuous quality improvement measure made them more productive and therefore much more of an asset to the volunteer program. The fact that they became aware that they were using reflective thought allowed them to employ it more regularly and with less guidance. The ability to improve autonomously is a key asset in today's workforce. Individuals who can be more autonomous and continue to improve are a great asset to any organization. The obvious value of reflective thought to each of the participants interviewed was such that this skill, in most of the cases, started to be used in other aspects of the participants' life. In most cases, this translated

directly to the academic aspect and the participants mentioned that this was a methodology that they were using in all areas of life, professionally, academically and personally. This effect can have a much larger impact than just on the individual. An individual who is able to reflect and improve in all aspects of life can make greater contributions to the overall community which can affect society in a very positive and meaningful way; which is an extremely valuable by-product over and above becoming more of an asset in the workforce.

All participants mentioned that they intended to volunteer their time in the future. This expressed wish is an important outcome of the positive impact experiential learning coupled with reflective thought had on participants. Having individuals who are willing and able to contribute to their communities via volunteering has a much greater positive impact on our society as a whole.

Direct Links to Data Collection

In the following section I will highlight the links I have identified from the data collected in my research and the theories explored in this paper. The examples collected from the data will be used to support my arguments and identify the participants' gains from participating in career related volunteer programs and further clarify the importance and benefits of promoting reflective thought.

It should be noted however that even with all the proper scaffolding in place for learners, the capacity for effective reflection requires the individual to be aware of the important time commitment, after each experience is completed.

Links to Theories from Literature Review

Participant 1 Links

Experiential Learning. When discussing the topic of experiential learning, Roger's (2002) states that students who complete a university degree expand the range of their cognitive and soft skills, competencies, and discipline. When you couple discipline specific knowledge with the application in a professional work setting, participating students have a more competitive advantage than those who do not have the same experience. These workforce type of experiences translate to a reduced learning curve, smoother integration with the team and organization and a more engaged professional worker when entering into the real workforce.

During my interview with participant 1, he believes that he was able to secure a very competitive position in his field as a direct result of both his academics and his participation in a career related volunteer program. He strongly believes that in addition to the skills he sought to gain through his participation in career related volunteering his overall experience exceeded his expectations and he acquired skills and developed competencies in unexpected areas. During the time participant 1 was volunteering he was given the opportunity to take on a leadership role allowing him to gain leadership skills and further enhance his conceptual thinking abilities. This experience taught him that working in an organization is a collaborative effort and success is achieved when all of its parts work cohesively. One aspect he appreciated about his experience was being able to work with diverse individuals from varying backgrounds, this created a unique experience and promoted reflection by being exposed to diverse points of view, levels of education and experiences. He mentioned that once he had begun his professional career he continued to reflect on his experiences not only to see how he could improve but also how his mandate influenced other departments and his overall integration with the organization. He believes his volunteer experience enhanced his higher order thinking and taught him to not only

look at his daily tasks but broaden his perspective and gain insights to how the various individuals and departments contribute to the overall organization. Furthermore, he believes that his experiential learning experience contributed to his problem solving skills as well as his ability to think outside the box and come up with more creative solutions to various problems.

I would conclude that the university curriculum provided him a foundation of knowledge that is discipline specific while his volunteer experience further promoted a variety of soft and transferable skills that further enhanced his employability upon graduation. I strongly believe that in participant 1's case, the aspect of reflection had a positive and powerful influence on his performance academically as well as career success.

Participant 2 Links

Experiential learning and Kolb. As seen in this thesis, there are a plethora of experiential learning opportunities that are available to students. The challenge is for the student to explore their options and find an opportunity that best suits their needs. For example, when participant 2 was searching for an experiential learning opportunity in order to gain experience in his field of study, human resource management, he sought after a program that would foster his development in various areas of human resource management. As a future human resource professional, he would eventually be in a position that required him to develop, train, evaluate and motivate employees, as such he needed to find an opportunity outside of the classroom where he could develop his skills and apply theory into practice. That being said, training and development is a multilayered skill set that requires a vast number of competencies, such as communication, objectivity, analytical skills as well as being able to facilitate learning to a broad range of individuals in different areas. Additionally, learning how to motivate and develop others by understanding their strength and weakness in relationship to future roles or career progression within an organization is very complex.

Moreover, in my professional opinion, the acquisition of skills related to employee training and development requires experience outside of the classroom as individuals are more complex in nature and do not all fit into one specific textbook case. Therefore, I believe that a student should invest the time to find an experiential learning opportunity that is designed to cater to their needs and interests. A key element to the success of these types of programs is to ensure that there is a mutual benefit and match between student and employer. By promoting experiential learning opportunities and reflective thought, students experience firsthand that the exception is more often the rule when managing human capital; thus highlighting the importance of creating authentic learning experience with reflective thought for students.

When developing programming that includes reflective thought one can utilize Kolb's four stages of his Experiential Learning Model as a basis to promote reflection. A perfect example that illustrates Kolb's Experiential Learning Model and reflective thought from my data collection was when participant 2 decided to focus on an aspect of human resources management, specifically the recruitment process. He learned how to simulate an interview tailored to a student's unique profile and the position they were applying to. Additionally, part of the process would require participant 2 to analyze, reflect and provide constructive feedback for the student's development as well as their learning process. Participant 2 went through an extensive amount of training, was provided feedback and evaluated to ensure he had the necessary skills to simulate practical and constructive interviews for his peers.

For example, the training process of a volunteer would include training with multiple individuals who were knowledgeable and that have designed and delivered various structured learning activities which incorporated both theory and practice. This not only supported the students enrolled in the volunteer program but also progressively increased their knowledge, skills, reflection, confidence and abilities. Once participant 2 was ready to autonomously simulate an interview, he had to develop customized interview questions based on the student's application package. During the interview process participant 2 had to carefully listen and reflect on the answers given to provide concrete and constructive feedback in order to help the student better prepare for their upcoming interview.

Since each student's experiences will vary along with the positions they are applying to, this promotes the four stages of Kolb's Experiential Learning Model and the process a volunteer will experience with each student; having the experience of simulating a customized interview, reviewing the applicants answers and reflecting on them, concluding what areas the applicant can

improve on and preparing and delivering feedback for the participant that is objective, concrete and concise in order to better prepare the interviewee for the interview.

Double loop learning. Taking reflection in learning a step further and exploring the depth and complexity of reflection that is occurring, we can refer to the concept of single and double loop learning identified by Argyris and Schön (1983). Participant 2 discussed how his experiential learning opportunity was beneficial to him in the following three areas; academically, professionally and personally. His experience went beyond the single loop learning process and enhanced his thought process by utilizing the double loop learning methodology. From his personal perspective and by examining underlying assumptions, he was able to analyze his strategy and technique and discover ways to improve and develop a more efficient and effective way of delivering a message or reaching a personal goal. Additionally, a soft and transferable skill he further enhanced was the ability to better appreciate individual differences and to adjust to these differences when possible. In his academics, he was able to exercise the theories he learned in class into real world experiences which bridged the gap from classroom to the workforce. In his current professional mandate he works extensively with all levels of his organization. In particular, he found that his volunteer career related experience better prepared him to develop an understanding of his audience and techniques on how to deliver difficult or uncomfortable messages to individuals regardless of any hierarchies, cultural differences or age gaps.

Ultimately, his experience allowed him to question the *why* and *how* of Double Loop Learning in all aspects of his life which contributed to him becoming a more reflective individual as a whole. This is why I believe that regardless of the different learning styles and rates individuals experience, by creating an opportunity for direct and diverse experiences to be

translated into knowledge; will fosters a learner's capacity for reflective thought and metacognition while increasing the depth and complexity of reflection.

Participant 3 Links

Reflective thought and Dewey's reflective inquiry in experiential learning. Similarly, participant 3 described how the interactive question and answer format of the workshops caused her to reflect on the types of questions which were asked during the workshops. This reflection allowed her to be better prepared with sometimes different responses to questions to be able to convey the same message in different ways in order to ensure as many participants of the workshop would grasp the material being shared.

Additionally, this type of workshop setting was very much in line with Dewey's reflective inquiry theory since it creates a platform for disturbances in habits and ways about doing things as no two workshops will have the exact same question and response format. The students attending the workshop have varying backgrounds, perceptions and knowledge, thus creating a space for learners to reflect, engage, validate, and assimilate the information being taught as well as creating an opportunity for diverse perspectives to be considered.

Participant 4 Links

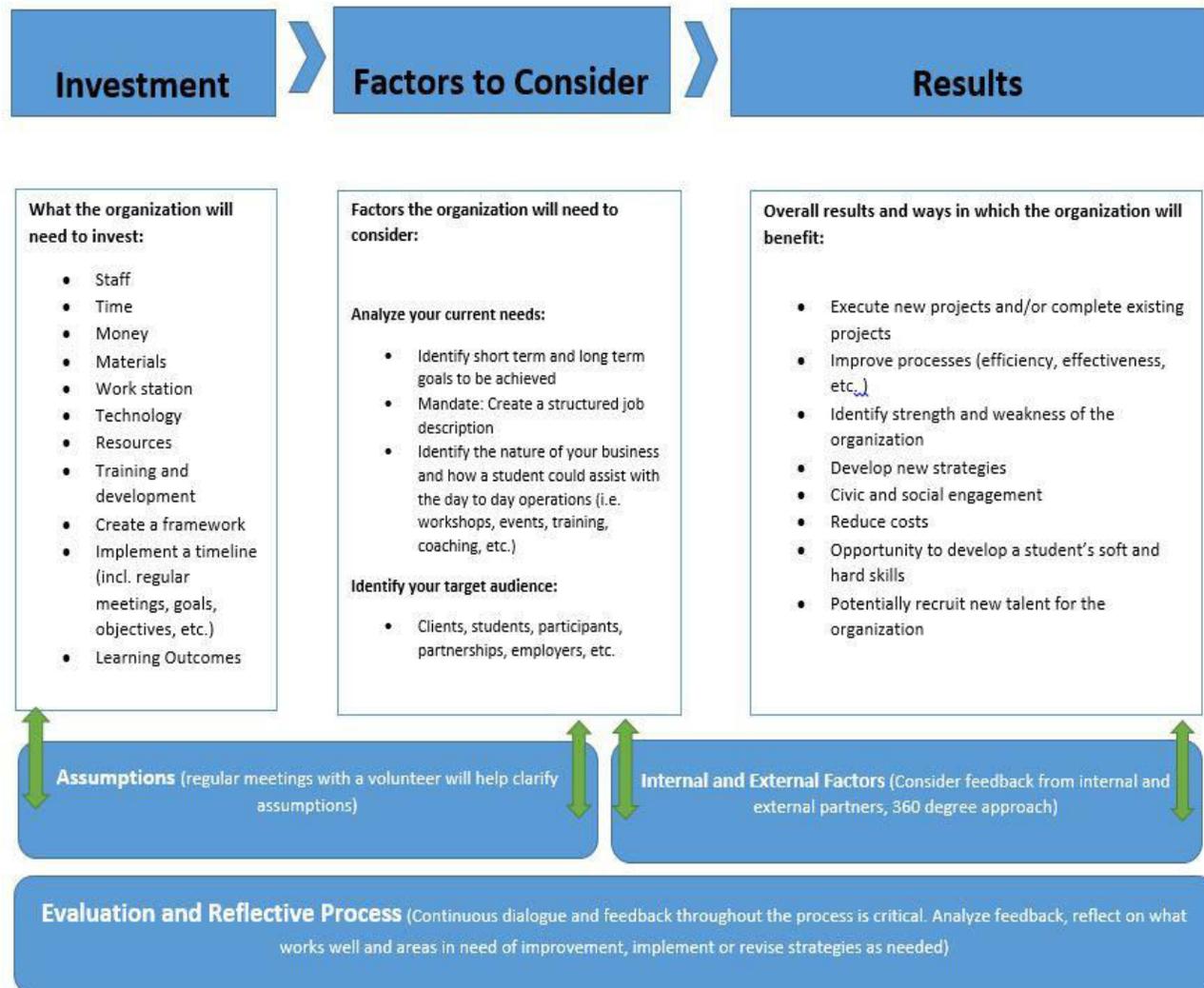
Reflective thought and double loop learning. Participant 4 discussed how her volunteer experience contributed to a constant reflection throughout the delivery of her workshops. She felt it was important to pay attention to the audience and ensure all students understood the content of the workshop. A way in which she engaged and assessed the audience understanding was by asking questions throughout the entire workshop. If she felt any student in the room was not understanding the material, she would find an alternate way to deliver the content. Something as simple as rephrasing the message or providing an example to explain could make all the difference for a student in the room. Participant 4 could have simply delivered the content of the workshop without evaluating the audience. However, rather than simply doing so, she chose to continuously evaluate her audience's understanding and quickly find alternative or more efficient ways of delivering the message ensuring all students walked away with a solid foundation of information. This is a clear example of the participant actively engaging in Kolb's Double Loop Learning process. Adapting to the learning styles of your audience can be challenging and that is why evaluating your audience by asking clarifying questions throughout the workshop was an important indicator for her to assess if she needed to adjust her technique or delivery style. When delivering a workshop, participant 4 constantly reflected on the level if her audience was engaged and their understanding the material. Asking questions to the audience was the technique that allowed her to assess the group's level of understanding. If there were students in the room who were struggling to understand key concepts she would readjust the delivery style to ensure all students walked away with all the necessary information. This demonstrates that this volunteer was not only able to incorporate the reflective thought and Double Loop Learning method into her own experience but she also utilized concepts of Kolb's learning style inventory when delivering a workshop.

All Participants Links

Mezirow's transformational learning theory. Mezirow states that transformational learning theory begins with the analysis of one's own assumptions, beliefs and being able to recognize frames of reference, paradigms and explore alternative perspectives or solutions to a given situation. I believe the format of the volunteer program which all four participants attended, set the stage for the social learning process to occur by fostering multiple opportunities for dialogue, in-depth understanding and manipulation of material being learned in order to go beyond simply acquiring knowledge. Drawing from my interview data, all four participants' responses were consistent with the application of Mezirow's transformational learning theory with respect to their own development within the volunteer program, academically as well as personally. Each volunteer became more aware and critical in their thought process when assessing their own assumptions as well as those of others. This provided a gateway for transformational learning to occur and this process extended beyond their own expectations when joining the program. Volunteers became better equipped and synthesizing information and contextualizing its application to multiple facets of their lives.

It should also be noted in my data collection that there was the description of a link between internal motivation and the social learning process. Therefore, simply providing the opportunity for social learning to occur does not guarantee that the learning will be transformational for each student. As such, based on my research students who engage and seek out experiential learning opportunities have a tendency to excel in their overall development and have had greater success with finding employment upon graduation. Furthermore, for organizations that are considering implementing an experiential learning opportunity, I have created a basic framework below that may be used as guideline for creating experiential learning opportunities that complement both the student as well as the organization.

Factors to consider when developing an experiential learning framework



Chapter 4

Discussion

Increasingly, higher educational institutions are recognizing the benefits of encouraging students to actively participate in volunteer service (Cohen & Kinsey, 1994; Levine, 1994; Markus, Howard, & King 1993; O'Brien, 1993).

It is clear in the literature that volunteering in career related activities provides benefits to students related to civic involvement and cognitive development. However, some faculty may critique the efficacy of volunteer service and how a student's educational and personal development are influenced by volunteering since the empirical evidence is generally limited to a small segment of the student population (Astin, et al., 1999). As a result, further research is required in the collection of longitudinal and multi-institutional data regarding the impact of volunteer service experiences for students (Astin, et al., 2000). I believe that there is a great deal of merit to be gained in the process of being able to objectively critique; as it is fundamental in our future development as individuals as well as society as whole.

As a Human Resources Professional and Career Advisor I have seen firsthand the benefits, skills and competencies developed in students who had sought after and integrated an experiential learning opportunity as part of their university education. In the case of participants in this study, each one had not only developed in areas they were looking to improve on but walked away with what some said to be a life changing experience. Each participant having completed the career related volunteering program, had developed a foundation of knowledge, better understanding what employers were looking for in future graduates and had the opportunity to network and find full time employment prior to them graduating from university.

Overall, experiential learning opportunities in the form of a volunteer program continue to provide the individual and community with a rewarding experience. The advertising and

marketing practices of developing a program could be of little cost to the organization through the form of work of ambassadors as well as faculty engagement.

Keeping in mind and trying to accommodate to the different learning styles of individuals it is important to create different learning tools and resources that continue to stimulate the learner. These include training manuals, training videos, workshop sign-off evaluation forms and interactive exercises that go beyond applying theory into practice and also foster soft and transferable skills such as team work, communication and leadership to name a few. In developing programming in this way, it allows for opportunities that benefit multiple disciplines, promote the acquisition of both soft and hard skills which can also translate into desired competencies that employers look for.

Finally, in preparation for the upcoming semesters, a needs assessment and critical examination of current programming is needed in order to develop more effective strategies for better future programming.

Experiential learning theories within higher education as well as experiential learning opportunities such as, career related volunteering promote reflection among students and reinforce the learning that occurs in the classroom. The combination of these two experiences provides students with real world examples in which they understand the complexity of the workplace.

The purpose of this study was to identify if participating in a career related volunteer program promoted reflective thought in participants as well as the way in which it may have influenced their future career. Understanding how a student will develop skills, abilities, and competencies as well manage challenges is key to establishing frameworks that are conducive to

developing their potential along with clear and concise communication, promoting reflection and reciprocal feedback.

A university's mission statement or values emphasize their educational approach to learning and expected learning outcomes to be gained. There are a variety of approaches that can be used when teaching and by providing the linkages of classroom knowledge and real world practice; in doing so we are creating a better understanding and approach to optimizing a student's overall learning experience.

I recognize that opportunities outside of the classroom may not be available to each and every student who pursues a university degree. An alternative solution to this and way of ensuring that all students have an opportunity to explore an experiential learning type setting would be if educators incorporated more experiential learning opportunities and peer to peer learning activities in the classroom. By doing so, we allow for all students to challenge their own learning, explore ambiguity, enhance and develop learning techniques that are best suited for the individual. Therefore, by establishing a pedagogical approach that offers variety and creativity in terms of lesson plans, we will continue to engage students in way that go far beyond their education.

Peer to peer leaning environments enable a more fluid learning process and students appear to be more engaged and comfortable in asking their peers questions without the concern of being evaluated on the level of their understanding of the material. During my research, all the participants I interviewed mentioned several times that the peer to peer learning component of the volunteer program they participated in played an integral role in their learning process and made a significant difference in their understanding of the concepts being taught. Peer to peer

support and safe learning platforms allow for a more authentic learning and promote reflective thought, the sharing of diverse perspectives and mastery of the material.

Creating experiential learning in organizations will vary depending on the needs, scope, design and objectives of the organization. Unfortunately, not all organizations have the resources to implement an experiential learning opportunity. With that said, there are many options of experiential opportunities still available that an organization may implement, deciding which is feasible and best will be determined by each organization. Therefore, creating an experiential learning experience does not need to be done on a grandiose scale, rather it may be as simple as creating one opportunity for one student. Ultimately, the goal of developing such an opportunity would be to ensure it has a benefit to both the organization as well as the student and have clear and measurable goals and objectives, components of reflection, reciprocal support and feedback in order to optimize the students learning and performance. If an organization wanted to establish such a position, and in order to effectively develop, follow and evaluate the opportunity, the following framework should be integrated into the structure of the program:

1. Create a job description
2. Establish the training schedule and the support system
3. Fix a date and time for weekly meetings
4. Schedule a midpoint and final evaluation
5. Schedule an exit interview

A job description provides an outline and sets the expectation for the participant's mandate during the position. It also allows for the organization to create a position based on organizational need with the aim of gaining additional resources for a set mandate. Each job description should include at the very least, a breakdown of desired qualifications, requirements, scope of the mandate including goals, objectives, projects and timelines. Providing training and establishing the key contacts for support would be highly recommended since this mandate will

likely be for a limited amount of time and this support system can be used to clarify the role, organizational strategies, systems used in the organization as well as policies and procedures. Furthermore, fixing a weekly meeting will contribute to the informal exchange of ideas, opportunity to ask clarifying questions, provide feedback, promote reflection, and assess the current mandate targets and timelines. If an organization sets their midpoint and final evaluations at the beginning of the mandate students will be better equipped to address any concerns, issues, challenges. More specifically, I believe using a 360 degree feedback approach takes into consideration feedback from a variety of individuals including, peers, supervisors or managers; this will provide a holistic approach and additional insight that supervisors may have not been aware of.

Should it be necessary, any additional guidance or resources can be reallocated in order to further support the student. Finally, an exit interview provide a platform for the student to critically analyze, offer a transfer of knowledge and provide their recommendations for the organization on a variety of areas.

Suggestions for Improved Programming

Merely providing career related volunteer opportunities outside the classroom does not translate to beneficial outcomes for both the student and employer. During my interviews the feedback I received from participant 1 was that the motivation factor of a student to participate in experiential learning was directly correlated to their success and acquisition of skills. Similarly, this same rationale would be applicable to benefits gained by the employer.

Therefore, in order to improve the quality of experiential learning programs we must understand how pedagogy connects with career paths, industries and employer expectations. By integrating career related volunteering as part of the curriculum we can complement education

with practical experience. A key aspect for continuous program improvement would be to integrate regular critical reflection when analyzing strategies, industries, curriculum, and future directions. It is essential to critically reflect on all aspects of a volunteer program in order to identify common and best practices, identify areas of strength and in need of improvement. This critical analysis extends its reach beyond student and employer and promotes more reflective and engaged citizens.

Further Research Directions

The project on which this thesis is based was designed to explore reflective thought and the practical gains students acquired when participating in career related volunteer opportunities during their university degree program. Through in-depth interviews, I was able to hear the interviewees' voices and understand the benefits and challenges that each volunteer faced throughout their experience.

The four participants who volunteered to collaborate in this project stated that the career-related volunteer program in which they took part, provided a platform for them to develop in areas they recognized were in need of improvement and their experience surpassed their overall expectations. This experiential learning opportunity had a profound and positive impact for each of the four participants, professionally, personally and academically. Programs such as the one in which they participated allow students to develop a better understanding of concepts, engage in a more authentic way in their studies and chosen specialization. Furthermore their engagement in these programs helps the them to apply a more reflective thought process during the period of their academic studies and as they start their employment in the work force. This feedback demonstrates that students need more experiential learning

opportunities as part of their academic studies, in order to apply the theories learned in a classroom to real world work situations and contexts.

The exploratory study presented in this thesis was designed to listen to the voices and experiences of four participants from one particular program. An area of further research would be to explore the benefits of experiential learning opportunities on a larger scale and the overall impact it may have on a student's education as well as career opportunities. If more universities had the capacity to include added experiential learning opportunities on a larger scale as an integral part of the curriculum more students would benefit.

It would therefore be interesting to integrate long term research and data collection in the planning of similar programs as well as tracking the career outcomes of students who engage in these programs. The collected data would contribute to gaining insights on current learning outcomes and practical gains. Furthermore, we would be able to benchmark the ways in which a student's academic studies curriculum, combined with similar programs enhanced by lessons learned from research, may, indeed, increase their employability when entering the workforce and provide strategies to integrate in their plans for career advancement.

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APPENDIX A: Letter of Introduction

July 25th 2015

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Mary Catherine Wargachuk and I am a Master of Arts (Educational Studies) participant in the Department of Education, at Concordia University, Montreal, Québec.

I am conducting a study based on interviews in order to collect data for my thesis which is entitled: Reflective Thought and Practice Gains Through Career-Related Volunteering Opportunities During University Studies: An Exploratory study.

You are an ideal participant for participating in this study since you have participated in career related volunteer work while attending higher education.

Your experiences and feedback will help me with my research in analyzing the benefits of reflective thought through the use of experiential learning opportunities such as career related volunteer work. This information will be kept confidential and in no way will be associated with you. All information will be protected for confidentiality by the use of pseudonyms.

I am reaching out to you by this letter and preliminary questionnaire to check on your availability to participate in this study. Please return this Letter of Introduction and preliminary questionnaire as an indication of your willingness to participate via my email address below. The interview will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes of your time. Please bring the signed copy of your consent form to the interview with you.

Kindly note that you may withdraw from the process at any time by sending an email to: myself at wargachuk.mary@gmail.com or my Advisor Arpi Hamalian at arpi@education.concordia.ca.

Thank you in advance!

Mary Catherine Wargachuk

Participant Name: _____

Participant E-Mail: _____

Participant

Phone Number: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B: Preliminary Questionnaire

Master of Arts Participant: Mary Catherine Wargachuk

Thesis Topic: Reflective Thought and Practice Gains Through Career-Related Volunteering Opportunities During University Studies: An exploratory Study.

Instructions: Please complete all the fields below with as much detail as possible.

Name of Participant:

Name of University:

Name of Program of Study (including Major and/or Minor):

Year of Graduation:

Was it easy for you to find career related volunteer work? How?

Did you have any prior career related experience?

What was your initial motivation for pursuing career related volunteer work?

How many hours per week did you volunteer and for how long?

Was your volunteer work directly related to your field of study and / or career path?

Participant Name: _____

Participant E-Mail: _____

Participant Phone Number: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C: Letter of Consent

This is to state that I _____ agree to participate in the research project entitled Reflective Thought and Practice Gains Through Career-Related Volunteering Opportunities During University Studies: An exploratory study conducted by Mary Catherine Wargachuk, a participant in the Master of Arts (Educational Studies) program in the Department of Education Concordia University, Montréal, Québec.

The purpose of this research project is to gain a better understanding of student perspectives on the benefits of promoting reflective thought career related volunteer work. Through the use of interviews, the researcher will compile and analyze narratives of the participants regarding their career related volunteer experience. Narratives should be understood to be the telling in the participant's own words about their expectation of volunteering, whether their experience contributed to their academics in any way, and does the participant believe that their volunteer experience contributed to their future professional success. All information will be protected for confidentiality by the use of pseudonyms.

In terms of participation, it would be expected that the participant complete and sign the following documents: the letter of introduction, the preliminary questionnaires as well as the consent form. Subsequently, there will be an interview that will be transcribed and shared with the interviewee for accuracy and the data thus generated will be used in Mary Catherine Wargachuk's M.A. thesis.

I understand how confidentiality will be maintained during this exploratory study.

I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time from the study without any penalty or prejudice by contacting the researcher at wargachuk.mary@gmail.com or her Advisor Arpi Hamalian at ahamalian@education.concordia.ca.

I understand the purpose of this study and am aware of the risks, benefits and inconveniences that this exploratory study entails.

I understand the anticipated uses of data, especially with respect to publication, communication, dissemination of results and that all participants will remain anonymous.

I have read the above and I understand all of the above conditions. I freely consent and voluntarily agree to participate in this exploratory study.

Name (please print): _____

E-mail: _____

Phone Number: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

APPENDIX D: Interview Questions

Thesis Topic: Reflective Thought and Practice Gains Through Career-Related Volunteering Opportunities During University Studies: An exploratory study.

1. What career related skills were you looking to gain as a result of your volunteering?
2. In what areas did you develop as a result of your volunteer experience?
3. What is your greatest strength and how were you able to apply this in the context of your volunteer work?
4. Describe the culture and learning environment of where you volunteered?
5. What did you like the most about your career related volunteer experience?
6. What did you like the least about your experience?
7. What were your expectations when you signed up to volunteer? Where your expectations met? Please explain?
8. Were you also involved in any other activities on or off campus during your volunteer experience (i.e. working, extra-curricular activities, etc.)? Have those experiences also contributed to your development? Please explain.
9. What types of activities, tasks or projects did you work on during your volunteer experience?
10. Did you find that your volunteer experience contributed to a more reflective thought process and if so in what areas, professional, academic, personal? Please explain.
11. Please explain how your volunteer experience was beneficial to you?
12. During your volunteer experience, were there any areas that were influenced in an unexpected way (positive or negative)? Please explain.
13. What types of reflective thought activities did the organization ask you to participate in (i.e. reflective journals, performance evaluations, final presentations, suggestions and/or recommendations, etc.)?
14. In order to improve the volunteer experience for future students, what recommendations would you suggest?
15. Are you currently volunteering outside of your career related volunteer work or giving back to the community in any way? Have you given back to your university as an alumnus, how? Or do you plan to in the future? In what way?