**S Y L L A B U S  S E L E C T I O N**

Innovative Learning Activity

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**Experiential Learning Using Kolb’s Cycle of Learning**

Experiential learning is an important consideration in RN-to-BSN education. Professional and personal experiences influence how students perceive and practice nursing. Incorporating a learning activity to explore a life-learning occurrence allows students to move from a significant life-learning experience to application of lessons learned in the practice setting. Kolb’s experiential learning model provides a framework for this process (Kenyon, 2000). The model includes a four-phase cycle of learning, consisting of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

**Activity Description**

RN-to-BSN students enrolled in the nursing education course developed a life-learning paper, which documented experiential learning using Kolb’s model (Kenyon, 2000). Students began with readings in Bastable (2003). Then, they completed an online learning style inventory to determine their learning method preference and learning style (Kolb, 2005). The learning style inventory provided information regarding Kolb’s learning theory and how it related to the students’ learning style. The professor discussed the requirements regarding the structure of the paper in class, after which the students completed worksheets that summarized each component of the paper. The professor reviewed the worksheets and provided feedback. The students used the feedback to write the paper.

The paper was three to five pages in length and consisted of an introduction; the body of the paper, including a discussion of Kolb’s four cycles; and a summary. The students wrote the concrete experience, reflection observation, and active experimentation in the first person. The abstract conceptualization was written in the third person.

The introduction established the topic of the paper, the nature of involvement, and a thesis statement based on the lesson learned. The concrete experience told the story of the students’ experiences. They described what happened on a particular day, the setting, and the time, giving detail to make the story come alive to the reader. It included what the individual saw and felt at the time of the incident. Reflective observation was an internal reflection after the incident. It recorded thoughts, feelings, and observations that revealed why the experience was meaningful. Abstract conceptualization expounded on what the individual learned. The students identified what they learned in one sentence. Then, the concept was defined and developed through the exploration of benefits or problems. They could use resources to support, refute, augment, or add to the narrative. Active experimentation applied the lesson learned to the professional setting. The students wrote about another experience, describing how they applied the abstract concept. The paper ended with a summary of the main points.

**Outcomes**

Life-learning paper topics usually involved an emotional experience that had personal and professional meaning for students. Examples included caring for a neonate with a deformity, teenage pregnancy education, understanding Alzheimer’s patients labeled as difficult, alleviating new nurse anxiety, and responding to hostility toward traveling nurses. Writing about the experience using the four cycles disclosed deeper understanding of the lesson learned. It allowed development of knowledge so it could be used to improve nursing practice. It also forced the students to explore learning methods they did not prefer. Individual learners showed preferences to different areas within the cycle. Students who were comfortable writing about the concrete experience may have encountered difficulty with the reflective observation or the abstract conceptualization. The worksheet allowed the professor to catch these difficulties and offer feedback before the student wrote the paper. The life-learning paper is an excellent exercise in applying learning theory to an experience that has a direct effect on the way the individual practices nursing.

**References**


Martha Puckett Hartley, MSN, RN, CNE
Hartley@lmc.edu
Lees-McRae College
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