STUDY OF INTERNS PERCEPTION OF AND SATISFACTION WITH EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

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The purpose of this study is to explore and analyze the factors that influence interns’ perceptions of and satisfaction with experiential learning during the internship process.
Although internships are used extensively in higher education there is a gap in the literature connecting their use to student learning.

Because of this disconnect there is controversy in higher education over the use of internships.
The theoretical basis for experiential learning and the related concepts of constructivist learning theory, reflection, and mentoring are necessary to understand the internship process.
Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory

- **Concrete Experience (CE)**: Full & unbiased involvement in learning experience
- **Reflective Observation (RO)**: Contemplation of one’s experience from various perspectives
- **Abstract Conceptualization (AC)**: Idea formulation and integration
- **Active Experimentation (AE)**: Incorporation of new ideas into action

The cycle represents the process of learning and adaptation.
Constructivist Learning Theory

- It is important for the learner or novice to participate in whole and authentic activities to internalize the need for further development and the identification of new challenges which consequently move the zone of proximal development (Doolittle, 1995).

- This zone of proximal development represents the “learning edge” which continually shifts as internalization takes place and the novice masters tasks and new challenges arise (Bredo, 1997; Illeris, 2007; Nye, 2007).
Mentoring is a holistic and fluid concept with two main aspects, first providing professional and organizational help in understanding the professional culture and political environment, and second a psychosocial support aspect that includes scaffolding and role modeling (Stead, 2005).

Mentors are very important from Vygotsky’s point of view as they are the people who make the zone of proximal development possible by helping the novice learn and achieve more than is possible by themselves (Bredo, 1997; Nye, 2007).
The Logic of Studying Interns’ Perceptions

- The implications of the conclusions made by Young, Caudill, and Murphy (2008) and Frick, Chadha, Watson, Wang, and Green (2009) suggest that the study of interns' perception of experiential learning to be a creditable indicator of their actual learning.
Methodology

- Students at a large Midwestern Public University were asked questions about their undergraduate internship and their perceptions of various elements which might influence such perceptions.

- Of the 132 students meeting the criteria asked to participate in this research study 116 responded by completing the survey, representing an 88% response rate.

- On average students reported relatively high levels of overall internship satisfaction ($\mu = 5.27; \text{SD 1.09}$).

- The survey respondents were primarily of traditional aged college students, 91% between the ages of 18 to 25, having approximately the same diversity as the university overall.
The research instrument (APPENDIX B) is a modified version of a questionnaire developed by Dr. Allen Coetzer and described in his 2007 article “Employee Perceptions of Their Workplaces as Learning Environments.” The original questionnaire developed by Coetzer (2007) was used to capture employee perceptions of workplace learning.
This dissertation research surveyed students at a large Midwestern Public University who were currently in, or had participated in, an undergraduate internship.

This large Midwestern Public University is a comprehensive research and teaching institution.
Data Collection

The modified survey asked college students who were currently participating in or had participated in an undergraduate internship experience a series of questions related to their perceptions of experiential learning during the internship process and their overall internship satisfaction.
Explanation of Overall Satisfaction with Internships

- Experiential Learning: 60.75%
- Learning Opportunities: 20.10%
- Further Career Goals: 14.90%
- Other: 4.26%
Satisfaction with Experiential Learning

- 72.20%
- 27.80%

- HAVING A MENTOR
- OTHER
Interns’ overall internship satisfaction, their satisfaction with experiential learning, and their perception of learning opportunities all increased as the number of hours per week increased.

Based on ANOVA testing of the relationship between the number of hours per week an intern works and each of the variables (above) were found statically significant.
Perceptions of Students with Other Employment During Internship

Overall Satisfaction
- With Other Employment: 4.76
- Without Other Employment: 5.44

Learning Opportunities
- With Other Employment: 4.82
- Without Other Employment: 5.12

Legend:
- Blue: With Other Employment
- Red: Without Other Employment
Perceptions of Students Considering Full Time Employment

- Overall Satisfaction: 5.51
- Experiential Learning Satisfaction: 5.028
- Perception of Learning Opportunities: 5.16

Bar chart showing:
- Would Consider F-T Employment
- Would Not Consider F-T Employment
Conclusions and Implications

- Provides empirical evidence linking learning theory to internships
  - Kolb’s Experiential Learning Model
  - Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (Mentors)

- Suggests a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between intern and internship

- Provides evidence of the importance of mentors in experiential learning during internships
Practical Considerations for AU

Assuming AU is consistent with the study’s results.

In order for AU internships to have to best learning outcomes:

- Structure interns to work 30 hours per week
- Do not have employment other that the internship
- Facilitate a Mentor relationship during the internship
THE END