Project-Based Learning in Sport Management: A Student-Centered Approach

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Improving our teaching and student learning inevitably means change in the pedagogic and curricula design (Young & Legister, 2018, p. 80). To move away from the passive learning environment, which relies on lecture as the main teaching method and memorization as the dominant learning process, sport management educators should incorporate teaching methods that engage students in their learning. Project-based learning has been defined as “a teaching method where teachers guide students through a problem-solving process which includes identifying a problem, developing a plan, testing the plan against reality, and reflecting on the plan while in the process of designing and completing a project” (Wurdinger, Haar, Hugg, & Benzon, 2007, p. 151).

Constructing a PBL assignment within the sport management curriculum is a more intensive pedagogical process that requires time to organize and implement but allows for deeper learning which can inspire and motivate students. Research has suggested that PBL is effective with students because it taps into their interests and allows them to create projects that result in meaningful learning experiences (Wurdinger, 2018). This presentation explores the integrated process of PBL through a service learning project within a Sport Information course. The purpose of this PBL assignment was to become familiar with the process of a public relations campaign. The PBL assignment required groups to partner with local non-profit organizations to better assist them with their public relations needs. Groups worked together to research, plan, execute, and evaluate their public relations campaign.

As Gallagher (1993) and Thomas (2000) suggested, PBL requires students to activate higher order thinking skills to reach a conclusion on their own about a given concept. Additionally, students are asked to investigate and resolve a problem by developing questions, gathering research, receiving teacher scaffolding, and participating in self-evaluation (English & Kitsantas, 2013; Torp & Sage, 1998). The PR assignment incorporated PBL methodology by asking students to investigate and resolve a problem by developing questions (e.g., many local non-profit organizations do not have resources to create their own PR program), gather research (e.g., each group identified a local non-profit to work with by researching and evaluating the effectiveness of their current PR program through the development of surveys, observations, and interviews), receiving teacher scaffolding (e.g., the process has no predetermined outcome, students completed the process with the teacher’s guidance and encouragement), and participating in self-evaluation (e.g., each group was required to evaluate the effectiveness of their PR program though their goals and objectives).

The goal of this presentation is to provide a pedagogical process within sport management curriculum that provides faculty with the skills and knowledge needed to incorporate Project Based Learning within their courses. Ultimately, by encouraging sport management faculty to learn the theory and practice behind PBL, it can translate to students by broadening their conceptual understanding and lead to active participants in the learning process. The rise in popularity of PBL is an opportunity for sport management faculty to become educational leaders and can be a platform to showcase sport management faculty’s pedagogical expertise.