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Research and Teaching – correlated or co-related?

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Abstract Template

Using Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle to Develop a Structured Approach for Research Methods: An Example from Business

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Theme: Developing student research skills

Type of contribution: Presentation

Abstract:

Contribution – the purpose of this study is to show how David Kolb's theory of experiential learning and development can be used to form the basis for a structured Model to assist business school students to develop research proposals and projects and to help them understand the key features of published research. The Model also uses components from Gowin's V mapping strategy and so brings together two Models that have previously been considered separate and distinct.

Design/methodology/approach – The Model was used in a research methods module with over 200 second-year business school undergraduate students in the UK. These students provided both qualitative and quantitative feedback of their experiences of using the Model.

Findings – The paper finds that it was usually possible to identify a student's main level of learning development with most students showing learning development from more than one category. Students generally found the Model useful in helping them prepare and plan their research proposal and helping them to think about and make the research process understandable. Students particularly liked components that focused on the 'experiencing and reflection' stages of Kolb's learning cycle. The Model helped students understand the nature of knowledge, reflect upon proposal requirements, the purpose of undertaking research, theoretical framework and empirical aspects of the research process. The more the Model was used the more useful it was found to be. On the negative side, some students disliked some components, particularly those associated with the abstract conceptualisation stage, found the Model difficult use and complex to apply with some components difficult to differentiate. However, a few students found the Model too simplistic, too restrictive, and doubted its suitability for all subject areas. Related to this were complaints regarding the time it took to use the Model in preparing a research proposal, its repetitive nature, the need to utilise all components, its helpfulness in making research decisions and its association with learning.

Discussion/research limitations/implications – In this particular instance, only undergraduate business school students were involved. However the potential applications of the Model are wide with respect to both degree level and subject area.