

Utah Valley University

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Winter February 26, 2011

Teaching HRD Theory with Toys: Creative Tools for Educators and Trainers

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/susan_madsen/179/

TEACHING LEADERSHIP WITH TOYS: CREATIVE TOOLS FOR EDUCATORS AND TRAINERS

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Program Description

The purpose of this experiential workshop is to offer a variety of innovative tools (toys) that both academics and practitioners can use with adult learners to help them further develop leadership knowledge, competencies, and skills through engaged learning activities. Each tool presented will be taught, practiced, and discussed.

Abstract

Developing leadership is all about learning, and it seems that there are ongoing efforts to understand the most effective methods and techniques to assist individuals in learning to become leaders. The purpose of this experiential workshop is to offer a variety of innovative tools (toys) that both academics and practitioners can use with adult learners in various settings to help them further develop leadership knowledge, competencies, and skills through engaged learning activities. Effective leadership development specialists and educators are continually searching for new and innovative ways to teach leadership concepts and competences. Many use cases, activities, and exercises to assist students and participants by enhancing their understanding through experiential learning experiences. One such experiential learning strategy is to teach leadership with toys.

The theoretical framework of this workshop is based on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model which "draws on an all-star set of interdisciplinary influences: John Dewey from education philosophy, Jean Piaget from developmental psychology, and Kurt Lewin from social psychology" (Petkus, 2000, p. 64). Kolb's model of experiential learning "represents one of the most widely accepted approaches to understanding action-based individual learning" (Kolenko, Porter, Wheatley, & Colby, 1996, p. 135). Kolb (1984) defined learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38). Experiential learning has been defined as "an interactive phenomenon, involving both the learner and his or her external environment" (Kenworthy-U'Ren, 2000, p. 59) and "learning that takes place through reflection on experience" (Root & Throme, 2001, p. 325). Carver (1997) explained that "Experiential education... makes conscious application of students' experience by integrating these experiences into the curriculum. Experience is comprised of sensory awareness (e.g., touch, smell, hearing, sight, taste), emotions (e.g., pleasure, excitement, anxiety, fear, hurt, empathy, attachment), physical conditions (e.g., temperature, strength, energy level), and cognition (e.g., constructing knowledge, establishing beliefs, and solving problems)" (p. 144).

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model consists of four stages: concrete experience, observation and reflections, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Some people appear to learn best when a specific stage or type of learning is utilized. It is suggested, however, that learning experiences integrating all of the stages result in the most effective and long-term type of learning. *Abstract*

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conceptualization includes the learning of concepts through most passive methods (e.g., lecture, reading, and memorization) and is referred to as the “theorist role.” *Concrete experiences* (pragmatist role) include applying the concepts and knowledge in a real world and active learning situation. *Reflective observations* (reflector role) occur best during and after the concepts are taught and real world experiences have been encountered. This stage involves thinking and discussing the links between the concepts and knowledge learned and their application into the real world. Finally, *active experimentation* (activist role) is used to “discover cause-and-effect relationships or to determine which of many solutions proves viable” (Godfrey, 1999, p. 365).

Although some of the tools presented in this workshop are not designed to move a participant through the full experiential learning stages as outlined by Kolb, they can help students move into some of the stages, which can supplement a fully designed experiential program. Toys can provide students with hands on activities that help them move concepts into engaging exercises and dialogue. These experiences can provide a rich array of reflective opportunities if educators and trainers become skilled facilitators. Any effective experiential learning activity includes an understanding and practice of course and program concepts, a continuous and thorough reflective component, and opportunities for students to actively experiment with the concepts.

In this workshop, participants will learn about the “Teaching Leadership with Toys” tools, practice using them, and then discuss their experiences with others in small groups. Here is an outline of our proposed session:

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Session overview
 - a. What are the session objectives?
 - b. What is experiential learning and reflection? (flip chart activity)
 - c. Why do these types of activities? (includes introduction of theoretical framework already described)
3. Toy tools (each will have a short explanation, opportunity to practice the tool, and duo or trio sharing exercise, and implications to practice discussion):
 - a. Tinker Toys: Leadership competency activity (teamwork, leadership, followership, styles, listening, conflict resolution, planning, results focused, ethics)
 - b. Play Dough: Famous leaders analysis activity (leadership qualities, styles, strengths, weaknesses)
 - c. Lego Activity: Leadership competency activity (communication, listening, speaking clearly)
 - d. Ball of String: Leadership competency activity (reflection, listening, questioning, communicating)
 - e. Various Interconnected Toys: Leadership theory toy models (e.g., systems theory, situational leadership theory)
 - f. Other toy ideas: Participants share their own ideas
4. Debrief: overall implications to practice in leadership education and leadership development programs
5. Summary, next steps

We argue that it is through these leadership development exercises (and others) that individuals can develop key leadership skills in a fun, educational and interactive way. This workshop can assist educators and practitioners in being aware of and learning about various creative techniques available to help them teach these skills. They can use these activities not only in their classrooms, but also utilize them with non-profit and for-profit leadership groups, teams, and boards, as well.

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Leadership Theories—Notes:

Authentic Leadership: _____

Contingency Theory: _____

Culture and Leadership: _____

Ethics and Leadership: _____

Leader-Member Exchange Theory: _____

Path-Goal Theory: _____

Psychodynamic Approach: _____

Situational Approach: _____

Skills Approach: _____

Style Approach: _____

Team Leadership: _____

Trait Approach: _____

Transformational Leadership: _____

