



Service-Learning with Special Olympics: Qualitative Study

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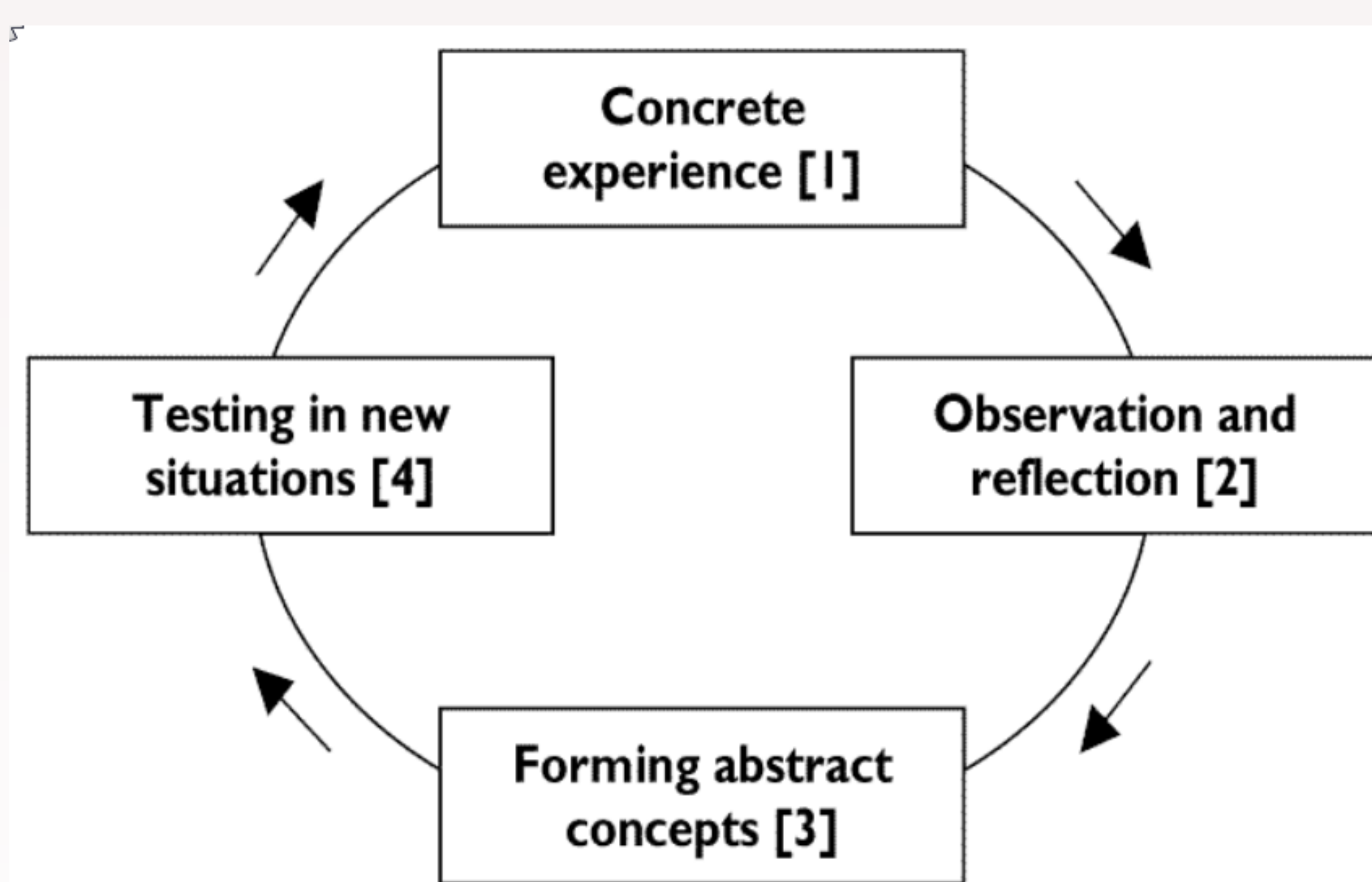
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Theoretical Framework:

David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) was used as a theoretical scaffolding to guide this study. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory consists of four dimensions: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. These four dimensions are essential for the learner to gain knowledge, and ultimately, to learn from experience. Service-learning's experiential nature provides a real-world situation in which students can experience, reflect on, conceptualize, and implement their talents. In addition, students might gain great satisfaction from helping the community (Kolb, 1984).

Healy and Jenkins claim that the Experiential Learning Theory offers a way to structure and sequence the curriculum to improve student's learning (2008). Kolb's theory presents a cyclical model of learning that consists of four stages; concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.



(Harkavay, 1996) argues that in order for service-learning, as an experiential educational program, to be effective, its primary goal should be "the long-term well-being of people in the community, followed by the students' need for civic, moral, and intellectual development" (p.6).

"Service-learning is defined as a 'course-based, credit bearing educational experience in which students a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs, and b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility'"(Bringle & Hatcher, 2009, p.38).



Research Design "My Story":

- 1) Students were required to coach at least five practices.
- 2) Students kept journal logs after each practice.
- 3) Students participated in a group discussion mid-way through the project.
- 4) Students wrote a reflection paper on their experience once their volunteering was completed.
- 5) I conducted an individual interview with each student to discuss their experience.
- 6) I concluded with analysis of data through coding and a follow-up discussion with the class instructor.

Emerging Themes:

'Out of comfort zone'

"I was very excited to try something new and out of my comfort zone. Little did I know how big of an impact this would have on me! It has changed my outlook on life and shown me the little things people take for granted." (McKinzie)

'Working with different skill levels'

"Putting what we talked about in class, to the Special Olympic athletes, even if it isn't at the same athletic level, it still has to do with the same stuff we talk about. In class, we will talk about different types of offensive plays and we are able to modify it to fit the skill level of the Special Olympic athletes." (Sam)

'Analysis of your feelings as a coach'

"Sunday practices showed me how truly different each individual in a room can be and that not everyone learns in the same way or at the same pace. For example there were athletes who learned more by playing and some more by doing drills that required constant direction. I believe these are things that I will take with me when my coaching seasons start." (Kailee)

'Communication'

"Through this experience, I have an advantage of knowing how to teach a wide variety of people and their abilities. I learned patience and different ways to teach drills." (Steph)

'Analysis of your impact as a coach'

"I have learned so much from this experience and I would definitely recommend volunteering with Special Olympics to anyone! Once again, I am so thankful for this opportunity and for the people who have helped with this program. Each of the athletes has left an impact on me that has changed my outlook on life." (McKinzie)

