

# DIABETES, GRAND RAPIDS RESTAURANTS AND HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM RESEARCH?

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## Introduction and Background

This work-in-progress paper outlines the instructional approach that is being used with a new Hospitality and Tourism Research course introduced into the Grand Valley State University hospitality and tourism management curriculum (Winter 2012). The course, which is at the Junior-Senior level, is intended to provide students with; an understanding of the relationship between general theory and applied research; the purposes and applications, procedures, constraints and management of applied research; and to help students compare and contrast quantitative and qualitative research. Twenty-two students have registered for the course. In the sections of this paper that follow a conceptual framework for instruction; the methods used in instruction; and how transformational learning will be assessed are outlined.

## Conceptual Framework for Instruction

Miller and Sellar (1990) provide a useful framework for grouping educational theories related to student focused learning. They combined them into: 1) the Transmission perspective; 2) the Transaction perspective; and 3) the Transformation perspective.

The transmission perspective, as the name suggests, is focused on the passive learner as the recipient of the knowledge provided by the educator. It assumes that students absorb the material and master the content which is presented through lectures. And further that the process of learning is similar for all students. Although learning can occur in a classroom with many students, it is usually regarded as a unique and individual endeavor (Van Gyn & Grove-White, 2004). In the transmission perspective the content is memorized and learned by rote.

The transaction perspective is focused on the development of skills used by the learner to acquire new knowledge. This includes the development and application of problem solving skills, development of cognition skills, experiential learning and life-long learning. This perspective is associated with the interaction of the student with the curriculum and changes in the method of instruction so as to achieve the curriculum's objectives. The teacher remains responsible for structuring the learning environment, however, this learning environment is radically different from the environment structured from the transmission perspective (Van Gyn & Grove-White, 2004). Transaction perspective emphasizes learner-centered outcomes and learning rather than teaching.

The transformation perspective emphasizes learning primarily as a social process. The ultimate objective is transforming the students' external world. It empowers the learner from unexamined ways of thinking (Mezirow, 1998). Personal change is the objective of the perspective. It prepares the learner to think and examine their world on their own, to draw their own conclusions and then to take action based on their inquiries.

The Hospitality and Tourism Research course could have been taught using any of these three perspectives. However there is anecdotal evidence that suggests that hospitality students have resistance to

working with mathematical problems and statistical analysis. This combined with the transformational objective of the instruction, shaped both the subject being researched and the method of instruction.

## **Method of Instruction**

Cooke and Wolverton (2002) indicate that students prefer to work on real world problems and cases. While Aguado (2009) emphasizes that students learn by doing, this goes beyond the apprenticeship approach where students learn by following the instructions of the master craftsman. Aguado (2009) further suggests that students be engaged and actively involved in the learning associated with research methods. To this end students in the hospitality and tourism research course were actively involved in all four phases of the course research. Lecture/discussion sessions were to be conducted on one day of the week and the second class session would be devoted to a lab-type/workshop environment where the students would be heavily engaged in hands-on activities associated with the lecture/discussion topic of the week.

### **Phase 1: Problem Definition/Identification**

Diabetes affects an estimated 25.8 million Americans (8.3% of the US population) and an estimated 1.65 million Michigan citizens (Michigan Diabetes Burden Report, 2011). This illness costs the United States of America \$174 Billion annually, including the \$9 Billion a year in the state of Michigan. In the first class session, when students were asked if they knew anyone affected by this illness, every student indicated that they knew someone who had diabetes. Given that diabetes is largely self-managed and that “80% of the increase in diabetes prevalence over the past 30 years is attributable to the increase in obesity” (Michigan Department of Community Health, 2010), it was agreed that the class would focus on diabetes as the central element of the class’ research project. This would be an exploratory study of restaurants in Grand Rapids to determine if they offered “diabetic-friendly” menus and a survey of person with diabetes to assess the practice of taking meals outside of the home, and if these persons would be willing to pay more for “diabetic-friendly” menu items and if so, how much more would they be willing to pay.

### **Phase 2: Survey Design and Study Population**

A quantitative assessment was agreed for the study of Grand Rapids restaurants. The quantitative survey would be conducted by the students and based on the dietetic class presentation by Professor Lisa Sisson. The survey designed by the class, identified; the type of restaurant (American, Ethnic, Deli, Pizza etc.), Date and time of visit, menu reviewed (breakfast, lunch, dinner or other), total number of items listed on the menu (appetizers, entrees, deserts, other), presence of identified healthy options such as (low fat, fat-free, heart-healthy, low sodium, grilled, gluten-free, dairy- free). The number of items in relation to the cooking/preparation method (baked, fried, steamed, grilled, sautéed), The presence or absence of nutritional information and the location and format of this information. This survey form was used as a pre-test by the class.

The total population was the 315 restaurants identified by Experience Grand Rapids (2012). Given that this represented 14 restaurant visits per student, too many restaurants given the time allocated for data gathering. Data would be gathered during Spring Break 2012 (March 5 to 7, 2012). It was agreed by the class that the research area would focus on only one segment of the city of Grand Rapids, South East Grand Rapids. This segment had a diversity of dining experiences, both white table cloth through quick service, chain/franchise and independent restaurants. It was agreed that each student would conduct a survey of 6 restaurants. This covered the 132 restaurants in South East Grand Rapids.

The qualitative assessment used a semi-structured survey allowing respondents to provide greater detail and more in depth responses to questions. Students would also be required to maintain written notes on important items reported by the respondents. The semi-structured interviews focused on: the length of time that the respondent has had diabetes, number of meals per week taken outside of the home and which meal/s (breakfast, lunch, dinner, snack, other), who makes the decision with regard to the restaurant selection, the three most important factors which influence restaurant selection, if a review of the menu for healthy choices is conducted and would the respondent select healthy choices if they were available; the average spent on the meal and how much more would they be willing to pay for diabetic-friendly meal options; and demographic information on the respondents. Students would conduct two semi-structured interviews based on a convenience sample of persons who they knew had diabetes.

#### Phases 3 and 4: Data Analysis and Reporting/Presentation

Quantitative data analysis techniques examined as part of the course facilitated students being able to identify techniques that would be appropriate for their small data set. Discussion surrounding issues of correlation and causality as measured by statistical techniques would be discussed. Content analysis and its application to the qualitative assessment conducted in the student research project would be examined. Each student would have the opportunity to make a 15 minute presentation on their findings and a 15 to 20 page report on the project.

#### **Assessment of Transformational Learning.**

Six formal assessment tools were used during the course to assess student learning. These include:

- Four quizzes would be used to assess content knowledge, critical thinking and the application of research in Hospitality and Tourism
- A final exam which would cover all aspects of the course, concepts and materials presented, through the analysis of a case study from an academic journal. Students would be asked to apply the knowledge obtained in the course in responding to the questions on the case.
- Both oral and written presentations of their research which would indicate not only student understanding of the research methods and their findings, but also the application of their findings to the wider problem of diabetes and food service operations.
- In addition, a pre-post assessment of student perception of hospitality and tourism research would be conducted using student students' drawing of their perception of hospitality and tourism research prior to undertaking the course and a similar drawing activity at the end of the course.
- Attendance and participation in the class discussion also formed part of the students' grades
- The Hospitality and Tourism Management Department and Grand Valley State University conducts mid-semester and end of semester evaluations of both the content and delivery of each course and these would be included in the assessment of the course.

In addition students might provide informal feedback through email and personal communication providing evidence of transformational learning.

## Concluding Statement

Although Aguado, (2009) indicates that students learn better when they are engaged and are actively involved in the processes associated with their instruction. The assessment for this course might indicate that there is a deeper level of learning when there is a bridge between the subject material and a personal connection; situations which might have a direct impact on the student's life beyond the classroom. Professor Terry Doyle (2011) suggests that students learn better and more when they do the work, that is, are actively involved, engaged and committed to the doing the work. This author's contention is that this is all very valuable but the more direct and important the bridge to the real world and personal life of the student, the greater might be the transformative learning.

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