



# THRIFTY LESSONS

ALLOWING LEARNING TO EVOLVE  
SERENDIPITOUSLY

IN AN ON-CAMPUS THRIFT STORE

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# Thrifty Lessons

Topper Thrift: The Origin Story

Learning Theory

Serendipity

Letting Learning Evolve



# West Liberty University

Founded 1837 – Oldest in the State

## Fall 2023 – Headcount

- Undergraduate – 1,557
- Graduate – 579

## West Virginia

- State population 1.7 M
  - No city with 100 K (largest ~ 50 K)
- Median Age 41 – oldest state
- Poverty rate – 18% (3<sup>rd</sup> worst in US)
- 50% unemployment rate
- Educational attainment
  - 40% high school / 19% some college / 29% degree





# West Liberty University

## Rural ... and Rural Serving

"serving goes beyond just where you're located ... rural-serving institutions are often in regions facing socio-economic distress — places with high poverty, low employment and population loss as Americans migrate out of rural areas"

(Koricich, Sansone, Fryar, Orphan, & McClure, 2022).

- Service to local / regional populations a clear and consistent priority
- Curricular and co-curricular initiatives



# Origin of Topper Thrift

## Thriftfing

- Purchase gently used items (Goodwill of AZ)
- Often a “treasure hunt”
- Opportunity for good value

Thriftfing has increased in popularity

Sale of used clothing alone – expected to exceed \$77 billion by 2025 (Glenn, 2023)

Harder to find “good stuff”



Image: Trove Thrift Store, LA | <https://dailybruin.com/2023/11/02/the-rise-of-thriftfing-and-the-dilemma-of-sustainability-ethics-and-affordability>



# Origin of Topper Thrift

## Fast fashion

- Increase in micro-trends and cheaper brands
- Made popular by social media influences

“I’m very into fashion so there’s always new trends I want to try”

Increased demand for “on trend” clothing



# Origin of Topper Thrift

## Fast Fashion Facts

Industry is among the most wasteful

- Manufacturing waste
- Consumption waste





# Origin of Topper Thrift

## Gen Z

- Born between 1997 – 2012
  - Age 27 – 12
- Current traditional college student (18 – 21)
  - Pandemic impact – high school 14 – 17
- Important Issues
  - Health care and Mental health
  - Higher education and [Economic security](#)
  - Civic engagement and Racial Equity
  - [Environment](#)

(Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021)



Image: Teen Vogue, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/gen-z-most-coveted-fashion-brands>



# Topper Thrift

## Gen Z – Fast Fashion – Thrifting

Earth Day 2022

- GBUS 325 – Social Entrepreneurship
- Net Impact Chapter

Clothing Swap

- Gently used items
- 1 : 1 swap





# Topper Thrift Proposal

Fall 2022

## Business Plan

- Social Entrepreneurship (GBUS 325)
- Entrepreneurship Internship (ENT 490)

## Marketing Plan

- Market Research (MKT 498)

Faculty Support

Expanded Faculty-led Professional Dress Closet



# Keeping a Good Idea Going

## Business Incubation Center

Not well utilized

Dedicated space

Able to be retrofitted to create Topper Thrift as a learning lab



# More than just a store ...

## Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb & Kolb, 2006)

Six tenants :

1. Learning is a **student-involved process** – not merely a set of stated outcomes
2. The **best learning processes** are those that **examine, test, and stretch** a student's beliefs on a topic
3. **Resolving conflicts** across the topic exploration process enhances learning
4. “**Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world**. It is not just the result of cognition but involves the integrated functioning of the total person – thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving” (p. 47).
5. The **synergistic interaction** between the learner and their environment
6. **Constructivist knowledge creation** as part of the “**transformation of experience**” embedded in the learning process (p. 47)





# More than just a store ...

## Project-Based Learning Theory

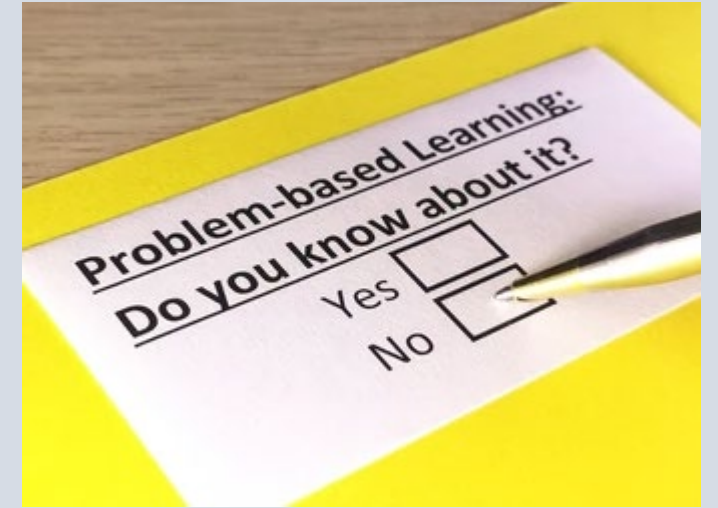
(Education Endowment Foundation, 2016)



- Application of “learning by doing” methodology
- Centered around a “project” – which can be and is broadly defined
- Generally, experiences designed around a driving question
- Goal is to connect conceptual knowledge with project-based experiences

# More than just a store ...

Problem-based Learning Theory ((Hmelo-Silver & Eberbach, 2012))



- Learner-centered instructional approach
- Students work collaboratively and learn through ill-structured problems
- Students engage in the self-directed discovery of what is needed to address the problem and then apply that insight to create the solution
- Students then reflect on the effectiveness of the solution and what they learned as part of the process
- Instructors facilitate the learning process rather than act as knowledge providers



# More than just a store ...

## Active Learning Theory (Brame, 2016)



“instructional activities involving students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing” (Bonwell and Eison, 1991).

- Promote a learning **focus on skill development**, as opposed to knowledge acquisition and transmission
- Requires the use of **higher-order thinking**
- Places emphasis on **students’ explorations of their own attitudes and values**
- Activities where **students construct knowledge and understanding**.
- Often involves **metacognition** - students’ thinking about their own learning

# More than just a store ...

## Additional Learning Issues ... and Opportunities (Kahu, 2013)



### Student Engagement

#### Four Dominant Perspectives:

- **Behavioural perspective** - student-centered learning approach
- **Psychological perspective** – learning is an individual psychosocial process
- **Sociocultural perspective** – learning is enhanced through the socio-political context
- **Holistic perspective** – all aspects of “being a student”

(p. 9)

### Key problems ...

- Lack of a true definition of “**engagement**”
- Understanding just **how “engaged”** a student really is
- Understanding of the **factors** that actually **impact engagement**
- Knowledge of the immediate and long-term **consequences of engagement**



# More than just a store ...

Additional Learning Issues ...  
and Opportunities (Kahn, 2013)



## Student Engagement and High Impact Practices

“Learning involves students taking responsibility for action in the face of uncertainty, whether in pursuit of personal or communal concerns.” (p. 1)

### Student Engagement and High Impact Practices in Higher Education

- **Distributed agency** - with the impact of a learning environment on student involvement
- **Reflexivity** – consideration of **oneself in context** to the social interactions of the tasks and the learning environment.

Some educational practices - ‘high impact’ - lead to higher levels of student engagement

# More than just a store ...

## Additional Learning Issues ...

and Opportunities (Bonet & Walters, 2016)



## Learning Communities

Intersection of John Dewey (1910), Lev Vygotsky (1978), and Paul Freire (1996)

- Learning is “reflective, constructivist, shared, and student-centered” (p. 2)

## Learning Communities

- Provide structure for faculty to allow students control over their learning experience
- Students “self-navigate through, reflect upon, and integrate experiential and academic learning as part of the ongoing process of meaningful knowledge construction” (p. 2)
- Integrative Learning – “refers to an ‘understanding and a disposition that a student builds across the curriculum and co-curriculum, from making simple connections among ideas and experiences to synthesizing and transferring learning to new, complex situations within and beyond the campus’ (AAC&U 2010)” (p. 2)



# More than just a store ...

## Additional Learning Issues ...

and Opportunities (Bonet & Walters, 2016)



## Learning Communities

### Reflection

- Systematically thinking through and making meaning across the experience
- Involves a “conscious goal of personal and intellectual growth (Rodgers 2002)” (p. 4)

“meaningful reflections emerge most effectively within a [process of learning from and among teachers and peers](#).

During discussion and interaction, all students, including life-long learners, critically evaluate prior understandings of social, scientific, and academic realities to achieve higher levels of awareness regarding “mind, self, and society” (Dewey)

# Striking the Right Balance

Structured learning

Meeting intended outcomes

Constructivist, self-generated learning

Individual growth opportunities

High-impact learning

Uniquely transformative experiences





# Fully Student-led Initiative

Faculty oversight / assistance

Construct the Store = Construct the Learning

Link Theory and Practice

Create Successes

Deconstruct 'Failures'



# Intended Student Learning Outcomes

## Course-connected Learning Initiatives

- **Retailing**
  - Product placement / display
  - Product / inventory turn rates
  - Product / donation inflow

## Course-connected Learning Initiatives

- **Social Entrepreneurship**
  - Ensure ongoing reduction of clothing waste
  - Increase “thrift-cycling” effectiveness
  - Connect with campus/local agencies to ensure maximum utilization of donations





# Intended Student Learning Outcomes



## Course-connected Learning Initiatives

- **Social Media Marketing**
  - Content creation
  - Regularity of placement
  - Metrics on placement effectiveness

## Course-connected Learning Initiatives

- **CIS / Accounting**
  - Create traffic tracking system
  - Account for clothing purchases
  - Create an inventory management system

# Unintended Student Learning Outcomes

## Ser·en·dip·i·ty

/ˌserən'dipədē/

noun

the occurrence and development of events by chance in a happy or beneficial way





# Unintended (Serendipitous) Student Learning Outcomes

Allowing Learning to Evolve

Topper Thrift Operations– Internship Project

- Need for motivation (of classmates)
- Need for accountability (of classmates)
- Tactics to schedule store opening/closing
- Work involved in “promotional campaigns”





# Unintended (Serendipitous) Student Learning Outcomes

Allowing Learning to Evolve

Topper Thrift Operations– Internship

- Need to rely on others
- Need to understand others needs
  - “I’m not fashionable – I don’t understand “*fashion*”
- Need to continuously spark interest



# Unintended (Serendipitous) Student Learning Outcomes

Allowing Learning to Evolve

## Topper Thrift Fashion Show – Internship Project

- Need for delegation
- Need for a project management system
- Need for ideation from others
- Need for more help/assistance than intended





# Unintended (Serendipitous) Student Learning Outcomes

Allowing Learning to Evolve

## Topper Thrift Operations– Internship

- Techniques for managing donations
  - Sort, organize, categorize, display
- College student appropriate
- What to do with the excess





# Current Challenges

Faculty lead departure

Lack of 'newness' of Topper Thrift

Student awareness of the challenges

Perpetuating the Learning Lab



# Questions ...



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