



CAL POLY

The Leadership Yield: Reaping Personal and Professional Growth Through 26 Hours

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INTRODUCTION

- Leadership development builds skills in visioning, strategizing, influencing, and communicating (Bower et al., 2021; Martinez et al., 2020).
- Defined as students creating positive change with institutional support (Lyons, 2018).
- Ag colleges provide low-risk environments for leadership growth (Cletzer et al., 2022).
- At Cal Poly, LIA has led the 26 Hours conference since 1988, exposing first-gen high schoolers to ag majors (McEwen, 2024).
- Familismo (obligation) and ganas (honoring struggle) shape Hispanic/Latinx student motivation (Azpeitia & Bacio, 2022).
- This study examines student leadership roles in 26 Hours through Kolb's (1984) experiential model.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

26 Hours as Experiential Learning: The event is a student-led activity framed within Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model, which emphasizes learning through experience rather than solely focusing on outcomes.

Cyclical Process: Kolb's model highlights a continuous cycle of Concrete Experience (CE), Reflective Observation (RO), Abstract Conceptualization (AC), and Active Experimentation (AE).

METHODS

A **qualitative** research design was used to gather detailed insights into student leaders' experiences during the 2024 26 Hours event, with six participants selected until data saturation was reached (Ary et al., 2010; Katz, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data collection involved 90-minute **Zoom focus groups**, where transcripts were generated and pseudonyms assigned to ensure confidentiality.

Analysis used **deductive coding** aligned with Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model, while remaining open to emergent themes; trustworthiness was maintained following Creswell and Poth (2025) and Saldaña (2021).

RESULTS & FINDINGS

Quote Tree

Quotes for RO

Daniel- "So I think from my perspective, it was like constant check-in and it kinda goes back to this idea of like what it means to be a Latinx member within this campus."

Arturo- "When I did it for the first time, I thought it was a great opportunity to be around people like me again."*

Quotes for AE

Pedro- "...and maybe building more on the transfer experience as well, because we're getting more and more transfers and I think they should feel just as welcome as our 1st years."

Veronica- "Definitely expanding who gets to come to this event...I know there's so many different communities that could be reached, so many high schools that would be interested in this opportunity."

Quotes for CE

Pedro- "In terms of prior experience in conference management, I have none."

Daniel- "I've been fortunate to have a little bit of experience of conference facilitation, whether that was through being a state officer and then a national officer as well."

Quotes for AC

Samantha- "But I think [I learned well about listening more], because I tried to listen to everybody instead of just tell people what to do."

Veronica- "My answer is also socially...in any other environment, I probably wouldn't go up to a group of high schoolers to talk to them about anything just in general. I think I felt comfortable enough..."

Most Impactful Quote

Samantha- "...it really fed my soul...I'm glad I could say that it's one of my favorite memories in college that I'm gonna treasure..."

Overall, students' experiences in the 26 Hours event reflected all four stages of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, ranging from varied initial experiences, to reflections of fulfillment and cultural connection, to insights for improvement, and intentions for deeper future involvement, ultimately highlighting personal growth, teamwork, and service to community as defining outcomes.

REFERENCES

1. Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice Hall.
2. Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. SAGE Publications.
3. Gorter, E. K., Sorensen, T., Russell, J., Taylor, S., & Henderson, T. M. (2020). Perceived changes among second-stage agriculture teachers following a professional development experience in Ecuador. *Advancements in Agricultural Development*, 1(3), 68-80.
4. Azpeitia, J. & Bacio, G.A. (2022). "Dedicado a Mi Familia": The role of familismo on academic outcomes among Latinx college students. *Emerging Adulthood*.

Theme: Varied Experience (Concrete Experience)

Some students reported being new to 26 Hours, while others held several leadership positions prior the event.

Theme: Student Fulfillment (Reflective Observation)

Students reported community involvement was a primary motivating factor, reflecting the ideas of familismo and ganas.

Theme: Personal Growth (Abstract Conceptualization)

Students gained several skills which help them to identify areas of growth as leaders.

Theme: Increased Involvement (Active Experimentation)

Substained by the growing demand for the conference, as reported by several participants.

CONCLUSIONS

Students' reflections aligned with Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model, as they engaged in the conference with varying levels of experience and found fulfillment in serving their community.

Participants reported personal growth in interpersonal and teamwork skills, emphasizing excitement about learning through collaboration.

Many expressed a desire for continued involvement in the conference due to strong family and community ties, underscoring the value of experiential learning when it connects to students' personal and cultural identities (Kolb, 1984).

IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Using Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model, the study found that students sought to develop new leadership skills, reinforce existing ones, and deepen engagement with their community through the 26 Hours event.

Future studies should explore the cultural concepts of familismo and ganas (Azpeitia & Bacio, 2022), and conduct longitudinal research with more participants to capture a broader range of experiences.

For **practitioners**, advisors and student leaders should acknowledge student backgrounds and emphasize building/maintaining relationships, which can strengthen students' sense of obligation to one another and support teamwork.

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