

# AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE TO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING



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“Lectures are a way of transferring the instructors lecture notes to students’ notebooks without passing through the brains of either.”

—Mark Twain

While lectures have been the typical classroom model in teaching and delivering course content, it does not always foster prolonged learning. A complement to this would be **experiential learning**<sup>1</sup>, where students are directly involved in a learning experience and reflection on that experience, further developing a students’ knowledge and skills from the ready made content in lesson plans and lectures.

## ABOUT EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

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Experiential learning is a growing field of learning, and is becoming increasing important for students in today’s economy, in order for them to **develop the right set of skills and experiences for future employment opportunities**. It is not simply actively engaging your students in class, which is a common misconception, but setting up challenges for the student to solve themselves, and reflecting on that experience. The following guide will go into detail on the reflection cycle, what experiential learning looks like, how you can encourage it in the classroom, and the different institutional benefits.

Types of experiential learning opportunities include:

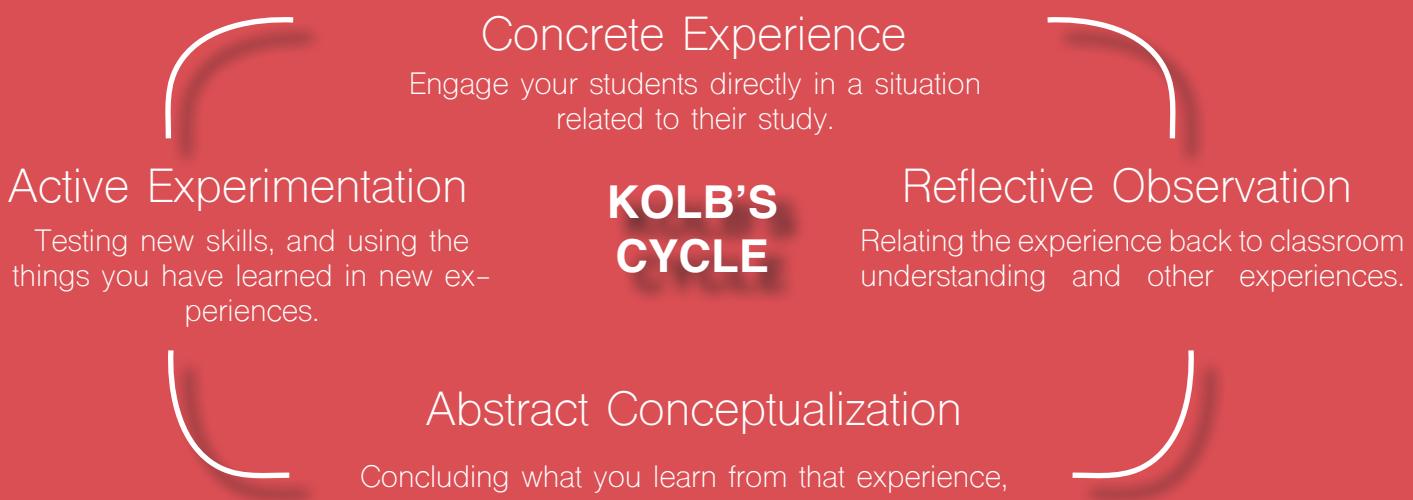
- **Field trips**
- **Career fairs**
- **Workplace tours**
- **Extra-curricular activities**
- **Lab experiments**
- **Volunteering**
- **Field Placements**
- **Internships**
- **Co-op**
- **Apprenticeships**
- **Studying Abroad**

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<sup>1</sup>“Experiential Learning | Centre for Teaching Excellence.” Campus Wellness. November 02, 2017. Accessed July 23, 2018. <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/support/integrative-learning/experiential-learning>.

# COMPONENTS OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

The concept of experiential learning was first explored by David Kolb, a twentieth century educational psychologist, who proposed a four step cycle for the best experience, called **Kolb's Cycle**, as illustrated below.



Kolb's cycle is clear on the stages each student should be in throughout the learning cycle, and as an educator it is important that you are ensuring each student is actively reflecting and learning from their experience, through journal entries, assessment sheets, or any other tools for reflection.

Other components that build the foundation of experiential learning are outlined below:

## Primary components of Experiential learning

according to [Association of Experiential Education<sup>2</sup>](#)

- Experiential opportunity must be carefully chosen, considering the **student's learning potential**, and whether it provides an opportunity for students to practice and deepen emergent skills, encounter new situations that support new learning, or learn from natural consequences.
- Learner is actively engaged in the experiential learning process through **asking questions, investigating, and experimenting**.
- **Reflection is essential**, as it leads to critical analysis and thinking.
- Learners **engaged intellectually**, emotionally, socially, and/or physically.
- Relationships developed and nurtured: learner to self, learner to others, and learner to the world at large.

<sup>2</sup> Smariga, Robert. "What Is EE." Association for Experiential Education. Accessed July 23, 2018. [http://www.aee.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=110:what-is-ee&catid=20:other&Itemid=260](http://www.aee.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=110:what-is-ee&catid=20:other&Itemid=260).



# WHAT DOES EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING LOOK LIKE?

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Things you should keep in mind before introducing students to an experiential learning opportunity:

- Students in traditional classroom situations learn to compete with one another, which results in them being highly unmotivated and uninvolved, distancing themselves from a fulfilling learning experience. **In experiential learning opportunities, this is the opposite**, and students learn to cooperate with one another, increasing their excitement and motivation about classroom learning.
- It is important to remember that experiential learning is **not simply exposing students to an experience**, but it is also locating an experience within the learning cycle<sup>3</sup>to ensure that the experience is leading to student learning objectives, as well **thorough reflection**.
- While all experiential learning is active learning, not all active learning is experiential. It is important that students participate in group discussions and classroom activities, but going beyond the classroom and actually **applying skills learned is what experiential learning is all about!**
- Experiential learning is equal parts of previous skill, theory, and investigation. In a classroom, an experiential learning environment looks like a **safe environment, time given to reflect, meaningful and relevant activities, and a look at the big picture perspective**.

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<sup>3</sup>Experiential Learning Working Group | Final Report. PDF. Queens University. Accessed July 23, 2018. <https://www.queensu.ca/experiential-learninghub/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca.qelhwww/files/files/Experiential%20Learning%20Working%20Group%20Report%20.pdf>



# EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM

When integrating experiential learning into the classroom, some primary points that need to be considered<sup>4</sup> include:

**Planning:** plan the experience by connecting it to course learning objectives and determining what students will require to be successful.

**Preparing:** prepare materials, rubrics, and assessment tools.

**Facilitate:** guide students through the process of finding and determining solutions for themselves.

**Evaluate:** success of the activity is determined through discussions, reflections, and debriefing sessions.

**Reflection** is key in experiential learning, and should be considered throughout every step of the way. There are various tools of reflection that should be encouraged in the classroom in order to gain further insight:

- Keeping a journal about the experience and reviewing entries later.
- Sharing your experiences with students, and inviting guest speakers to speak about their own.
- Encourage students to contribute to online discussions regarding the class.
- Create self assessments for your student, which they can keep updating through each step of the experience
- Have students write themselves a letter before the experiences, and reviewing it afterwards to see if learning goals were accomplished

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<sup>4</sup> Experiential Learning. PDF. Northern Illinois University, Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center. Accessed July 23, 2018. [https://www.niu.edu/facdev/\\_pdf/guide/strategies/experiential\\_learning.pdf](https://www.niu.edu/facdev/_pdf/guide/strategies/experiential_learning.pdf)



# INSTITUTIONAL BENEFITS

Experiential Learning is a growing field for students, and there are countless benefits for them and their learning development. It is important to keep in mind that experiential learning **benefits all stakeholders involved**, and that includes the educators and institutions. Below are a few of the many benefits that experiential learning can provide for an institution.

- Attract and **retain high quality** and motivated students, with increased enrollment as experiential learning grows.
- Build and maintain **positive relationships with the community** and organizations.
- Students returning from work terms **enrich the general education community** of the campus.<sup>5</sup>
- Gain **opportunities for research** through ROP programs, and **institution collaborative projects**.
- Align with **Ontario government priorities** of supporting experiential learning.<sup>5</sup>
- Enhance the **institutions reputation and visibility** through positive interactions.
- Responsible for **well-qualified graduates**, who are prepared to be productive members of society.
- Students develop **loyalty to institutions that provide them with opportunities**, with potential to return again for other studies.

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<sup>5</sup> "Benefits of Co-operative Education for Students, Employers, and Institutions." Co-operative Education Definition. 2018. Accessed July 23, 2018. <https://www.cewilcanada.ca/about-us-benefits.html>.



For more information and resources, visit the [\*\*ELPH\*\*](#) site.  
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