Experiential Learning at Mohawk College

Faculty handbook

Centre for Teaching & Learning Innovation | 2024

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Experiential Learning at Mohawk is supported by the Centre for Teaching & Learning Innovation and the Centre for Experiential Learning.

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What is Experiential Learning?

Experiential Learning (EL) is an educational activity facilitated and supported by the college through which students learn while doing. Students participate in workplaces, or simulated workplaces, where they are exposed to authentic professional demands and expectations.

The goal of an EL experience is to improve students’ employability and interpersonal skills and to support their transition to the workforce (MTCU, 2017).

This handbook has been designed to provide faculty with information and resources related to EL. It includes definitions, supporting theory, information on reflective practice, and assessment strategies.

Indigenous roots of experiential education

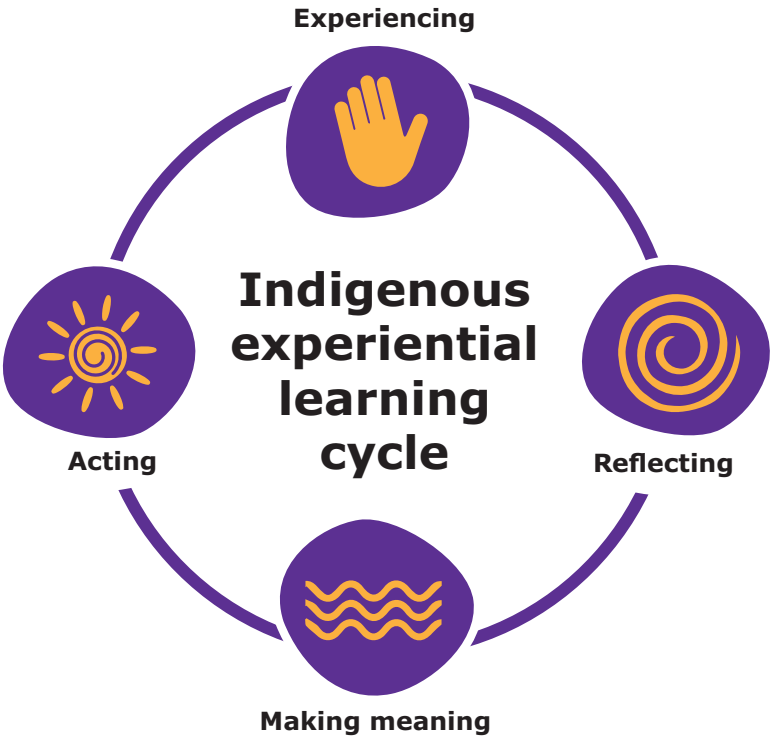


Figure 1: Indigenous experiential learning cycle

Indigenous roots of experiential education

For Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island (North America) Canada, experiential learning is deeply connected to ways of knowing (Figure 1, page 5), doing and being. Mohawk College is committed to upholding the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Calls to Action and acknowledges that EL is a principle of Indigenous learning. Long before the TRC, Battiste (2002) reinforced the importance of experiential learning for Indigenous learners explaining:

> The first principle of Aboriginal learning is a preference for experiential knowledge. Indigenous pedagogy values a person's ability to learn independently by observing, listening and participating with a minimum of intervention or instruction. This pattern of direct learning by seeing and doing, without asking questions, makes Aboriginal children diverse learners (p. 15).

Additionally, Battiste (2002) explains that this type of learning focuses on and stems from introspection, calling upon learners to engage in reflection, meditation, prayer and other types of self-directed learning (p. 16), thus putting students in control of their experience and learning. The Indigenous Quality Assurance Standards on Ontario Colleges (2018) document reinforces Battiste's (2002) assertion that colleges need to celebrate and share experienced-based learning as Indigenous ways of knowing and doing. As such, "to maximize participation of Aboriginal [and all] students in the educational process, teachers need to experiment with teaching opportunities to connect with the multiple ways of knowing these students have and multiple intelligences" (Battiste, 2002, p. 15). Acknowledging the significance that Indigenous ways of knowing and doing have had on teaching and learning pedagogy will continue to improve the experiences of all students and demonstrate respect for Indigenous ways. In your teachings, be of a good mind and act in a good way.

Key components of experiential learning activities

EL activities must meet the six guiding principles, outlined by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU). These principles are:

1. The student is in a workplace or simulated workplace.
2. The student is exposed to authentic demands that improve their employability, interpersonal skills and transition to the workforce.
3. The experience is structured with purposeful and meaningful activities.
4. The student applies university or college program knowledge and/or essential employability skills.
5. The experience includes student self-assessment and evaluation of the student's performance and learning outcomes by the employer and/or university/college.
6. The experience counts towards course credit or credential completion OR is formally recognized by the college or university as meeting the five criteria above.

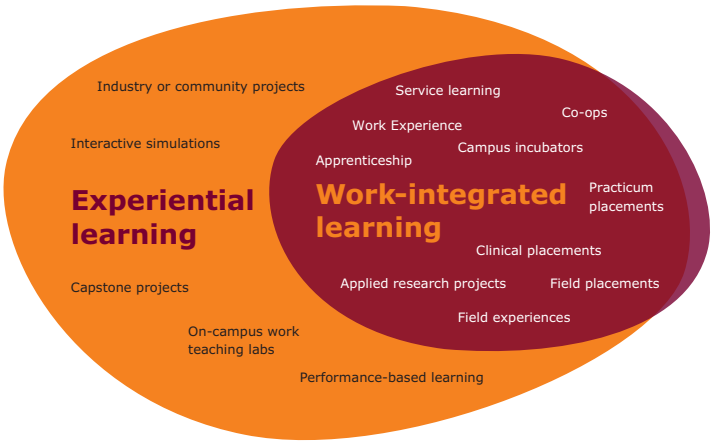


Figure 2: Experiential learning activities

Definitions

EL is a broader term which encompasses 16 unique types of EL activities, which includes work-integrated learning (see Figure 2, page 7). Work-integrated Learning (WIL) "is a form of curricular experiential education that formally integrates a student's academic studies with quality experiences within a workplace or practice setting. WIL experiences include an engaged partnership of at least: an academic institution, a host organization, and a student. WIL can occur at the course or program level and includes the development of student learning objectives and outcomes related to: employability, agency, knowledge and skill mobility, and life-long learning" (CEWIL Canada 2021).

Applied research project or course

Research that solves real world challenges and has immediate practical implications. Applied research is undertaken with an external organization in order to apply new knowledge, primarily towards a specific practical aim or objective. Applied research can occur at either a workplace or on campus.

Apprenticeship

An on-the-job training program for skilled trades that combines paid employment under the supervision of a certified journeyperson and in-class training from a post-secondary institution, with a specified amount of hours for both requirements. Apprenticeships programs are administered by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development through Skilled Trades Ontario.

Campus incubator

Intended primarily to promote entrepreneurship and social initiatives. Incubators provide start-up assistance, physical space, mentorship, and support services that focus on early-stage entrepreneurs.

Capstone project

A cumulative activity in the final semesters of a program that is based significantly on knowledge and skills acquired in earlier course work. It involves a creative, iterative, and often open-ended process using problem-based learning to address a project challenge. Students spend a significant amount of time, working independently or in a team environment, throughout the semester and translate their results using written reports, oral presentations or poster presentations. Projects can involve qualitative or quantitative research.

Clinical (Mandatory Professional Practice)

Required as part of a health program of study with a scheduled number of unpaid hours in an environment that provides healthcare or related services to patients or the public. Clinical placements are an integral component of the curriculum and necessary for a professional association and accreditation. Placements can take place in primary, secondary, or community healthcare or social care settings.

Co-operative education

Co-operative education alternates periods of academic study with periods of work; beginning and ending on an academic term. Paid work terms provide students with an opportunity for substantial and relevant work experience that complements academic study. A minimum of 420 work hours is required during each four-month work term. Work terms must account for at least 30% of the time for academic programs over three years and 25% of the time for programs two years or less. The student's performance in the workplace is supervised by the employer and is evaluated by Co-operative Education, as part of their academic program of study.

Field experience

Students explore academic content in a purposeful way outside the classroom through short-term field trips/field-work/site visits or through intensive and immersive experiences.

Field placements

Scheduled hours of activities intended to give students hands-on experience in the workplace. Students are not expected to receive a regular salary. Field placements account for work-integrated education experiences not encompassed by other forms such as co-op, clinic, practicum and internship.

Industry or Community project

Students work with an organization, business, or industry within a classroom setting to explore challenges or opportunities and develop solutions and/or strategies to respond to identified challenges.

Internship

A supervised and structured program-related experience in a professional work environment that is offered as a single block placement at the end of program or single block placement alternating with an academic program. Internships are typically four, eight or 12 months long and can either be paid or unpaid.

Labs

In an on-campus controlled lab environment, students will observe, test, measure, apply course concepts, collaborate and/or experience hands-on learning with tools, equipment and resources utilized in a specific field or program of study.

Performance-based learning

Students will produce, manage, curate or participate in an artistic presentation, musical performance or portfolio exhibit for an audience.

Practicum (Mandatory Professional Practice)

Experience required by both an academic program and a regulatory professional association where work hour requirements are mandatory for a professional license, certification or registration. Professional skills are developed in an unpaid work setting or simulated work setting under the supervision of a registered or licensed professional.

Service learning
Academically linked work experience designed to foster civic or social responsibility and leadership that is undertaken with a local, provincial, national or international organization to address community or global needs. Integrates course content and critical reflection to produce meaningful outcomes in personal, academic and civic learning. An instructor/professor facilitates the experience.

Simulations
A teaching and learning strategy that involves an interactive and accurate representation of a field-specific situation or process, with or without the use of equipment/technology. Simulations are non-linear in nature and require students to utilize critical thinking skills to respond to ambiguity through direct decision making.

Work Experience - Degree
Includes at least one term in a formal work environment. In most cases the work experience is a paid position that is completed in-between two academic semesters and requires a minimum of 420 hours of work. The successful completion of the work experience is required for graduation.

Experiential learning theory

Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning
This theory discusses the key components of learning-by-doing, how it works and the characteristics which contribute to meaningful practice. As a widely-accepted theory, educators can incorporate the model to support teaching practice and learner experience. The model is known for its holistic approach to student learning, which incorporates action/reflection and experience/abstraction (Kolb & Kolb, 2011). There are four key phases to the experiential learning cycle: concrete experience (CE), reflective observation (RO), abstract conceptualization (AC), and active experimentation (AE) (Figure 3, page 12) (Kolb & Kolb, 2011). There is no starting or end point to the cycle, ensuring students can jump in at any phase.

- **Concrete experience (CE):**
  This is the action phase. Students are encouraged to try out the action and have a new experience.
- **Reflective observation (RO):**
  This is the observation phase. Students are encouraged to intentionally reflect on their experience from multiple perspectives and the factors involved (e.g. environment, stakeholder, context, outcomes.)
- **Abstract conceptualization (AC):**
  This is the integration phase. Students are encouraged to integrate the experience (action and result) into existing knowledge schemas and with existing theory. As a result, a new concept is formed and can be applied to future experiences.
- **Active experimentation (AE):**
  This is the hypothesizing and trial phase. Students are encouraged to hypothesize what will happen and try the action out by making decisions and solving problems.

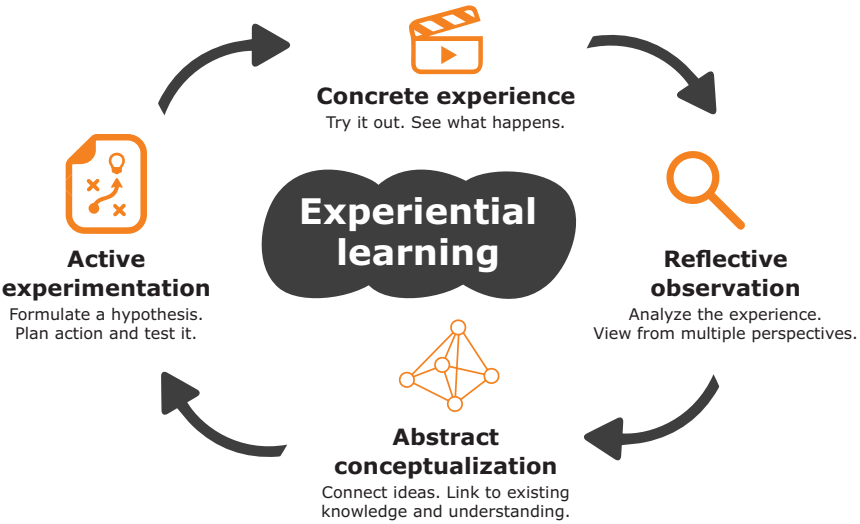


Figure 3: Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning

Key findings

Kolb and Kolb's (2011) extensive work in the field of experiential learning have resulted in some considerations that educators should review. They recommend that educators recognize that learning is cyclical and while students learn about specific content and subject matter, reflection and learning about the self and individual learning processes is just as important.

Remember that experiential learning takes work and time; it should be purposeful and beneficial to student learning. Educators should create EL activities based on the appropriate and most meaningful level of involvement for students (Kolb and Kolb, 2011, p. 58). Kolb and Kolb (2011) suggest the following principles as a guideline:

- respect learning and their experience;
- begin learning with the learner's experience of the subject matter;
- create and hold a hospitable space for learning;
- make space for conversational learning;
- make space for acting and reflecting;
- make space for feeling and thinking;
- make space for inside-out learning;
- make space for development of expertise; and
- make space for learners to take charge of their own learning (2011, p. 61-62).

Experiential learning and reflection

Defining reflection

Reflection is a deliberate action in which the participant consciously thinks about an experience, assesses what happened and offers an evaluation. A critical aspect of reflection is that it is conscious and deliberate (Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1996; Brookfield, 1998; Schon, 1998). Reflection involves considerations of thoughts, feelings and actions, recognizing that learning affects the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains (Figure 4, page 15) (Bloom, 1956). Linking to each of the domains allows for a more holistic approach to learning which can result in new skills, knowledge and/or attitudes, solidifying connections to learning outcomes and essential employability skills.

Figure 4: Bloom's Learning Domains

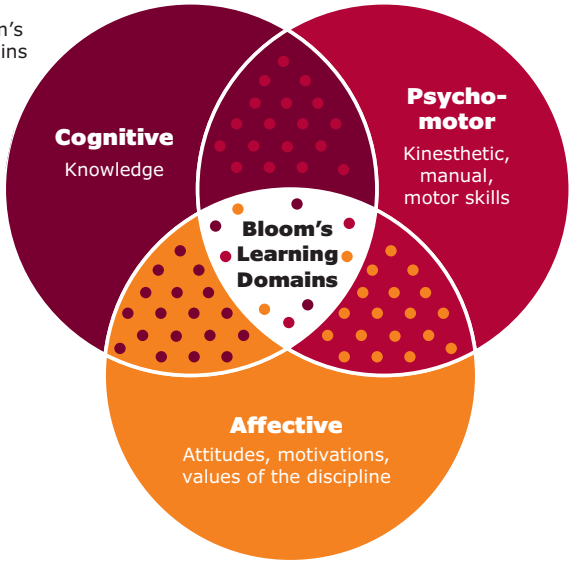
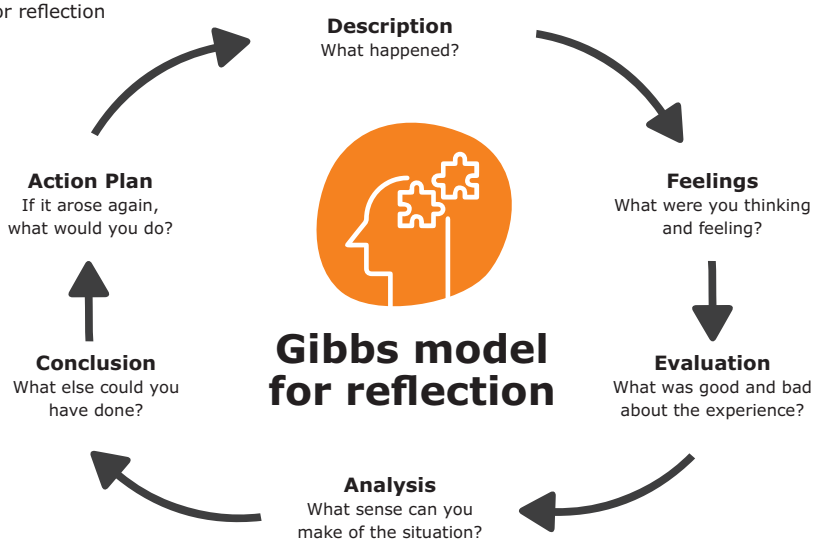


Figure 5: The Gibbs model for reflection



Given that reflection is a skill that is learned, educator support is vital for student success. Additionally, educators should take a moment to reflect on the experience from their perspective, concluding with evaluations for future experiences. This section of the handbook provides reflection considerations for both students and educators. The assessment section of the handbook can be used to garner awareness on the activities that can support reflective practice.

Guiding learner reflections

Educators should consider engaging the learner in a pre-experience reflective activity. Past experiences of learners will impact how a learner engages with a new learning experience; deliberate reflection asks learners to consider what they bring to experience (i.e., knowledge, attitudes and skills) and how this might impact their experience (Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1996).

Gibbs (1988) offers a reflective cycle that students can use during and after their experience (Figure 5, page 15).

As a starting point for reflection, educators can also guide learners with three simple questions: what, so what and now what. Expanding on these questions can include asking questions such as:

- What happened?
- What was different than you expected or is different from your prior knowledge?
- What might this mean or tell you? Is there anything you need to learn more about?
- How will this impact you personally? How have your views or understanding changed?
- What will you do differently as a result of this learning/experience?
- What might this mean for the field/work/subject area?

As an educator, you can guide learners in their reflective practice, helping them to identify critical events that occurred in the experience and connecting these experiences back to the course learning outcomes. For assignment specific reflection prompts, activities and/or assessment tools, consider connecting with the Centre for Teaching & Learning Innovation.

Reflection for educators

Similar to students, educators are encouraged to reflect on the upcoming experiential learning activity, its connections to course content and expectations for student learning.

Pre- and post-reflection should consider Brookfield's (1998) four critical lenses for reflection: self, student, colleagues and scholarship (Figure 6). Brookfield (1998) suggests that educators should be consciously aware of and considerate of these lenses as they all contribute to effective pedagogical practice. Specifically, conscious reflection of the self enables educators to develop an awareness of their teaching pedagogy and its potential implications for classroom facilitation.

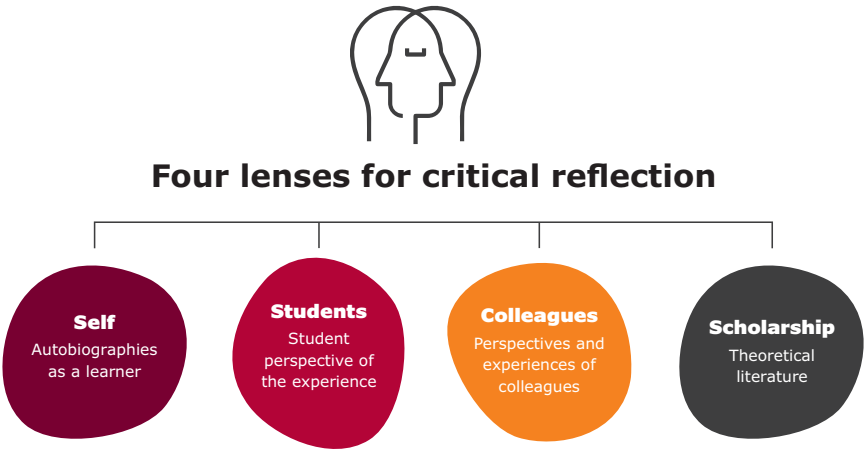


Figure 6: Brookfield's lenses for reflection

As a starting point, educators can consider Brookfield's (1995) questions for reflection:

- What moment(s) did you feel most connected, engaged or affirmed as a teacher?
- What moment(s) did you feel most disconnected or disengaged, or distanced as a teacher?
- What moment did you find most affirming or helpful?
- What moment did you find most puzzling or confusing?
- What surprised you most during or after the activity?
- What do you feel proudest of in your teaching activities this week and why?

Additional reflection activities can include journal writing, creation of a teaching portfolio and teaching inventories.

Experiential learning and assessment

EL activities must be assessed. EL activities need to be included on the Course Outline and input into the Course Outline Mapping and Management System (COMMS). The Centre for Teaching & Learning Innovation is available to support integration of EL activities into courses and programs of studies.

Assessment strategies

In order to assess the personal reflection and/or self-assessment component of EL activities, it is recommended that one or more of these elements be included in the assessment(s):

- Summary of the EL experience
- Connections to academic material/content
- Critical analysis (e.g. who was there, how could perceptions differ pending person involved, context in which it occurred, consequences of actions, etc.)
- Significance of the experience and related learning
- Application of new knowledge in future (personal or professional)

The elements listed above can be applied in a variety of assessment types. Below are some assessment considerations.

Assignment project (individual or group)

Using an assignment or project assessment allows learners to identify what they observed, experienced and learned. When using this assessment type there should be an explicit connection or sub-section that specifically addresses the EL activity.

Debate

Debates can include application and/or discussion of what was experienced and/or observed, and application of these discussions to the academic content and/or relevant subject-related experience.

Observations

Using the method of their choice, students can record and submit observations of an EL activity. It is recommended that prompts or a guide is provided (e.g. chart form, fill in the blank, etc.) to encourage the recording of appropriate observations.

Open discussion

Students can lead the conversation on key findings, the experience from multiple perspectives, address lingering questions and apply findings to future employment-related roles and/or environments. This could be done in small or large groups, a sharing circle, etc.

Presentation (individual or group)

Various reflections/applications of the experience can be presented in multiple, unique formats (e.g., video, song, dramatic presentation).

Universal design for learning

Universal design for learning (UDL) is a curriculum design, development and delivery framework used to create accessible and inclusive learning environments. When considering assessments, it is important to note that multiple means of submission should always be considered unless there is a connection to an industry standard that requires students to demonstrate a specific communication/ representation standard.

To learn more about UDL, please review the UDL webpages.

Assessment tools

Assessment tools should be reflective of the assessment strategy used. If you need support to design your assessment type, components and/or tools for evaluation, please contact the Centre for Teaching & Learning Innovation.

Critical reflection rubric

The value of assessing reflection is that it signals to students the importance of experiential learning and provides an opportunity for you to provide feedback on their learning. Rubrics are valuable tool for students as they articulate the learning and behavioural expectations of an assignment and demonstrate alignment between an assignment and the learning outcomes for the course. The critical reflection rubric below (adopted from Kember et al., 2008) provides a framework for evaluating reflection. This rubric can be used on its own or as a starting point upon which to layer course-specific expectations.

	Critical reflection	Reflection	Understanding	Habitual action/ non-reflection
Reflection on existing knowledge	Critically reviews existing knowledge, questions assumptions, and articulates new perspectives as a result of experience	Active and careful consideration of existing knowledge and articulates new understanding of knowledge as a result of experience	Makes use of existing knowledge without an attempt to evaluate/appraise knowledge; demonstrates understanding but does not relate to other experiences or personal reaction	Automatic/ superficial responses with little conscious/ deliberate thought or reference to existing knowledge; responses are offered without attempting to understand them
Connection to academic concepts	Demonstrates superior connection between experience and class content (concepts/ theories) and literature; evidence of application of theory and reconstruction of perspective	Demonstrates clear connections between experience and class content (concepts/ theories); evidence of application of theory	Connects experience with class content (concepts/ theories) but remains superficial or abstract	Connections are not drawn between experience and class content (concepts/ theories) or literature
Evidence of development	Articulates transformation of their perspective of themselves or about a particular issue/concept/ problem as a result of experience	Articulates new understanding/ insights about self or particular issue/concept/ problem as a result of experience	Limited/ superficial insight about self or particular issue/concept/ problem as a result of experience	No evidence of insights about self or particular issue/concept/ problem as a result of experience

Centre for Pedagogical Innovation, 2020

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