

EL Bulletin #1

TYPES OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Defining Experiential Learning

Experiential learning (EL) or experiential education (EE) is a hot topic that is enjoying much attention, support and even funding. Most academic references to EL cite David Kolb as an early leader in this field. Kolb's EL Theory defines learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984, p.41). Kolb presents a holistic view of learning that is widely supported and involves a continuous cycle of students participating in *concrete experiences*, dealing with such experiences through *reflective observation*, asking questions and forming generalizations through *abstract conceptualization*, and making decisions or solving problems through *active experimentation*.

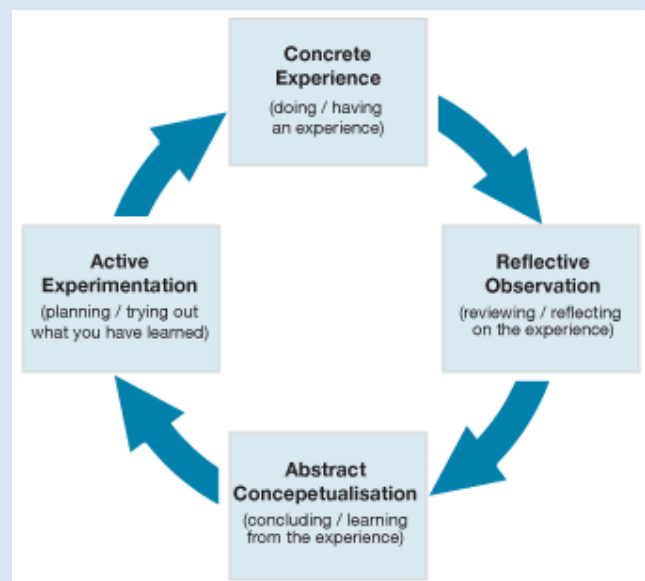
The Association for Experiential Education offers the following

streamlined definition of EL: "*Challenge and Experience* followed by *Reflection* leading to *Learning and Growth*."

There is an important difference between experience and experiential learning. Merely exposing students to an experience is not experiential learning. EL occurs when experiences are delivered through a purposeful learning cycle that leads to the realization of learning outcomes.

Furthermore *active learning* is another term often misinterpreted as synonymous with EL. Active learning involves a broad range of activities (such as class discussions, labs role-playing, and group work) that meaningfully engage students in the learning process. While all experiential learning is in fact active learning, not all active learning is experiential learning.

Within specific disciplines, further definitions and applications of EL are presented. Regardless of the precise definition, there is general agreement that much learning can take place beyond the confines of traditional classroom delivery. Students can enrich their learning experiences and their world readiness by assuming a more active and reflective role in practical applications.



Kolb, D. A. and Fry, R. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Types of Experiential Learning

The understanding, appreciation and applicability of EL has evolved greatly with most universities now proudly housing EL centers that inform and support such growing initiatives. (See select references listed on page 3.) Under the broad umbrella of EL, there is a vast array of activity types and terms that are observed. Work integrated learning (WIL), integrated learning experiences (ILEs), community engaged learning (CEL), high impact practices (HIP), etc. have all become common references in educational settings. Pasted below is a framework developed by U of T that effectively captures various forms of EL within the four broad categories of research and innovation, community, workplace and international based experiences.



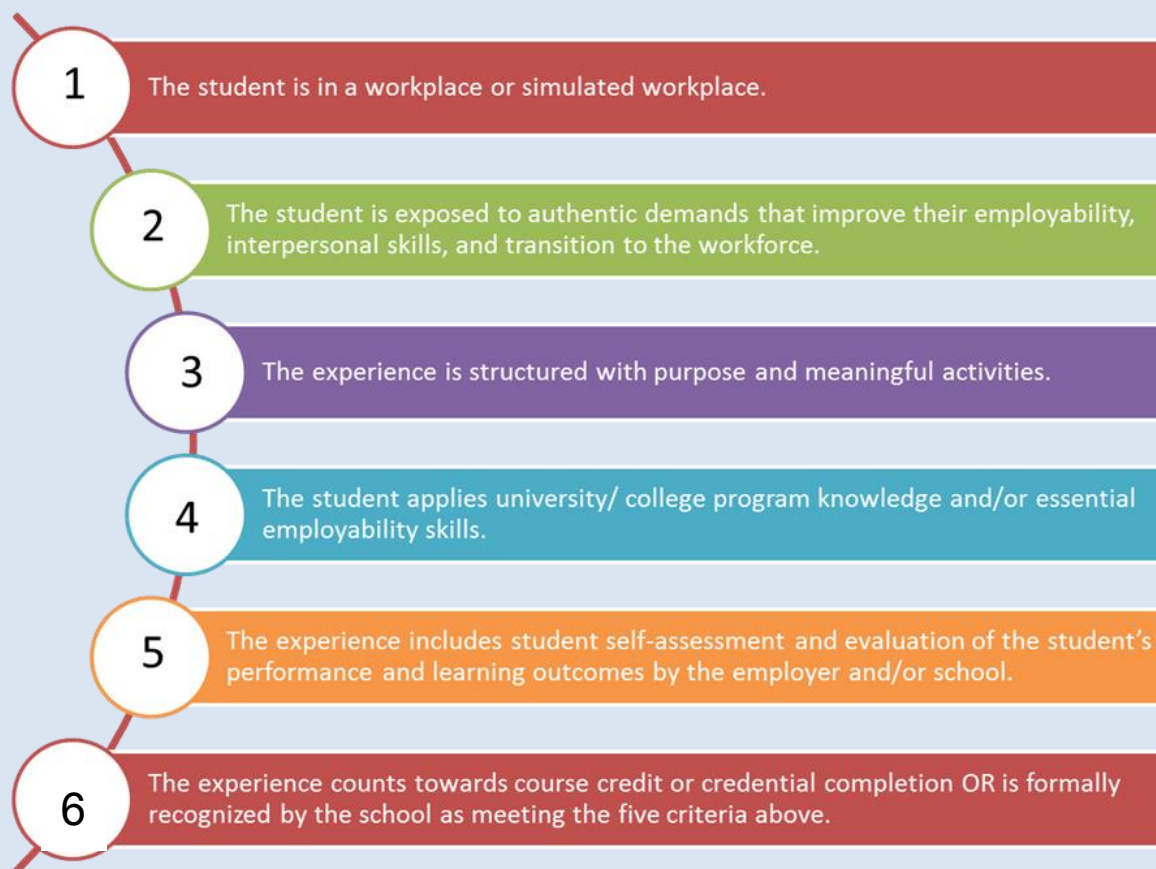
[Integrated Learning: Experiential Education at the University of Toronto](#)

While we may define or classify them somewhat differently, many of these enriching activities are currently taking place at Nipissing University. At a recent conference, I listened as participants debated these various terms and classifications of EL. I was enlightened when one individual rightfully dismissed the need to further dispute definitions and suggested that efforts could be better spent in advancing the understanding, adoption and implementation of such practices in order for students, instructors, and external learning partners to truly reap the rewards of these enhanced practices. (My next bulletin will therefore focus on the benefits of EL. Stay tuned...)

“Challenge and Experience followed by Reflection leading to Learning and Growth.”

Criteria for Experiential Learning

Regardless of the precise terminology used to define varying types of EL endeavors, the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD) requires EL activities to satisfy the following 6 conditions:



“Merely exposing students to an experience is not experiential learning. “

Select References

- ★ [Association for Experiential Education](#)
- ★ [U of T Center for Teaching Support & Innovation](#)
- ★ [Western University Student Success Centre](#)
- ★ [Queens University Experiential Learning Hub](#)
- ★ [York University Teaching Commons](#)
- ★ Kolb, D.A. (1984) *Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice Hall

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