ONIX EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Experiential Learning Where Learning Comes to Life

Experiential learning at Onix-Intercambio Cultural **is implemented at all levels** of our curriculum and revolves around the central idea of **learning by doing.** The central tenets of this methodology include engaging students in a cycle of (1) activity/experience, (2) reflection, (3) conceptualization, and (4) application of desired learning outcomes. While the classroom affords many opportunities for students to engage in experiential education, the school also employs this learning methodology outside the traditional classroom.

- **Concrete Experience:** The learner encounters a new experience or engages in a reinterpretation process of an existing experience.
- **Reflective Observation:** The learner reviews and reflects on the new experience and identifies any inconsistencies between experience and understanding.
- **Abstract Conceptualization:** Through the reflective process, the learner creates a new idea/concept or modifies an existing abstract concept – analyzing the concepts and forming conclusions and generalizations.
- **Active Experimentation:** The learner plans and tries out what was learned and is able to apply the new knowledge to other situations – conclusions and generalizations are used to tests hypothesis and thus the learner engages in new experiences.

Learning by doing has been a tenet of the Onix-Intercambio Cultural program since the school's inception in 2005. Onix-Intercambio Cultural has since put a great deal of effort into refining its approach to experiential education.

Through practice, training, research, and the addition of like-minded teachers and administrators, the school's vision and practice have evolved into a more conscious and thoughtful approach that has resulted in the adoption and employment of the hybrid model shown.

At the center of this teaching technique is the experience.

These experiences must have true meaning and value for the students. Some are related to the curriculum and others are related to the development of the individual - socially, emotionally, and/or physically.

Research shows that this kind of active, experiential learning supports creativity, problem solving and a deeper understanding that endures beyond test day. As such, many of the experiential learning opportunities support the academic curriculum. But, just as many support other important programmatic elements such as service learning, leadership, outdoor education, travel, or perhaps just exploring beyond one's comfort zone. The school has adopted experiential learning as a cornerstone of its mission and recognizes the inherent value in teaching within this model. Not every lesson on every day employs the entire model, but the quality and depth of learning, not to mention student engagement, is clearly enhanced by the practice.

It is possible for the learner to enter at any of these four stages and follow them through their sequence to acquire new knowledge. What is highlighted is that for effective learning to occur the learner should complete all four stages of the model and no one stage can stand alone as a learning procedure.
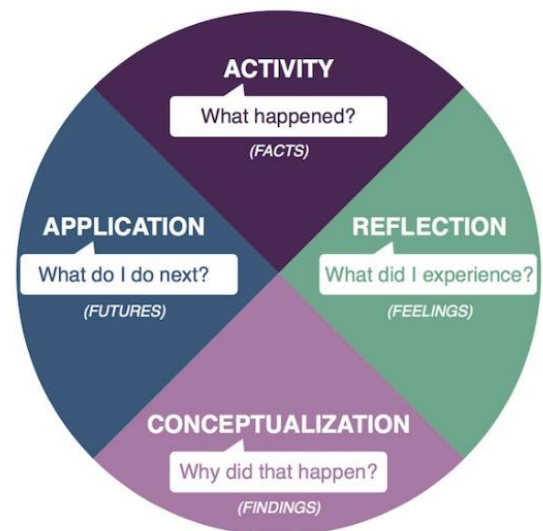
REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCES

"**Experiential learning** is the application of theory and academic content to **real-world experiences**, either within the classroom, within the community, or within the workplace, which advances program or course-based learning outcomes that are specifically focused on employability skills. Experiential learning requires the student to not only engage in the experience activity, but also requires them to reflect upon their learning and how their skills learned through their academic studies can be applied beyond the classroom.

Workplace experiences such as co-op and internships placements are only one form of experiential learning opportunities that can be provided to students. Such opportunities are typically divided into three categories – **course focused, community focused, and work focused** – giving students hands-on experiences not only in the classroom, but also in the community and the workplace"

Experiential Education

- Combines direct experience with focused reflection.
- Builds on past knowledge and experiences.
- Requires active involvement in meaning construction.
- Encourages collaboration and exchange of ideas and perspectives.
- Can be course focused or in-class, community focused, or work focused.

The image below illustrates a subway line of these strategies and they are organized with the following sub-categories.
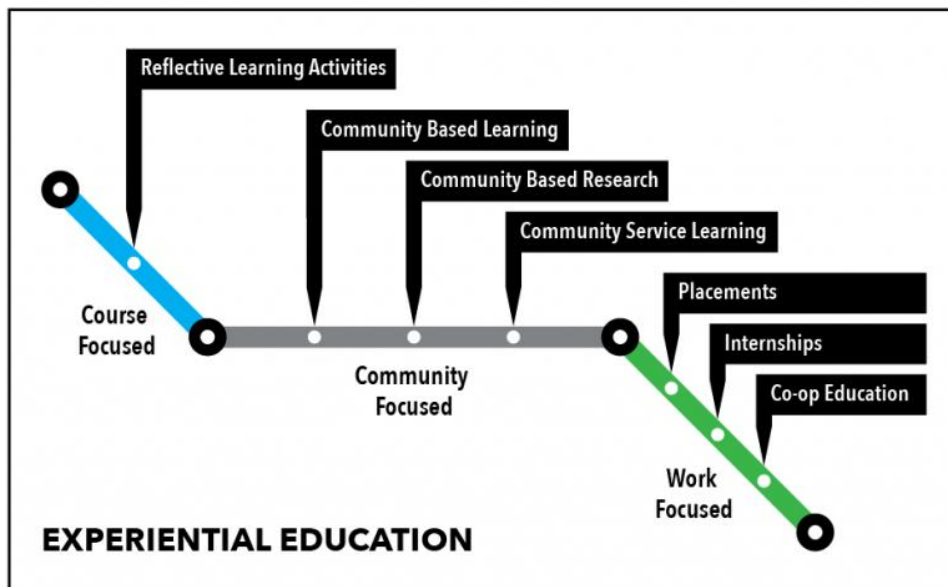

Diagram of experiential education strategies (Adapted from York University)

EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION STRATEGIES

Experiential Education can enhance students' learning through a range of strategies. These strategies can be organized into a spectrum, from strategies implemented within the classroom to strategies that take place in the community to strategies that take place in the work environment.

I) Course Focused   **II) Community Focused**   **III) Work Focused**

I) Course Focused

These are Experiential Education strategies implemented within a course or classroom. These strategies allow the students to explore an issue, reflect on concrete experiences, make connections between these experiences and background knowledge to theory and course content, and come up with generalizations and deeper understanding of the issue. There are various in-class learning activities that belong to this category, such as role play activities, case study, reflective portfolio, inviting guest speakers, arts-based learning, use of films/documentaries and media, concept mapping, research projects, simulation activities, workshops, and other.

II) Community Focused

These are Experiential Education strategies that connect what students learn in their courses to what they experience within the community.
These community focused strategies can be organized in the following three sub-categories: **1) Community Based Learning – 2) Community Based Research**
3) Community Service Learning

1- Community Based Learning	2- Community Based Research	3- Community Service Learning
Within this category students are provided with opportunities to make direct connections between the course content and community related experiences. These experiences range from observations and field notes on community events, to conducting interviews of community members and professionals, to field trips and visits to museums and sites of interest and relevance to their courses. In addition, this category includes any other international experiences built within the courses, as well as participation in exchange programs abroad. Students who are involved in traveling to other countries and immerse in their communities have the unique opportunity to learn authentically and at a more profound level about cultures, community histories, global development issues and international languages. For example, students may visit a country to practice and deepen their learning of a foreign language, or engage in activities that would allow them to acquire deep intercultural competence and understanding. Such community-international engagements should be credited and assessed through reflective and other assignments	This category includes engagement in research projects that result from the collaboration between the instructor of the course and community partners. Such research projects are taking place within the community and they are highly relevant to the community and community members.	Community Service learning provides the opportunity to the students to immerse in real-world experiences by applying knowledge acquired in their course and addressing community issues, enhancing thus their academic progress (Eyler, 2002). It is a pedagogy that is based on the experience. Learning takes place through the delivery of service to the community. Examples of Community Service Learning could be the work offered in a shelter or food bank, or accessibility services provided to students with learning disabilities in schools. Such community service benefits the community partners in a direct way. The benefits for students range from opportunities of experience in applying skills and knowledge to deepened understanding of populations that are vulnerable, or study of complex social issues, strengthened critical thinking and leadership skills, and other (Taylor and Raykov, 2014). Community service is in alignment with the course learning objectives and is incorporated into the course through the assessment strategies and the evaluation process.

III) Work Focused

Placements provide the opportunity to students to apply what they have learned, theories and concepts, into a practice-related environment and provide relevant reflections of such work. Usually, placements are linked to professional programs and are known as practicum or practica or field work, as in the case of Teacher Education programs, or Social Work, Nursing, Anthropology, Medicine, Law. Students are not being paid for their placement work, but they receive credit and, therefore, placements are evaluated. Students may complete their placement experience periodically and their attached courses provide opportunities for concrete reflections on the experience and remediation work if that is necessary. Community partners may be involved in the evaluation of students' performance in their placements.

Tips for Success

- Clearly articulate **learning outcomes**: How does the experiential activity connect to the learning outcomes of the course?

- Ensure students coming into the course understand that there is an experiential learning component and any additional **expectations** that will accompany this (i.e. expenses, time, and different kind of experience that might be challenging).

- **Integrate** experiential learning activities into the course in a holistic way (time, space, evaluation).

- Develop clear and transparent **evaluation processes and criteria.**

- Identify **potential risks** and ways to avoid them (may need to acquire consent forms from interview participants; may need to be exposed to weather conditions; students may be placed under stressful situations)

- **Equip** students with necessary knowledge and skills in order to participate in the experiential activity.

- Provide appropriate **time for reflection** on the experience and sharing of perspectives.

- **Collaborate** with faculty members on developing interactive experiential learning engagements for students combining perspectives from various courses.

Resources: Carleton University & Association for Experiential Education

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