Guidelines for assessment of experiential learning

This guide provides an introduction to experiential learning, summarizes several strategies for assessing experiential learning, and offers case studies with potential in-class applications.

What is Experiential Learning?

In its simplest form, experiential learning means learning from experience or learning by doing. Experiential education first immerses learners in an experience and then encourages reflection about the experience to develop new skills, new attitudes, or new ways of thinking.¹

Experiential learning can take many forms, including field trips, laboratory experiments, role playing, and work placements. All share common characteristics, including:²

Mixture of content and process: there should be a balance between the activities and the underlying content/theory.

Putting it into Practice

Here are some real-life examples of different experiential learning assessment tools put into practice, as described in the literature. One thing to note is that, while experiential learning opportunities may often occur in the field (work placements, community projects, field excursions, etc.), many of the assessment tools also translate well to in-class applications.

1. Science students participate in a field trip to Costa Rica to study biodiversity

Learning outcome: Demonstrate an ability to apply scientific theory to describe an environment. Assessment tool: Reflective Journals

Why and how it works: Students were asked to journal their experience daily. These journal activities are similar to field journals used by scientists to organize and document field observations. The process

from other classes) can be invited to observe the presentations and/or to participate by delivering their own. tudents can perform self-assessments of their work and

3. Law students participate in a full clinical model, offering legal advice to members of the public

Learning outcome: Improve drafting/writing skills while developing self-awareness of own approach to learning.

Assessment tool: Portfolio of practical work and reflections

Why and how it works: Students must include copies of all substantive written communications they have produced, and a reflective commentary which refers to three specific items (such as a letter of advice, a witness statement and a letter to an opposing party setting out a case) and which: (1) compares the different approaches the student took when preparing each of the three items, and (2) discusses the development of the student's drafting and writing skills throughout the year and his or her strengths and weaknesses in this area

reflection will make them more aware of how they learn. There is evidence that increased selfawareness of learning is correlated with better learning, so by engaging in reflection students are

In-class applications: Like reflective journals, reflective portfolios of work accomplished throughout the term or during a single project can be used effectively in a classroom setting. Portfolios can be used to track the progression of different types of written work (e.g., letters, lab reports, essays: outlines, drafts, commentary from peers, final products, self-assessments) and can even be used to create products for hypothetical scenarios (e.g., business plans, not-for-profit funding proposal, intake assessments and client records for social workers/ counsellors, etc.)

Checklists and rubrics

To provide feedback on journals and other methods of assess

instructors can develop a checklist or rubric. These tools have several benefits:

Articul

instructors have a common understanding of expectations for the assignment. Oriteria should be related to the desired learning outcomes what you want students to be able to know, do, or value as a result of the experience/assignment.

Permit students to self- or peer-assess their work prior to submitting it, potentially resulting in higher quality submissions.

Offer a systematic approach to providing feedback

Students can see their strengths and possible areas for improvement

A checklist is a straightforward and accessible way to communicate assignment expectations. It should list the criteria that would define an excellent assignment. These criteria should be described such that each can - or peer-assess prior to handing in

their work. An example checklist for a short written assignment, an op-ed, is below. [The checklist and rubric examples here are e -

Law. For the complete assignment description, consult the online Writing Toolkit.]

<u>Topic</u> Ourrent, newsworthy Related to the course Organization, Writing, & Mechanics The op-ed presents a clear, focused and original point of view Information is organized in a meaningful way (i.e. ideas follow a logical sequence) The language is appropriate for the purpose and the audience The length is appropriate

In its simplest form, a rubric is a list of assignment components with space for instructor comments:

	Comments	Grade:
Topic chosen		
Content of assignment		
Structure		
Manner in which		
assignment is written		
Response to another		

For a wealth of information and examples of checklists and rubrics, please consult suggested readings^{12,} ¹³ available through the McGill University Library.

Detailed sample rubrics for specific types of assessments similar to the case studies shared above: Reflective journals: <u>http://ar.cetl.hku.hk/am_rj.htm#6</u> (field biology); <u>http://www.rcampus.com/rubricshowc.cfm?code=LXW8B79&sp=yes</u> (dinical medicine);