



Advancing knowledge and skills through real-life workplace experiences

**EDUCATOR'S TOOLKIT**





## WHAT IS EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING?

Experiential learning opportunities are hands-on learning experiences that help students prepare for future employment. Examples of experiential learning could include a co-op placement, an internship, an apprenticeship, an extra-curricular activity, a volunteer experience, an industry professional presenting to a class, a field trip, or a job shadowing experience. It involves learning by doing, making connections to classroom theory,<sup>1</sup> and to career education and career life planning.

The experiential learning cycle that appears as a three-stage process, is a dynamic and highly personal process.

Three questions - **What?, So what?, and Now what?** - are associated with each stage of the process, as follows:

**Participate: What?** Students are immersed in an experience, acknowledging what they are doing, what they are thinking, and what they are feeling during the experience.

**Reflect: So what?** Students think about their experience, guided by reflective questions and prompts, and identify what they learned as a result of the experience - about themselves, other people, the world, their opportunities, or the subject of study.

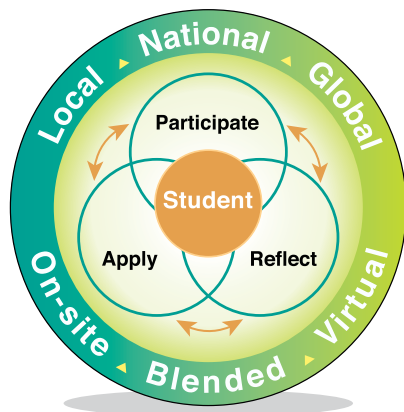
**Apply: Now what?** Students describe how their learning stimulates further inquiry; how it has influenced - or may influence - their decisions, opinions, goals, and plans; and what they might do differently if they have a similar experience in future.<sup>2</sup>

Facilitated reflection activities, whether led by parents, educators, or an employer, ensures students are able to identify their personal strengths, weaknesses, skills, and interests which all contribute to career decision making.

Experiential learning can also benefit educators by creating connections with employers in the community to stay current on industry demands and incorporate industry information into classroom activities.

This guide will provide you with an overview of the benefits of experiential learning and will provide you with templates for how you can incorporate it with your students.

### The Experiential Learning Cycle



Source: Adapted from Rolfe, Freshwater, & Jasper, 2001.

### TYPES OF EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LOCAL EMPLOYERS

- TOURS
- TAKE YOUR KID TO WORK DAY
- JOB SHADOWING
- MENTORING
- HIGH SCHOOL CO-OP
- WORK EXPERIENCE
- ONTARIO YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM (OYAP)

“The thing I appreciate most about working with students is the fresh perspectives they bring to the work. It has helped me challenge myself while getting to watch them develop their ideas, their perspectives, and their individual voices.”

Community Partner, Markham



## HOW CAN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING BENEFIT STUDENTS?

Those who have done volunteer work have a **higher chance of getting hired** compared to those who haven't volunteered.<sup>5</sup>

**27%**

“ The research co-op was a fantastic experience that allowed me to learn a vast amount of information. I learned the basics about neuroscience and through this, it gave me re-assurance to pursue a field in neurosurgery. ”

Student, York Catholic District School Board

“ I feel really great about experiential learning because it has helped me in so many ways. It has changed the way I view the business world. It has created skills that I've never had before. This experience has definitely made me think about my future and where I want to go in life. ”

Student, York Region District School Board

- Students are able to gain work experience before they begin a formal job search.
- Employers are often looking for candidates who have work experience as it shows that they have been in a work environment and have developed the skills needed to succeed in a job.
- Students are able to learn faster and better retain information when taught in the workplace.<sup>3</sup>
- Students may further develop problem solving and analytical skills resulting in improved classroom performance.
- Students often become increasingly motivated in their placement as well as in career decision making, and may be exposed to non-traditional career opportunities.<sup>4</sup>
- Students are able to learn about different jobs and industries of which they may not have previously been aware of.
- Students are able to develop business contacts and references. This network of people will be helpful for future career opportunities.

## Student Success



## RANGE OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### Short-Term (one hour to one day)

- Career talks/classroom visits
- Career fairs/career days
- Workplace tours
- Job shadowing /job twinning
- Take Our Kids to Work Day

### Medium-Term (about a month)

- Work experience
- Mentoring
- Project based learning

### Long-Term (a few months)

- Cooperative education (Co-op)
- Specialist High Skills Major
- Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP)

## HOW TO SUPPORT STUDENTS

### AS AN EDUCATOR

1. Start small - don't be afraid to try something new.
2. Bring real world problems into the classroom with industry related activities.
3. Ensure that students understand the learning outcomes of the activities and follow-up with reflective exercises that guide the student to identify their abilities and interests.
4. Consider the life experiences of the student and determine how you can best support their unique needs and abilities. Recognize barriers that the student may face and appropriately develop strategies to assist the student in overcoming them.
5. Encourage students to explore interests and take advantage of the opportunities that are available to them at school.
6. Look at curriculum content and identify how it applies to their work place or experiential learning activity.
7. Make sure that the employer and the student understand the purpose of the program and have appropriate expectations and preparedness.
8. Confirm that all necessary paperwork is completed by both the employer and the student.
9. Ensure that the job duties and planned tasks for the student are going to be challenging enough that they provide a meaningful learning experience.
10. Ensure that students are reflecting on their experiences. You can have students:
  - Deliver a presentation on what they learned during their placement, including new skills, techniques, and personal career insights (ex. whether they enjoyed the job);
  - Journal and take part in group discussions;
  - Develop a career action plan based on their identified strengths and weaknesses.
  - Encourage students to talk to their supervisor and co-workers to learn about what training and education is necessary for their careers.
  - Maintain up-to-date industry knowledge.
  - Document their learning experience in a portfolio (e.g., Career Cruising, My Blueprint Career Planner).
11. Ask for help! There are many resources and supports available in the community to help you.

“ This experience let me showcase my creative/artistic side. It helped me learn and expand my skills on the computer. It helped me find what my career pathway would be. ”

Student, York Region District School Board



## HOW TO IMPLEMENT EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN YOUR CLASSROOM

HERE ARE SOME IDEAS YOU CAN USE TO GET STARTED IN USING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING WITH YOUR STUDENTS:

“ My co-op placement at a local dental office has taught me a lot about the field of dentistry and could potentially be a field I pursue for a future career. ”

Student, York Catholic District School Board



### Student Success

“ I feel experiential learning has taught me many things about dealing with customers, time management and being in a workplace environment. Overall after this experience I feel I am ready for the workplace. ”

Student, York Region District School Board

- Show videos of Virtual Reality Workplace Experiences. YouTube *‘The Learning Partnership’* to see the videos they have developed.
- Arrange to take students on a tour of local companies. If possible, try to have an interactive or hands-on learning component to the day.
- Provide opportunities for your students to share about their volunteer experiences. Having engaging discussions around the skills they are using and developing through volunteering can help students connect these experiences to potential future career options.
- Invite an employer into your classroom to share their career journey or to teach a specific skill to your class.
  - Is there a sector your students are particularly interested in?
  - Is there a unique or new job that they would like to learn about?
  - Would any of your students' parents or your friends be willing to come in and share their career journey with your students?
  - Consider joining with a few other classes and have students rotate between employer talks!
- Consider creative ways of partnering with other classes or departments in your school. For example, could a math and construction class partner together to design and build a picnic table? Could a media class work with a music class to develop a music video?
- Encourage your students to take part in skills competitions or extra-curricular activities and share their experiences. Examples may include a robotics team, a math club, a sports team, musical groups, yearbook club, Skills Ontario events, etc.
- Ensure that your class is aware of the opportunities that are available to them through programs such as co-op, OYAP, Specialist High Skills Major and Dual Credit. If you are unsure of the details of these programs, see if a colleague can share information about them or explore opportunities for a visit from a Learning Consultant at the board level.
- Consider hosting an opportunity for your students to share their skills with other students. This could look like an in-class gallery to share art, poetry, construction projects, science experiments, music, etc. This would give your students an opportunity to educate other students.



## RESOURCES FOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

You may find that the following resources and organizations are helpful to you as you seek to implement experiential learning opportunities. Use these websites to access further information on-line.

- **Ontario Ministry of Education**
  - Community Connected Experiential Learning
  - Dual Credit Program
  - Specialist High Skills Major
- **Council For Experiential Learning**
- **The Learning Partnership**
- **Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP)**
- **Skills Ontario**
- **Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities**
  - Start an Apprenticeship
- **Workforce Planning Board of York Region**
  - Local Labour Market Resources
  - Experiential Learning Educator’s Toolkit
  - Experiential Learning Parent’s Guide
  - Experiential Learning Employer’s Guide
  - Work Ethics Assessment Toolkit
- **Future Building**

An annual event designed to introduce young career seekers to the building and construction industry
- **Ontario Ministry of Labour**
  - Worker Health and Safety Awareness in 4 Steps
- **York Link** *“Where Talent and Opportunity Intersect”*
- **York Region Chambers of Commerce**





## PREPARING FOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING



### GUEST SPEAKERS



Have students **research** the speaker, looking at their career and projects they have been a part of.



Have students **look up** the topic that will be talked about.



Students should write out **two questions** that they can ask the speaker.



Make sure that students have the opportunity to **ask questions**. If time runs out, provide a list of remaining questions for follow up from the guest speaker.



After the presentation, have students **discuss or write** about what they found to be the most interesting part of the presentation.



### FIELD TRIPS



Have the students **research** the location that they will be visiting.



**Inform the employer or tour guide** of anything specific that you would like covered while on the tour.



**Check with the location** to see if taking pictures is permitted during the tour.



Inquire about **specific dress codes** that need to be followed (ex. closed toed shoes or safety glasses in manufacturing facilities).



Review **safety rules and guidelines** for respect with your students before the trip or activity.



Have students write out **two questions** that they can ask the speaker.



After the field trip, have students **discuss or write** about what they found to be the most interesting part of the field trip.





# STUDENT SELF-ASSESSMENT

## PREPARING FOR YOUR PLACEMENT

Identify the skills and interests that can be used to describe **YOU** to an employer on your resume and during an interview.

### WHO AM I

- energetic
- well-organized
- a team player
- resourceful
- punctual
- a hard worker
- a quick learner
- patient
- creative
- friendly
- competent
- enthusiastic
- compassionate
- articulate
- dedicated
- open to new ideas
- honest
- adaptable
- capable
- bilingual
- adventurous
- inclusive



### I HAVE

- managed
- organized
- analyzed
- implemented
- researched
- directed
- trained
- improvised
- presented
- planned
- produced
- achieved
- accomplished
- made
- supervised
- worked with
- repaired
- adapted
- inspected
- solved
- specialized
- built
- designed
- created
- initiated
- led
- improved
- monitored
- invented
- participated
- guided
- coordinated
- developed
- sold
- administered
- illustrated
- updated
- coached
- reviewed
- programmed





## MY HOBBIES AND INTERESTS

- fishing
- gardening
- presenting
- sketching
- painting
- designing
- reading
- fundraising
- volunteering
- photography
- coaching
- building
- nature
- experimenting
- writing
- teaching
- playing an instrument
- leading a group
- talking with people
- selling
- playing with children
- fixing things
- acting/performing
- working with computers
- planning/organizing events
- sports/fitness
- travelling
- coding





## REFLECTING ON YOUR EXPERIENCE: CLASS ACTIVITY

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Describe the activity in your own words.

What was the most interesting thing you learned?

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What is a strength you identified in yourself?

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What jobs do you know of that are related to the activity you did?

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What part of the experience would you like to do again?

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What field/sector/industry are you most interested in and why?



## REFLECTING ON YOUR EXPERIENCE: WEEKLY JOURNAL

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Describe your week's activities.

What was the most interesting thing you learned?

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What is a strength you identified in yourself?

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What is a skill that you would like to improve on?

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What was valuable about the experience?



## REFLECTING ON YOUR EXPERIENCE: FINAL JOURNAL

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Describe your experience.

What was your greatest accomplishment?

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What was the most interesting thing you learned and why?

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What personal strengths did you develop?

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What skills would you like to work on?



## REFLECTING ON YOUR EXPERIENCE: WEEKLY JOURNAL (continued)

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What was the most valuable part of this experience?

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How did you add value to the workplace?

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Would you consider this work as a future career, why or why not?



## REFERENCES

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