Unlocking the Career Development Value within Experiential Learning

Literature Search & Abstract
Approach, Findings and Results

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Introduction

This literature search was part of the information collecting phase of the CERIC-funded project, "Unlocking the Career Development Value within Experiential Learning" conducted by the team at OneLifeTools. For more project information, see : https://ceric.ca/projects/unlocking-the-career-development-value-within-experiential-learning/

The literature search focused on defining reflective practice and the key elements that make it effective for career development in the context of experiential learning. This document summarizes our approach and presents our major findings. We also provide a list of all literature examined, in three categories: English-Core articles, English-Peripheral articles, French articles. After an initial overview, we define high-quality reflective practice, identify its key elements and sort the reflective process into three stages essential for impactful practice: design, implementation and assessment. We also suggest incorporating career development into these stages. This literature search draws on a detailed project report submitted to CERIC in 2021. The report emphasized the following guideline for practitioners, faculty, staff and reflective practice designers:

" *No matter what subject you teach or program you lead, you can and should connect experiential learning to universal career development outcomes through reflective practice design.*

From report on Unlocking the Career Development value of Experiential Learning, CERIC-OneLifeTools project.

2021

Overview

The benefits of reflective practice in education and professional practice are well documented, mainly through qualitative research. Benefits include better student performance, engagement and retention; improved knowledge translation and optimization of feedback and supervision; increased effectiveness in planning professional and personal development; enhanced ability to identify soft skills, life skills - such as decision-making, goal setting, problem-solving and the ability to integrate multiple concepts- and to communicate attributes to gain employment; greater job satisfaction; and enriched professional life (Ashby, 2006; Brookfield, 1995, 2021; Dewey, 1933; Freeman et al., 2014; Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario [HEQCO], 2016; Mezirow, 1991; Moon, 2004; Piaget, 1971; Prince, 2004; Sattler, 2011; Sergeant et al., 2009; Schon, 1983; Thejll-Madsen, 2018; Wagner, 2006; Wald et al., 2012; Wegner et al., 2015).

One major challenge to reflection is the belief that every learner is always reflecting, when in reality he or she is doing something else. For instance, "while a diary can be reflective, writing down what has happened on a particular day without questioning 'why it has happened' and 'what it means' is not reflective" (Thejll-Madsen, 2018). This became evident in the findings of our resource scan and key informant interviews. **While, the benefits of reflective practice are well understood, just what constitutes high-quality reflective practice is not. Similarly, practitioners rarely make effective connections to career development. We address this gap in the literature. Furthermore, evidence suggests that reflection can be taught and people can improve their reflective abilities** (Carson & Fisher, 2006; Grossman, 2009).
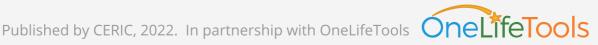
What is Reflective Practice?

Kolb (1984) connected reflective practice to successful experiential learning, stating that encouraging the student to reflect on his or her experience is necessary to extract meaningful elements and incorporate them into a personal knowledge base. Without this reflective time to purposefully debrief the experience, student learning is less likely to become conscious or lasting. Reflective practice is variously described in the literature:

Many definitions signal that reflective practice is a purposeful, active, critical examination of experiences - both positive and negative - and of ourselves (Thejll-Madsen, 2018). It is a tool that enables theory and practice to inform one another (Thompson & Thompson, 2008).

Reflective practice can take place spontaneously during an experience, when reflection is used to adapt to a current situation (Beard & Wilson, 2013). This is known as reflection - in - action (Schon, 1983). It can also take place after an experience, usually as structured

reflection (Schon, 1983) -- referred to as reflection-on-action. Some practitioners engage in reflection before an experience -- called reflection-for-action. Reflective practice can also occur in a variety of teaching and learning contexts. In turn, the educator becomes more critically reflective of their own work (Brookfield, 1995, 2021).

The depth of reflection can vary. It can be **single loop,** which connects experience to theoretical knowledge using thoughtful retrospection. The single loop does not consider personal influences. **Double-loop** reflection, however, focuses on challenging one's role and contribution in learning environments, while considering personal influences, beliefs, attitudes or actions (HEQCO, 2016). In either case, reflection must be critical, not simply descriptive, to be effective (McRae & Johnston, 2016).
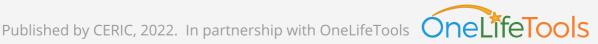
Reflection can be **extrinsically** motivated and focused on external aspects of experience -- referred to as surface-level reflection. Alternatively, it can be **intrinsically** motivated and applied to self and real-world context (HEQCO, 2016).

Reflection **can also take a hierarchical approach** that considers different levels of cognition and familiarity with reflective practice on the part of both practitioner and learner. Both the DEAL Model for Critical Reflection (Ash & Clayton, 2004) and ICE Model (Fostaty Young & Wilson, 2000) do this.

Evidence suggests that a mix of individual and group settings for reflective practice is most effective. Examples include reflecting independently, with other learners, course staff such as instructors and coordinators or employer partners (HEQCO, 2016).

However reflection is practiced, the **goal of reflection is transformation** (Mezirow, 1997): to make meaning of experiences and deepen our self-understanding (Thejll-Madsen, 2018), converting impulsive action to intelligent action (Dewey, 1933). We accomplish this by questioning current practices and assumptions as we experience, using reflection to inform future actions and beliefs (Thejll-Madsen, 2018). We further enhance self-understanding by deliberately engaging in problem-solving (Mezirow, 1991, 1997); and by using metacognition -- an awareness of one's own thought processes that **understands the patterns behind them** (Johnson, 2013). The outcome of reflection is improved problem solving (Loughran, 1996), and knowledge which is in continual development, shaped by its ongoing relationship with experience (Kinsella, 2007).

What are the key elements for Reflective Practice success?

Reflective practice should ideally be consistent and continuous. The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (2016) has identified the following precursors and conditions that make reflective practice successful in post-secondary experiential learning, specifically Work-integrated Learning (WIL):

The individual:

- Is typically involved with an unfamiliar, new or complex experience;
- Is open and eager to reflect on experiences;
- Iincorporates personal changes and consistently sets new goals

The environment:

- Should encourage autonomy of the learner, appropriately increasing workload or project challenges;
- Should promote consistent and appropriate assessments with constructive feedback, and promote opportunities to collaborate with others

Reflective activities:

- Should draw on personal experience, while being situated within the broader community;
- Should be guided by a deliberate connection between theory and practice;
- Should emphasize inductive (e.g., experience followed by academic learning) and deductive (e.g., academic learning followed by experience) reflections
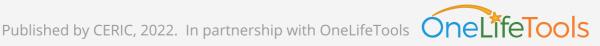
Reflective Practice Design:

When describing the process of reflection, most of the literature and resources found in the online scan refer to the relatively recent DEAL Model for Critical Reflection. Although developed in a service-learning program, its general features can support reflection on a range of educational experiences (Ash & Clayton, 2004).

The DEAL Model for Critical Reflection includes three steps:

- Objective and comprehensive Description of an experience
- Analysis/Examination/Evaluation considering learning objectives
- Articulation of Learning outcomes

Using this model, Ash and Clayton (2009) advised first identifying desired learning goals and outcomes. Practitioners can then simultaneously design reflection strategies and activities to align with these outcomes.

The highly respected DEAL model originally focused on three categories of learning objectives, based on service-learning: personal, civil and academic. We suggest expanding this model in the next section to include career development objectives in experiential learning.
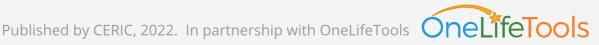
Examples of other models that explain the reflection process are "What? So What? Now What", as cited in Rolfe et al. (2011), for its simplicity to support reflection both on and in (during) experience, and "The Reflection Cycle" (Ryan & Ryan, 2013). The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (2016) cites additional frameworks for reflection before experience, many of which formed the basis for more recent models.

Reflective Practice and Career Development within Experiential Learning

There is a dearth of literature that both integrates reflective practice with experiential learning and discusses career development specifically. Although peer-reviewed articles exist about the benefits of reflective practice for working professionals, **literature focusing on career exploration, planning or development in post-secondary level experiential learning programs, and the potential for reflective practice to contribute, was a challenge to find.** Career-related aspects of the programs in the articles reviewed are limited to career readiness, development of soft skills, identifying employability skills, building a resume and/or preparing for placement or job interviews (Andrews & Ramji, 2020). Tiessan et al. (2018) suggested providing more guidance to students on how to articulate what they learn through experiential learning programs in ways that resonate with employers (DuRose & Stebleton, 2016). In many instances, career-related objectives are only self-identified by the learner, not in partnership with program staff or workplace supervisors.

Although these activities contribute somewhat to establishing a career path, opportunities remain for broader career exploration and integration of these activities into reflective practice models for experiential learning programs. I**deally, specific career-oriented reflection questions and explicit identification of career development objectives and outcomes should be integrated in the design and assessment phases of reflective practice** (Risner, 2015). Development of these objectives should be done in partnership with learners, program staff and workplace supervisors. Maguire (2018) recommended that developers consider adding reflective practice elements to further strengthen the understanding of career opportunities for students, as well as mechanisms for monitoring and assessing these elements, to improve career understanding in an experiential course.

Implementation of Reflective Practice:

HEQCO (2016) identified the following instructional practices that strengthen student reflection:

- Encourage the use of advanced vocabulary to promote rich and exact reflections;
- Ensure appropriate timing;
- Attend to the individual learning styles of students;
- Provide guiding questions and activities;
- Structure appropriate learning environments.

A wide range of activities have been used to facilitate reflection, including pre-experience and post-experience surveys, structured dialogue (e.g., mentor-to-mentee, class discussions, online chats), writing activities (e.g., worksheets, case studies, essays, journaling, question posing, narrative), acting (e.g., storytelling in front of audience), visual arts (e.g., graphic designs, poster presentations, video), and behavioural modeling (HEQCO, 2016). Our online resource scan also found many additional resources to support implementation, discussed in the report, under the heading "Resource Scan Findings."
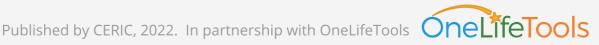
Using a diverse range of activities will avoid reflection fatigue. Using a reflective map will ensure diversity of activities, while also covering the range of reflective practice (Eyler, 2002). See Practitioner's Audit & Guide in the Appendix for an example.

Ash and Clayton (2009) recommended adapting instruction and activities as needed, based on trial and error, feedback received (from students, instructors, workplace supervisors, peers and other practitioners, etc.) and consistent alignment with learning outcomes.

Assessment of Reflective Practice:

Assessment of reflective practice helps to measure advancement in the capacity to think critically over time; this is an important aspect of reflective practice that is often ignored. Assessment needs to be flexible enough to accommodate different topics, contexts and formats, since reflective activities are often personalized to each student and learning environment (Kember et al., 2008). Whalen and Paez (2019) offered practitioners a rigorously developed and piloted framework with accompanying supportive resources to assess student reflections. Kember et al.'s (2000) questionnaire and Ash and Clayton's (2009) DEAL Model for Reflection consider improving the quality of reflection over time. Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (2016) also lists a number of models for effectively assessing reflective practice in medical and other contexts: Hatton and Smith's (1995) levels of reflection, Wong et al.'s (1995) reflective

journals coding scheme, King and Kitchener's (1994) reflective judgement model of intellectual development, Boenink et al.'s (2004) observer-rated instrument for measuring reflection in medical practice, and Mamede and Schmidt's (2004) nature of reflection in medical practice questionnaire.

Effective feedback from practitioners and/or supervisors on students meaning making optimizes high impact reflective practice (University of Iowa, 2021).

Assessment rubrics: Our online resource scan also found useful rubrics, including University of Iowa's Using Reflection for Assessment; Carleton's sample rubric for experiential learning; and Brock University's checklist criteria for evaluating reflections. Brock's checklist is especially helpful if a mode of assessment simpler than a rubric is needed. Queen's University's Experiential Learning Hub Faculty Toolkit provides a sample assessment rubric for the DEAL Model for Critical Reflection. Links to these resources are available in the Online Resource Scan Table in the Appendix.
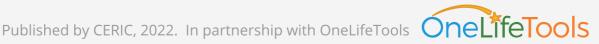
Lastly, we acknowledge that career development and employability are not the only focus of reflective practice in experiential learning, but one domain of reflection to ensure a holistic and meaningful learning experience as envisioned by Tiessan (2018) and LaFever (2016).

In conclusion, reflective practice strongly enhances experiential learning in the career development arena. Broader recognition of its strengths will positively impact the field. And, introducing a clear career development agenda into the existing range of experiential learning activities will further benefit students.

Literature Search Approach

- Preparation: we identified background reading material that provides a quick overview of reflective practice and established key terminology associated with it. Useful sources included the CERIC Experiential Learning and Career Development Literature Search (2016-2019); University of Edinburgh literature review on reflection (Thejll-Madsen, 2018); and Chapter 3 (titled "Reflection") of Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario [HEQCO] -- A Practical Guide for WIL -- Effective Practices to Enhance the Educational Quality of Structured Work Experiences Offered through Colleges and Universities;
- Key search terms: experiential learning; reflective practice; career development;
- Alternative search terms: reflection; employability; career; critical thinking;
- Additional parameters for selecting resources: Canadian resources were prioritized, then US and then international; post-2016 were prioritized, then prior-2016;
- Sources for search: University of Toronto libraries; relevant references cited in resources found as part of the online resource scan (part of the information -

collecting phase of this project) were also added to the list of literature search results;

- Number of literature documents identified: 86 English and 22 French. A complete list of the articles and reference documents found, categorized for easy reference, is provided below.

Acknowledgments

Literature Search Results

ENGLISH CORE ARTICLES (specific to our search topic)

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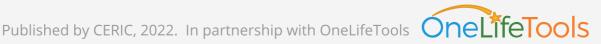http://archive.sciendo.com/SSR/ssr.2010.xix.issue-3-4/v10237-011-0025-8/v10237-011-0025-8.pdf

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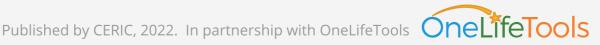
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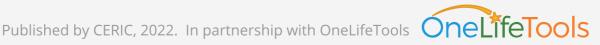
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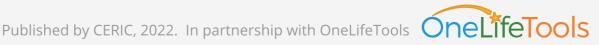http://experience.uwo.ca/pdfs/faculty_resources_and_examples/HEQCO_WIL_Guide_ENG_ACC.pdf

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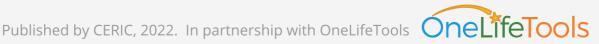What is your Ikigai? The View Inside Me.
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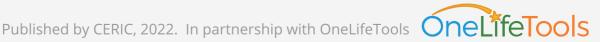Reflection in service-learning: Making meaning of experience. Educational Horizons, 7(4), 179-185.
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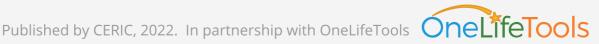https://futurenewbrunswick.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/FRNB_EmployerToolkit-Booklet_Final.pdf

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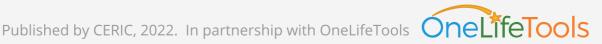
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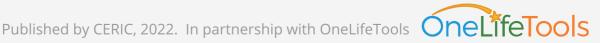Evidence, Articles, Resources & Presentations.
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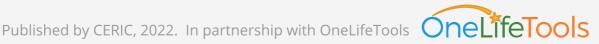**Schön, D. (1983).**
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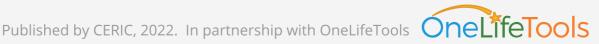Quality of Work Term Experiences, Co-op Student Perspective.
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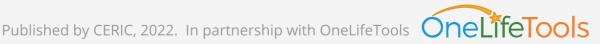
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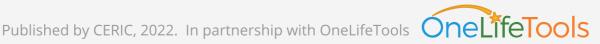**Le Boucher, C., Lameul, G., & Pentecouteau, H. (2018).**
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