Chapter 18

Successful Transitions From College to Career (C2C)

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ABSTRACT

For many minority, first generation, and other under-represented students at two small universities, graduation and a successful career seem almost out of reach. Lack of preparation, lack of confidence, and lack of career-focused experiential learning opportunities leave students feeling frustrated and result often in their early departure from higher education. This newly developed and piloted experiential learning educational program provides opportunities that allow students to grow and develop inside and outside the classroom. Through community building and regional partnerships—enmeshed in a visible number of academic departments campus wide—the researchers endeavored to promote engaged and active learning. Engaged, active learning encourages students’ connections with college resources with diversified programming that includes (a) internships, (b) service learning communities, (c) experiential immersions, (d) undergraduate research platforms, and (e) capstone projects, all of which directly correlate with increased retention and persistence in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Experiential learning is educating through first-hand experience. These experiences help students to complete foundational preparation for their chosen careers, reinforcing course content and theory. Students learn through student- rather than instructor-centered experiences by doing, discovering, reflecting, and applying. Through these experiences, students develop communication skills and self-confidence and strengthen decision-making skills by responding to and solving real-world problems and processes. Whether emerging sophomore or graduating senior, students who fully participate in experiential learning immersion opportunities are connected with their interests and major fields of study. Both faculty and students alike discover intrinsically stimulating methods of learning beyond the classroom lecture format.

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Many of those engaged in professional learning applications have acquired a broad understanding of the work of David Kolb. Kolb’s highly influential book, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, first published in 1984, was an innovative, formalized practice theretofore undeveloped. Kolb’s ideas then, as now, have dramatically impacted design schemas and developmental expansionistic views on lifelong-learning models. Yet, of course, Kolb’s research, subsequent development, and active model constructions have ancient roots.

Clearly, from ancient scholars to today, professional educators can trace a direct lineage. Acting as Mobius inversion coordinates on a graph, these learning-oriented dictums ultimately substantiate the axiomatic educational inversion: Experience, as learning—and conversely—learning, as experience. In his *Cone of Experience*, Edgar Dale (1969) suggested, although not without dispute, that we remember 10% of that which we read (visual), 20% of that which we hear (auditory), 30% of that which we see (visual), 50% of that which we hear and see (auditory+visual), and 70% of that which we say and write (auditory+tactile). However, when we integrate all learning preferences, we remember 90% of that which we coalesce through, demonstrating our preference for activated experiential participation for learning (Dale, 1969). Nonetheless, the case for experiential participation and experiential learning was assuredly expanded by David Kolb.

**BACKGROUND**

Since 1984, David Kolb’s *Experiential Learning Theory* (ELT) has been a leading influence in the development of learner-centered pedagogy in management and business. It forms the basis of Kolb’s own *Learning Styles’ Inventory* and those of other authors including Honey and Mumford (2000). It also provides powerful underpinning for the emphasis, nay insistence, on reflection as a way of learning and the use of reflective practice in the preparation of students for business, management, and various other professions.

The concept of experiential learning explores cyclical pattern for all formative learning from experience through reflection and conceptualization to action incorporating not only expansive experience but also summative metacognition. Kolb’s *Experiential Learning Cycle* now forms the heart of many training and learning events. It also describes the process for recording continuous professional development, through taking time to capture, record, and implement learning in daily, routine working-life activities. The model has been adapted and used in many ways.

David Kolb’s work has influenced the ongoing work of many in the learning, development, and education fields. The National Society for Experiential Education (2004) is a membership association and networking resource operation promoting experience-based approaches to teaching and learning. The society’s site has an extensive resource library. With aims to construct productive, positive ends, the society “contribute[s] to making a more just and compassionate world by transforming education” one learning experience at a time (The National Society for Experiential Education, 2004).