

RESEARCH CONNECTION

Exploring experiential education and post-secondary student employability skills: A twenty-year review

By Cora Dupuis, M.Ed.



Why this research is important

Over the past decade, Canadian leaders from across all sectors of industry, education, government, and student governance have called for an expansion in experiential education opportunities for post-secondary students, united in their belief that such experiences will better equip students with the employability skills needed to succeed in the workplace.

But where did this collective harmonization come from? What underpins this commonly-held belief? These unasked questions motivated me to delve into the existing

What you need to know

Experiential education is a rich, multi-dimensional concept encompassing philosophical, practical, and pedagogical approaches to facilitate learning. Recently, the popular narrative has conflated the benefits of experiential education, almost exclusively, with skill-building.

This project analyzes twenty years of peer-reviewed, published research conducted at Canadian post-secondary institutions that examines the link between student participation in experiential education and their subsequent development of specific employability skills.

research on experiential education and employability skills among post-secondary students in Canada.

How the research was conducted

I engaged in a comprehensive interdisciplinary literature review of refereed, academic studies published between January 1997 and December 2017 that met two criteria:

1. focused on post-secondary student participation in experiential education programs or courses in Canada; and

- assessed the development of any of five specific skills: communication, critical thinking, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability.

What the researcher found

The search yielded 453 studies, and of the 42 that met the aforementioned inclusion criteria, the results show *promising* evidence that experiential education programs or courses at the post-secondary level do promote the development of communication and teamwork skills. Beyond this initial finding, this small number of studies revealed multiple gaps in the research. For example, the majority of studies used self-assessment tools to measure skill development, there were no studies conducted at colleges and non-U15 institutions, and there were no studies that considered student demographics as a critical aspect of their participation in experiential education and their skill development. These gaps point to new opportunities for future research.

Also, based on this thesis' literature review, I created the Experiential Education 3P Model, which visually explains the interconnected relationship between the philosophical, practical, and pedagogical aspects of experiential education.

How this research can be used

This research is a preliminary exploration of what scholars know about the connection between experiential education and employability skills. Though some promising evidence has been uncovered, the research suggests that more Canadian research should be directed on this topic.

Further to that, this work is a launchpad; future research needs to go beyond my original questions to instead address the gaps mentioned above. The more we know about the most effective ways to deliver a variety of experiential education programs to the greatest number of

students in the most inclusive and accessible ways possible, the more students will benefit.

About the researcher

Cora Dupuis joined Brandon University in August 2019 as the Co-operative Education Coordinator. As a former co-op student herself, she knows first-hand the value of these experiences and passionately advocates to increase access to them. That is why she has helped expand the number of Arts and Science majors with co-op as well as double the number of students and employers participating in the program.

She is currently leading two research projects with the Rural Development Institute, and every summer, she teaches the Work Term I, II, and III courses. She also serves as a member of a number of committees, including the BU/BUSU Work-Study Program Grant Selection Committee and the Brandon Chamber of Commerce Workforce Alignment Committee.

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