The President’s Teaching & Learning Scholars Project
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Investigating Experiential/Applied Learning
in Kinesiology and Health Studies
Phase II – A Student Perspective

Faculty of Kinesiology and Health Studies

Principle Researcher: Roz Kelsey
Research Associate: Bonnie Cummings-Vickaryous
Supported by: Dean Craig Chamberlin
**Background**

This study was the second phase in a two-phased project. Support was gratefully received in 2007-2008 from what is now known as the President’s Teaching and Learning Scholars Project for the initial phase [Investigating Experiential Learning in Kinesiology and Health Studies – A Faculty Perspective (Phase I)] of this project. Originally, this project was initiated by a number of Kinesiology and Health Studies (KHS) faculty members who showed genuine interest in investigating the concept of experiential learning. It was willingness on the part of KHS faculty that allowed for an exploration into the meaning and provision of experiential learning opportunities in the KHS Faculty through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The detailed results of Phase I of this study are available directly through the Principle Researcher and on-line through the University of Regina Centre for Teaching and Learning ([http://www.uregina.ca/ctl/assets/files/Roz_Kelsey-Phase_I_Final_Submission.pdf](http://www.uregina.ca/ctl/assets/files/Roz_Kelsey-Phase_I_Final_Submission.pdf))

*For the purpose of this report, a brief review the findings of Phase I will be included concurrently with those found in Phase II for comparative purposes.*

**Definition of Issue**

It was the investigator’s view that although valuable information was gleaned from faculty members in Phase I of this project, it was necessary to give consideration to student perceptions and opinions on experiential learning meanings and opportunities within the Faculty of Kinesiology and Health Studies.

The purpose of Phase II of this project, Investigating Experiential Learning in Kinesiology and Health Studies – a Student Perspective was to investigate the perceptions of experiential education opportunities of students enrolled in classes offered by the Faculty of Kinesiology and Health Studies. Examples of experiential learning offered in KHS classes were solicited along with an attempt to uncover perceived meaning of it.

The anticipated outcomes of this project included uncovering a sense of what students believed experiential learning opportunities to be, examples of these opportunities offered in KHS classes and how often these opportunities were presented to them. Along with this was the attempt to uncover the current perceptions of experiential learning along with perceived merit of experiential education by students enrolled in KHS classes.
**Project Summary**

Classes offered by KHS at the time of this investigation were identified from which students were recruited for participation. These classes were chosen to represent the three streams offered in KHS (Sport and Recreation Administration, Adapted Physical Activity and Fitness and Lifestyle) at the time of the study. Visits to these classes were made by the principle researcher and a research associate to solicit participation in the project.

A written questionnaire was created based on the targeted outcomes outlined above. A total of 23 questionnaires were completed by students who agreed to participate. These questionnaires were used for comparative purposes during data analysis only. No formal discourse analysis was performed.

Eight focus groups were conducted with participants involving 9 – 12 participants in each. Focus group questions and discussions were audio and visually recorded. Questions posed were created based on anticipated outcomes of the project. The responses were transcribed verbatim using Vertalink, a U.S. based private company offering transcription services. Data analysis of these transcriptions followed a systematic process of categorization based on the structure assumed by the interview questions. Identical questions (excluding probes and feeder discussions) were asked in both Phase I and II of the study and are as follows:

- How do students (and faculty) define experiential learning?
- What are the benefits and challenges associated with offering and assuming experiential learning opportunities in KHS classes?
- What type of experiential learning opportunities are currently offered to you (by you) in KHS classes?

**Project Results**

*Understanding of Experiential Learning:*

KHS Faculty view:

- There is a lack of common understanding and agreement concerning concepts related to experiential learning. Not unlike current peer reviewed literature would suggest, it is very difficult to extrapolate one succinct meaning of experiential learning from a group as diverse as those represented in the Faculty of Kinesiology and Health Studies.
- One common understanding of experiential learning articulated by most faculty involved in this study was that it is understood as learning that occurs through participating in or observing an activity.
• Inconsistencies occurred in defining experiential learning when considering how it relates to the attainment of knowledge. Some faculty members that viewed experiential learning as a way to gain new knowledge whereas others believed students required previous knowledge.

• To note (as an interesting aside): few faculty members made any mention of reflection as a practice of experiential learning.

KHS student view:

• Experiential learning is commonly understood by students as learning that occurs through participating in or observing an activity.

• As was the case with faculty understanding of experiential learning, there was an inconsistency among students with respect to the role of gaining knowledge. Some students that were interviewed saw experiential learning as a way to gain new knowledge. They believed no prior knowledge related to the topic was necessary in order to engage in experiential learning. Conversely, others believed that they could have prior knowledge as long as the knowledge was extended through the experiential opportunity.

• Experiential learning opportunities were defined through a wide variety of examples that ranged from class discussions to fieldwork placements.

• Interestingly and of significance, some students commented on the importance of reflection which was notably absent in faculty definitions of experiential learning.

Challenges of providing experiential learning opportunities

KHS faculty views

• Faculty members believed that providing experiential learning opportunities to students requires much preparation and time during class which can be difficult considering the size of required curriculum content in many classes.

• Scheduling of appropriate space and time required for offering experiential learning opportunities can be very challenging. It was mentioned that not every class has assigned labs or practicum components that might more easily facilitate these experiences.

• Large class size was also identified by KHS faculty members as a challenge or barrier to delivering experiential learning opportunities.

KHS Student views

• Similarly to faculty views, students taking classes offered by KHS believed that experiential learning opportunities require much time and preparation by faculty members and this may be why more of these types of opportunities are not more readily available or offered during the regular semester.

• It was also suggested that the amount of material covered, in introductory classes in particular, increases the difficulty for experiential learning opportunities to be offered on a more regular basis.
Examples of Experiential Learning Opportunities Available in KHS Classes

KHS faculty views
- Assignments
- Seminars
- Discussions
- Exam questions
- Laboratories

KHS student views
- ‘Mock’ assignments
- Case studies
- Seminars
- Discussions
- Practicum opportunities
- Laboratories

Future Research and Reflections for Practice

It would be an interesting process to compare and contrast further the similarities and inconsistencies of faculty and student views of experiential learning opportunities in the Faculty of Kinesiology and Health Studies. This summary report was a preliminary attempt at this but this effort would certainly require more time and effort to review the richer nuances of the conversations held with each participant group. Raw data is still being stored and is available for this process should time and resources become available.

If experiential learning opportunities are deemed an important component of learning for Kinesiology and Health Studies students by administration of the Faculty, the following recommendations for practices are proposed:

- Workshops or seminars need to be provided to KHS faculty to reveal the disparity between faculty and students with regard to understanding common characteristics of experiential learning. What we think as a Faculty we are offering students in terms of experiential learning opportunities may in fact not be perceived as such by the students themselves.
- The KHS administration needs to be made aware of the challenges faced by teaching faculty in providing experiential learning opportunities in the face of large class sizes and pressures for what can often be excessive curriculum agendas.
- Resources and systems of acknowledgement need to be identified to facilitate the inclusion of experiential learning opportunities if we hope to see efforts made in this area.
• Provision of instructional/professional development opportunities to faculty on experiential based teaching strategies to KHS faculty would be helpful, particularly if these were delivered in collaboration with educational seminars for students.