2 Bringing experience-based education together at our institutions: A focus on distinct outcomes, shared attributes and a coherent narrative

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ABSTRACT

Institutions seek to meet demands for more work-integrated learning (WIL) and experience-based education (EE) options yet face confusion regarding "what" and "how much" they already offer. Offerings are de-centralized and not reported as discrete models. CEWIL provides some guidelines on WIL, however, many institutions need to determine what is 'in *their* collective EE tent.' The challenge of defining and determining how best to promote, support, monitor and report on this is daunting and sometimes divisive (Johnston & Sator, 2017). Building on existing quality frameworks, this chapter proposes a Purpose and Outcomes Driven approach (POD) that enables institutions to develop coherent narratives and shared understandings regarding their offerings in meaningful ways. The POD framework focuses on shared quality attributes and unique outcomes across model types, helping link each model's purpose to student, institutional, and other stakeholders' outcomes and providing the ability to report on outcomes by their shared purpose.

Keywords*: experience-based education; work-integrated learning; purpose and outcomes*

INTRODUCTION

Many institutions around the world offer opportunities for students to learn from direct, hands-on experiences, often off-campus and beyond the classroom. For example, most professional programs include internships, articling, practica, preceptorships and so on as part of the academic requirements for graduation. Study abroad programs such as field schools and study tours have grown exponentially as options within a degree or diploma experience. Service learning and other community based programming is commonly embedded in many course curricula. Learning-living communities in residence halls take on many community based projects over the course of a year as part of a co-curricular program, and many forms of work-integrated learning (co-operative education, apprenticeships, work experiences, etc.) are proliferating in the post-secondary milieu.

Experience-based education (EE) programs may vary in terms of their lengths, the degree of immersion in the host learning environment, their primary purpose(s) of the program, the learning outcomes that are sought, and the degree to which the institution is involved in design, integration, and assessment. The nexus of all EE is the belief that direct, immersive, and guided experiences (Itin, 1999) can provide powerful learning opportunities. Done well, many of these experiences are reported to be transformative in that participants' assumptions and beliefs are often disrupted during the acquisition of new knowledge and understandings. Through exploration and critical reflection on those "disruptive moments," significant changes can result in the learner's perspectives and subsequent behaviors (Mezirow, 1991).

CHALLENGES IN DEFINING WIL

As institutions (colleges, universities and technical institutes) struggle to meet the growing demands for experience-based options, there is confusion at many institutions regarding "what" and "how much" experience they are already offering. In most cases, experience-based offerings are decentralized in both their development and delivery (Johnston & Sator, 2017), and with a few exceptions, are not reported on as discrete models of education. Some models such as co-operative education, apprenticeships, professional program practica and service learning may be more organized and more coordinated

than others, but there are few institutions that centrally manage *all* forms of experience-based offerings. There is a significant amount of EE that is delivered much more informally, often under the direction of a very engaged instructor or professor who believes in the value of these experiences, yet often do not have access to support systems or resources that would assist them with experiential learning and teaching.

Challenges arise in understanding EE in higher education institutions because many "have used different terminology, expectations, learning outcomes and assessment requirements" (Hay, 2020, p. 51) to describe their experience-based offerings. It is easy to get caught up in debates on definitions and taxonomies (Sattler, 2011), which adds to the difficulty of the task, especially in politically charged environments where there may be a fear of the institution supporting one experiential model over another in its efforts to enhance productivity. This leaves institutions facing not only the challenge of defining their EE, but also how to report exactly what (and how much) they are doing in this area, much less be able to provide evidence regarding the quality and effectiveness of these offerings (Johnston & Sator, 2017).

The issues that surface with the slippery slope of differing terminology in the field of experience-based education is firstly, how institutions choose to define it (e.g., experiential education versus experiential learning, curricular vs co-curricular, etc.). Each institution may be guided by internal purposes that are shaped by philosophical and political orientations to meet institutional missions and visions, academic plans, and in some cases the definitions are also shaped by government mandates. Most often however there is no singular, institutional framework to assist administrators and course developers in their design, naming, and tracking of such programs. This is typically left at the course or program level, likely based upon their personal or professional experiences. The second challenge for institutions is how to assess the attributes of quality experience-based offerings. Lastly, institutions are also tasked with finding/developing a common language with which to discuss the various models of EE, their unique purposes and outcomes and how they contribute to the overall learning goals of the various programs within which they are offered.

At the global level, there is no one overarching and agreed upon theoretical framework to define EE. As such, common attributes of EE and the diverse models mean many different things to many different people. Historical and contemporary literature shows that definitions are often conflated (Johnston & Sator, 2017), which results in misunderstandings between stakeholders in institutions. Given the plethora of definitions, attributes and taxonomies of different models, the field of EE faces challenges. For example, it is difficult to understand process and outcomes of a program, conduct research, report on participation, and plan strategic growth of EE if everyone is defining things in different ways. Further, institutions may find it difficult to report on quality and participate in quality assurance processes, or report to external bodies regarding outcomes.

These definitional and model challenges extend into work-integrated education, a sub-category of EE. Work-integrated learning (WIL) is a term used to describe experiential education that connects a program of study to the workplace (Sattler et al., 2011). Related to WIL, Zegwaard and Rowe (2019) state that there has been valuable work completed by Smith et al. (2016) in investigating and determining quality aspects of WIL, but they point out more work is required. Various researchers have attempted to create typologies (see, e.g., Groenewald et al., 2011; Rowe et al., 2012) in order to better understand the boundaries between, and advantages/disadvantages of different approaches (e.g., placement, non-traditional/innovative WIL models). While the work of Billett (2015) and others has developed our understanding of how particular approaches can more effectively support diverse learning outcomes, students and situations, there remains considerable variation across the sector as to how WIL is conceptualized, and clearer delineations between categories of WIL are needed (Sachs et al., 2017; Universities Australia, 2019). Hence, there is a need for significant work to be undertaken around determining, measuring, and achieving quality in WIL, including the methods of describing

and grouping types of WIL activities (Zegwaard & Rowe, 2019, p. 325).

RESPONSES TO DEFINING WIL

One response to enhance the common understandings of EE, specifically in the field of WIL, was the British Columbia WIL Council's articulation of a comparative matrix to allow for comparing and contrasting of WIL in the BC context. Johnston et al. (2016) stated that "this work was a response to significant confusion in the field with respect to defining and describing the many and diverse models of WIL" (p. 337). The matrix was needed as attempts to categorize WIL programs (Patrick et al., 2009; Johnston et al., 2013) stopped short of providing meaningful ways of comparing various WIL programs. Often experiential programs were compared by how they differed, which also tended to greatly vary across contexts, and less so with respect to their shared attributes. The WIL Comparative Matrix offered a way to talk about various WIL types that all share specific attributes, allowing for a new way to discuss "developing and promoting (and supporting) appropriate offerings, conducting meaningful research, collecting data, developing quality standards, and assessing impact" (McRae & Johnston, 2016, p. 338). The comparative matrix attributes were informed by the CEWIL national accreditation criteria for Co-operative Education and allow for "conversations around work-integrated learning in ways that extend beyond definitions and shift the discussion towards comparing attributes of quality programs" (McRae & Johnston, 2016, p. 338).
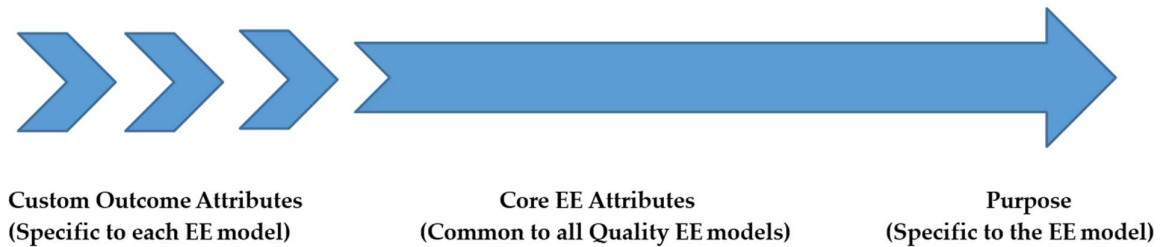
The provincial matrix was extended into a global framework to be more inclusive of attributes and descriptions of diverse models outside of the Canadian context. An extension of the BC Matrix was The Global WIL Learning Framework, which was "derived from current theoretical models of experiential learning" (McRae & Johnston, 2016, p. 340) and offered a way to discuss the different terminology and models used for WIL around the world. To facilitate these conversations, the necessity of definitions is replaced in the Global Framework with attributes of high impact practices and programs (McRae & Johnston, 2016) within which people can situate their particular models. "In this way, programs may be compared, contrasted, further developed and assessed, resources shared, etc., by virtue of their relationship to shared key attributes and outcomes, regardless of what that model may be called" (McRae & Johnston, 2016, p. 343).

Using the field of WIL as a proxy, one way to circumnavigate the similar tension in EE and move forward in a productive way is rather than focus on the labels and definitions of experience-based models, move the needle towards being situated in theoretical underpinnings and good practice attributes, as evident in the WIL Global Learning Framework. However, a constraint of the WIL Global Learning Framework as noted by McRae and Johnston (2016) is that "it is limited in its ability to help resolve the issue of discriminating between and amongst the many WIL terms that are often conflated" (p. 347) and can limit advances in the field or promotion/development of models. Further, this framework does not explicitly state how the attributes are connected to intended outcomes of a particular model, which are driven by the primary purpose of the model. One way forward, and building on the WIL Global Learning Framework, is a purpose and outcomes driven framework, herein referred to as the POD Framework. This framework, described below, allows for the discussion to extend beyond the names of models and into what their primary purpose and outcomes are, and how they link to the academic goals of the programs they support. This should assist in the development of different shared understandings, without the need for agreed upon broad based definitions for the multitude of experience-based models that are available. In this way, the POD framework supports the rationale for making choices about different experience-based models, such as: which models are used for a particular purpose; what quality attributes are shared that link to the purpose and outcomes; and what general supports can be shared across programs/models. Further, the framework can help educators operationalize the AAA Quality Framework (McRae et al., 2018), particularly with respect to how institutions and practitioners may understand the aims of their EE.

POD FRAMEWORK

This section proposes an attributes-based approach as a basis for a Purpose and Outcomes Driven (POD) framework to guide institutional discussions regarding the growth and development of EE (EE) that is situated in quality. The goal is to provide an approach that helps institutions engage in high impact practices, strive for quality and articulate clear purposeful outcomes with respect to each of their EE models. The POD framework (Figure 2.1) intends to help institutions better support their EE offerings in a coordinated and substantive way by taking advantage of the significant intersections at the core of the various models to understand quality by acknowledging and supporting the unique or custom features of each. Appendix 2A offers a worksheet and tool for thinking through the POD framework.

FIGURE 2.1: Purpose and Outcomes Driven (POD) design model for EE programs/offerings.

Custom Outcome Attributes
(Specific to each EE model)

Core EE Attributes
(Common to all Quality EE models)

Purpose
(Specific to the EE model)

The **arrowhead** represents the **unique primary purpose** of the EE model being described. Depending on the program/offering, these could include:

- facilitating school to work transitions (e.g., internships, capstone projects)
- meeting professional/program requirements (e.g., entrance and or completion requirements for professional schools such as medicine, engineering, teaching)
- developing innovators and entrepreneurs (e.g., Incubator or entrepreneurship programs)
- providing service to community (e.g., service learning, community-based learning)
- fostering social innovation (e.g., Ashoka, Radius)
- ensuring work-readiness (e.g., co-operative education, job shadowing, apprenticeships)
- developing intercultural or global fluency (e.g., study abroad programs, field schools, community-based practicums)
- integrating theory and practice to enhance learning (e.g., field schools, field placements, co- operative education, guest lecturers and community projects brought to the classroom)
- enhancing access through financial aid/earnings (e.g., work study programs, co-operative education)
- clarifying and aligning career and academic goals (e.g., job shadow, mentorship).

The above provide examples of student centric purposes but others could be added from diverse stakeholders such as the institution (e.g., greater student satisfaction scores, greater retention, enhanced reputation); governments (e.g., faster transition to workforce, specific workforce gaps addressed) and industry (e.g., early talent ID, more work ready graduates).

The **shaft** of the POD arrow is the **quality** heart of the model, based upon high impact EE design and practices, drawn from the scholarship in the field. These high impact practices, such as those determined in the WIL Global Learning Framework (McRae & Johnston, 2016), represent the core attributes that would be shared by *all* institutional EE models. The POD EE Core, which also aligns to the quality indicators as presented in the WIL AAA framework (McRae et al., 2018), consists of the following key attributes:

- *Experience* should be direct, hands on, meaningful and substantial and as authentic as possible. Disruptive moments are embraced for their transformational potential.
- *Curriculum Integration* between the experience and the academy is a goal. Learning outcomes are articulated and aligned with assessment (self, institutional, and host organization), and connections are made between the experiential and course-based learning for and by the learner.
- *Student Outcomes* (skills, knowledge and understanding) are developed and new meaning results, values, and beliefs are challenged, and the learner is an active participant in the process.
- *Reflection* is embedded in all aspects of the process (in and on the experience), is critical versus descriptive and is supported and assessed.
- *Assessment* should focus on the students' personal learning outcomes, development, competencies, skills and knowledge, and capacity to contribute; includes formative and summative feedback, provides opportunities for critical reflection, and is re-integrated into the curriculum to support learning.

The feathers or fletching represent the custom attributes of each EE model that help ensure it is going in a particular direction, toward the specified outcomes of a given EE model (e.g., service learning versus co-operative education versus field school)**.** In some cases, the feathers will be unique attributes of the model (e.g., full-time salaried work) and others will be content specific (e.g., curriculum on intercultural fluency or entrepreneurship or workplace preparation or community development).

These constitute the POD Custom attributes specific to a given model, which complement the POD Core attributes shared by all EE models.

Model specific attributes include:

- degree of experientiality (e.g., from real world problem integrated into class projects through to fully immersive, in situ experiences) (Gibbons & Hopkins, 1980)
- time committed: from exploratory (<10 hrs per week) to integrated (10–20 hrs per week) to full-time (>20 hrs per week)
- paid at competitive rates
- unpaid
- credit bearing
- mandatory or optional
- supervision/mentorship
- international or domestic setting
- optional
- mandatory
- mandatory for professional licensure or certification
- involves host organization and/or employer/industry partner
- involves the community and/or partner
- involves a host institution
- assessment completed by organization, partners, community, and/or employers.

ADVANTAGES OF THE POD FRAMEWORK

All offerings at an institution could be mapped using the POD model in order to gain an enterprise-wide view of the EE environment and reviewed for instances of unintentional overlap or potential synergies. This mapping could also facilitate the development of more integrated communications and promotional materials so that the institutional narrative around EE offerings is coherent and connected for all stakeholders.

All models could share core curriculum and assessment resources in support of their shared core attributes, ensuring a base level of EE design quality. Each individual model would be differentiated by both purpose and outcomes, so that stakeholders have clear understandings as to why to engage in one model over another, currently an area of confusion as the many models are often conflated. Appropriate models would bridge one to another, taking advantage of the shared core and making clear, intentional connections for students between and amongst the models, based on student outcomes or purpose. Finally, all EE offerings sharing the EE core attributes could be tracked and reported upon in the aggregate while more specific reports could be generated by outcomes or clusters of shared outcomes.

UTILITY OF THE POD

Johnston has conducted multiple consultations with institutions wishing to understand, rationalize, and scale-up their institutional EE activities. During these consultations, Johnston noted similarities, opportunities, and challenges across institutions. As such, Johnston offers the following supportive process (Table 2.1), embedded in the POD conceptual framework.

TABLE 2.1: Supportive process of the POD conceptual framework.

1.	**Define the Experience Based Term**	Determine what the term (e.g., work-integrated learning, experiential learning, community-based learning, etc.) means. Identify what is in the institutional experiential "tent," what is not, and why (maps onto graduate attributes, contributes to academic or institutional goals and outcomes, contributes to Strategic Enrollment Management, etc.).
2.	**Conduct an Institutional Inventory**	Determine what is offered at the institution, the primary purpose(s) and outcomes of the models, and how much of it meets the definition of the term (e.g., from course embedded experiences to field programs through to full-term paid work experiences). Establish baseline measures and understand the current state of the experience-based offerings at the institution and/or other stakeholder groups).
3.	**Identify Attributes of Quality**	Once there is agreement on what is offered, identify the core attributes required to assure quality outcomes for experiential offerings. Those are centrally required and supported across all programs.
4.	**Identify Unique Attributes of Each Model**	The key to this is identifying distinct purpose and learning outcomes for each experiential model (e.g., service learning is highly interested in developing community engaged, civic mindedness, co-operative education is highly interested in enhancing employability, professional program practica focus on outcomes defined and required for professional designation). All would share the core qualities identified in point 3 above, but each would also have distinct purposes and design attributes for particular outcomes. Note: Here the institution can also identify where there may be overlap in the models offered and address this constructively.
5.	**Link the Learning Outcomes to Institutional Goals**	Experience-based programs should contribute to learner, institutional and system purposes, and ongoing assessment should be in place to measure and report on this. For example, student retention, grades, post-graduation employment rates, alumni satisfaction, development of civic minded and inter-culturally fluent graduates etc.
6.	**Assessment**	Establishing regular assessment and reporting activities that track participation and effectiveness related to the identified student learning outcomes and other identified goals noted in point 5.

Once an institution has completed the above groundwork it will be well positioned to create a coherent narrative regarding EE offerings at their institution. As well, institutions will: understand what is needed to support quality opportunities (and develop them to support all offerings); appreciate the unique models that are offered and why; and link their experiential offerings to multiple other stakeholder purposes (e.g., enhancing post-graduation employability rates, improving institutional recruitment and retention, meeting professional accreditation requirements, etc.). The POD approach allows an institution to bring together these various models of education in a thoughtful way that supports the shared attributes and respects each offering's unique outcomes. It allows for a coherent narrative to be created at the institution with respect to each model's distinct role, while ensuring that economies of scale are realized through the development of core resources that may be shared, so as to ensure quality and efficiencies. Finally, the POD approach allows for an institution to talk about its various offerings from the perspective of "purpose" that links to its own goals as well as those of its community, government, and employer partners.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this chapter proposes a way to situate experiential education programs in the tertiary environment so that they may be better coordinated, clearer in their shared and distinct purposes, and more successful and accountable with respect to ensuring quality learner and institutional outcomes.

In many post-secondary institutions, EE offerings take many forms and are administered in a variety of ways, and usually not centrally tracked or coordinated. Most have arisen as a result of external accreditation or professional requirements (e.g., internship requirements in Engineering and Medicine, apprenticeships in the trades, teaching practicums in Education), discipline-specific field opportunities and practices (e.g., case competitions in Business, free clinics in Law) and the support of specific learning models to meet particular purposes and outcomes such as service learning, co-operative education, and field schools to name a few. Often these EE programs operate independently of one another within the academy, report differentially, and are held to varying levels of quality monitoring and outcomes assessment.

With calls by learners and outside stakeholders to do "more and better" in the area of experiential education, many post-secondary institutions are faced with the daunting task of trying to determine what is *currently* being offered on their campuses. Questions such as:

- Who is offering EE, for whom and with whom and to what ends?
- What are the current levels of participation in EE?

How quality and outcomes are being assessed are rightfully being asked at both the institutional and system levels. In most cases, gathering this 'baseline' data is challenging given the breadth of offerings, the siloed nature of the academy (where programs are run quite independently of each other), few shared metrics, and the lack of clear operational definitions for what constitutes EE. There have been many recent attempts to better define some of the most popular types of EE offerings in post-secondary education, so as to begin to get a better sense of the breath and scope of the EE work already in place. While several EE models, typologies and definitions have been proposed, the significant definitional variations locally, nationally, and globally, even with well-used terms such as co-operative education, field school, internship, and work-integrated learning remind us that this work will long have its challenges.

In 2015, a Comparative Matrix for WIL (a specific subset of Experiential Education) was proposed in an effort to move away from purely definitional ways of differentiating various models and move towards a way of discussing these models with respect to their shared and unique attributes. This work inspired conversations that focused on high impact attributes gleaned from the literature and good practice, as well as the CEWIL accreditation criteria for co-operative education.

This work was then expanded upon at the national and international level, adding a global dimension and additional attributes of interest with respect to learning, program, institution and system-level outcomes. However, to truly create shared understandings without broad based definitions of experience-based models, the POD framework offers sustenance to the rationale in decision-making about diverse experience-based models, such as which models are used for a particular purpose, and what quality attributes are shared that link to the purpose and outcomes.

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APPENDIX 2A
POD Worksheet/ Tool for Thinking

Program Name: _____

Number of Participants per year: _____

Graded: yes_____no_____P/F_____

Purpose Outcome Design (POD) Model

Type Specific Design Attributes (Specific to each EE model)	Core Quality Attributes (Common to all EE models)	Type Specific Outcomes (Specific to each EE model)

The **arrowhead** represents the **unique primary purpose** of the EE model being described. For example, career/employability development, social justice, service to community, intercultural fluency/global citizenry, talent identification and recruitment, etc. You may want to consider both students' and employers' purposes separately (please note in brackets which is which).

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The **shaft** of the POD arrow refers to the **quality** assurance heart of the model, based upon the high impact EE design and practices. These High Impact practices represent the core attributes that are shared by *all* institutional EE models. The POD EE Core consists of the following key attributes.

Place a check beside each core attribute that is present in your program.

- **Experience** is direct, hands on, meaningful and substantial and as authentic as possible.

    Present: Yes____No_____Partially____Don't Know_____

- **Curriculum Integration** between the experience and the academy is a goal, learning outcomes are articulated and aligned with assessment (self, institutional and host organization), and connections are made between the experiential and traditional learning for and by the learner.

    Present: Yes____No_____Partially____Don't Know_____

- **Student Outcomes** (skills, knowledge and understanding) are developed and new meaning results, values and beliefs are challenged, and the learner is an active **participant in the process.**

    Present: Yes____No_____Partially____Don't Know_____

- **Reflection** is embedded in all aspects of the process (in and on the experience), is critical vs descriptive and is supported and assessed.

  Present: Yes____No_____Partially____Don't Know_____

- **Assessment** is focused on the students' personal learning outcomes, development, competencies, skills and knowledge and capacity to contribute, includes formative and summative feedback, provides opportunities for critical reflection, and is re-integrated into the curriculum to support learning.

  Present: Yes____No_____Partially____Don't Know_____

The **feathers or fletching** represent the **custom attributes of each EE model that help ensure it is going in a particular direction, toward the specified outcomes of a given EE model.** In some cases the feathers will be unique attributes of the model (e.g., full time salaried work) and others will be content specific (e.g., curriculum on intercultural fluency or entrepreneurship or workplace preparation or community development). Please note the degree to which the are included in the model you are reviewing:

- **Degree of Experientiality** (e.g. from real world problem integrated into class projects through to fully immersive, in situ experiences).

  Present: Fully____Partially____Introductory_____

- **Time Committed** to work setting/issues:
    - Exploratory (<2 hrs per week) _____
    - Integrated (2-5 hrs per week) _____
    - Fully immersive (>20 hrs per week) _____

- **Remuneration:**
    - Paid at competitive rates _____
    - Stipend _____
    - Academic credit _____
    - In- kind support (e.g. travel costs, living costs, etc.)

- **Credit bearing**

  Yes____No_____

Choice of participating:

   - Mandatory _____
   - Optional _____