Analyzing Experiential Learning (EL) and Creating Communities of Practice through Reflection Activities and Digital Storytelling in the EL Lab

Karen Velasquez, Ph.D.
Director of Experiential Learning
University of Dayton
University of Dayton students are often engaged in many high-impact experiential learning activities throughout their college journeys, oftentimes simultaneously.

- Research
- Community-Engaged Learning
- Education Abroad
- Leadership Positions
- Project-Based Learning
- Co-ops
- Internships
- Student Employment
- Campus Ministry/Vocation Immersions
● What is the meaning, impact, and value of EL for students?

● How do students make connections between EL and other personal, academic, and professional experiences and goals?

● How can we help students articulate a compelling, holistic, integrative narrative of their EL experiences?
An Educational Anthropologist Interviews Students
What does EL mean to students?

- Understanding the student (emic) perspective
- Listening and asking thoughtful questions
- Building rapport and trust
- Documenting stories and reflections about learning
- Analyzing stories to understand patterns and differences
The Experiential Learning Lab
Experiential Learning Lab

- July 2017 - ongoing
- Monthly 3 hour workshop
- 45 student participants from diverse majors
- Facilitated by Director of EL and OEL student employees: Digital Media Producer, Peer Advisor, and Research Assistant
Experiential Learning Lab: Qualitative Research

- Student Researcher/Co-PI
- 35 students - 18 male/17 female, 2 international
- 144 EL Experiences
- Avg. ~4 memorable EL experiences per student
- Data: Integrated Stories of Realizations (ISORs), Visual EL Maps, Transcripts of Video-Recorded Semi-Structured Interviews and Group Conversations
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<th>Lexi Babovac</th>
<th>Thuy Tran</th>
<th>Dylan Narkon</th>
<th>Beau Landry</th>
<th>Clare Gallagher</th>
<th>Devon Dubiel</th>
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EL Lab: Findings

- Agency (self-guided learning), Awareness of Community/Others, Reflection and Growth
- Want to make a positive impact on the world
- Had rarely been asked to reflect on their EL experiences holistically
- Desire to dig deeper into their experiences
EL Lab: Findings

- Increased confidence & expanded “EL repertoire”
- Trust and relationships with diverse peers
- Educate each other about EL opportunities
- Students find personal meaning in EL in many different ways

Limitations

- Reflections did not explore impact of identity, race, ethnicity, gender
- Limited time to discuss & challenge students’ biases etc.
- Participants not representative nor inclusive of all student populations
- Often, reflections do not connect classroom learning & EL: why?
EL Roadmaps

August 2015
Start at UD as a Mechanical Engineer

High School -> UD

Camp 'Blue'

CO-OP

YouTube

Classes

Design

Engineering design

3-D CAD

Materials

Shop

Woodworking

Toy Making

Engineering projects

Future engineers

President

Social justice club

Director of DCW

Graduate school

Office of Experiential Learning Digital Media Products

Teammate

Workshop
The Lab as a Model for EL Reflection

- Curiosity, analysis, examination, and creative documentation of learning experiences
- Teaching students to investigate their own and others’ experiences (student-led interviews)
- Being open to unexpected findings, insights that may challenge our assumptions about education & EL
Other OEL Media & Digital Storytelling Projects

- Podcast/YouTube Series: “A Closer Look”
- EL Mini-Documentaries/Video Features
- Faculty Voices Series
- Vox Pop Series
Reflection, Digital Storytelling, & Building Communities of Practice

- Communities of Practice (Jean Lave): learning as a socially organized, co-constructed activity - “problematizing learning”
- Student communities of practice: come together to analyze, discuss, learn from their own/each other’s experience
Reflection, Digital Storytelling, & Building Communities of Practice

- Student stories used to build faculty and staff communities of practice; workshops, panels
- Faculty & staff more likely to listen to student voices
- Result: Integration of Lab Model with Programs on Campus (OLR, CIP, SoE)
Some Concluding Thoughts

- Provide spaces for students to define, challenge, and redefine what EL means in authentic ways
- Rather than imposing our own definitions/views of what the impact of EL should be according to (sometimes arbitrary) institutional norms and values
- Developing as reflective practitioners who are responsive to the lived experiences of our students, as well as our own assumptions/biases
- View EL as a part of our culture of schooling; subject to constant change and analysis