

Chapter 3

What a Design: Collaboration Through Guided Learning

Yasir Kurt

Texas A&M University, San Antonio, USA

Elena Castaneda Aguinaga

Texas A&M University, San Antonio, USA

Laura Todd

Texas A&M University, San Antonio, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter begins by exploring traditional experiential learning assessment and the limitations of these assessment methods. The authors suggest that by applying design thinking (DT) principles to the assessment of experiential learning, learners can become central to the learning process and comprehend more from the experience. In this chapter, the authors will evaluate the impact of traditional experiential learning assessments on student learning and their goals, identify DT principles that could influence learners' learning experiences and achievements, and examine existing design thinking tools that can be used to assess experiential learning programs.

INTRODUCTION

Wurdinger and Carlson (2010) said it best: "...learning becomes experiential when [learners] create plans to solve problems and test them against reality" (p. 9). Student Affairs professionals and faculty, as coordinators of experiential learning (EL), are tasked with guiding learners through a process of problem-solving that leads to a plan of action. EL assessment is a vital part of that process. Assessment provides a structure through which prior knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs can be examined, challenged, and reformed into new knowledge. Thus, the method of assessment educators use to measure learning needs to be carefully considered and complement the learning activity. Common forms of EL assessment are themselves experiential in nature, such as journals and presentations, although traditional forms of

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assessment are still used to measure EL learning outcomes (Yates, Wilson, & Purton, 2015). Traditional forms of assessment are valued for their familiar nature as well as their ability to evaluate the product of learning although learning is far more dynamic than a sum of all parts. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb & Kolb, 2017) has four stages identified as part of the learning process, where a learner begins and how they are guided through the process is not defined but is key to success. There are a multitude of learning styles and learners will enter the cycle at a phase where learning feels comfortable. Coordinators and educators are challenged to meet learners where they are by assuming different roles. Coordinators must, at some point, assume all these roles to confidently guide learners through the steps of learning as well as creating exacting learning spaces. Assessment can be used as a tool that guides both learners and coordinators through the steps of learning while accommodating different learning styles and scaffolding the multiple educator roles. EL requires assessment that is as transformational as the process itself and holistically measures the multiple dimensions of learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). To do this, the assessment must be both flexible and structured, measure intended and consequential outcomes, as well as evaluate the process and the product of learning.

The authors introduce Design Thinking (DT) - based on the *Designing Your Life* book of Bill Burnett and Dave Evans- as a method of designing a more meaningful learning experience by utilizing DT tools to help EL coordinators guide learners through the stages of DT. The stages of DT are a process of learning that allows for flexible design, pedagogy, assessment and learning. The chapter will examine the similarities between DT as a process of learning compared to other theories, arguing that DT has the ability to extend the cycle of experiential learning. Moreover, the authors propose using DT as an alternative assessment method that has the opportunity to move beyond an assessment tool and serve as a device that moves forward the learning process by intentionally situating the learner, educator, and subject in a theoretical "think-tank" that allows for instruction and learning to happen collaboratively.

The tools we will share in this chapter are mostly inspired by the *Designing Your Life* book (Burnett & Evans 2019), Mind Map (Buzan, 2005), Harvard's Project Zero-Visible Thinking (Ritchhart, Church, & Morrison, 2011), and along with additional tools and methods used by others in DT. The authors discuss the importance of building a fulfilling and meaningful life that is possible by being creative, exploring possibilities, and prototyping multiple paths before making a choice. DT assessment tools will support EL coordinators in creating more meaningful experiences for their learners and, as a result, learners become design thinkers throughout the experience by articulating their career plans. As an analytic and creative process, DT encourages learners to experiment, create and prototype models, gather feedback, and redesign (Razzouk & Shute, 2012). Design Thinkers should possess several characteristics (e.g., visualization, creativity) that have been elaborated for each tool.

The authors of this chapter bring diverse perspectives from the areas of assessment, career advising, and counseling, and believe in the vital importance of assessing and evaluating the process of learning to improve the learner experience and deepen learning. This chapter will focus on the value of assessing the learning process in addition to the product, beginning by exploring traditional experiential learning assessment and the limitations of these assessment methods. By applying DT to the assessment of experiential learning, learners can become central to the learning process and comprehend more from the experience.

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