Academic Staff Induction and Assessment on Implementing Experiential Learning and Reflective Practice

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Abstract

Experiential learning and reflective practice are two effective key learning and teaching strategies that many successful teachers employ as learner-centred education practices. It has been proven that many students appreciate the meaningful learning received through a learner-centred classroom environment.

The aim of this paper is to share the findings of an induction programme focussing on experiential learning and reflective practice, which was designed to enhance the importance of transforming teacher-centred practice into learner-centred practice, with the teacher taking on the role of facilitator. The objectives of this induction programme were to help staff in understanding and incorporating experiential learning models in their teaching practice at a New Zealand tertiary institution.

The paper contains a qualitative analysis of staff perspectives on experiential learning practice taken from their answers to a questionnaire, which followed an online Moodle course. It also contains a quantitative analysis of the data gathered from classroom observations using a digital classroom observation tool for assessment.

The results showed that, although theoretical awareness about experiential learning was not a problem for new academic staff, its practical application was not always fully achieved. Even when lecturers were successfully implementing experiential learning activities in their classes, they were not incorporating reflective practice as part of a complete process. A more conscious incorporation of reflective practice by the academic staff in their classes, will ultimately help students to continue learning through experiences and reflection in their self-directed learning journeys.

Keywords: experiential learning, reflective practice, staff induction programme, teacher performance

Experiential learning and reflective practice are the key drivers for bringing an authentic and learner-centred environment into classroom practices (Beard & Wilson, 2015; Moon, 2004). This is probably why experiential learning is part of many tertiary institutions' curriculum requirements nowadays, as a preferred learning and teaching method.

The basis for experiential learning is the constructivist belief (Vygotsky, 1978) that students learn best by trialling and experimenting with what they are taught, rather than by passively observing or listening to the teacher. Many teaching practitioners seem to understand experiential learning as "learning through reflection on doing" (Felicia, 2011, p. 1003). Yet, in order for the students to obtain a complete learning experience using this method, their experiential learning tasks need to be accompanied by a reflective session (Moon, 2004).

In modern teaching practice, experiential learning involves problem-solving learning experiences (Miller & Maellaro, 2016) and co-created learning experiences that enhance student capabilities and transferable skills (Stephenson, 1998). This would ideally enable students to understand how they learn and how to continue to learn, and hopefully also positively contribute to their future employability.

This paper aims to share the findings of a trial induction programme designed to assess the extent to which academic staff at a New Zealand tertiary institution are employing experiential learning activities within their regular classes. The main objective of the induction programme was to support new academic staff members at our New Zealand tertiary institution and enhance their understanding of experiential learning models, incorporation of experiential learning and reflective practice into the courses, and contextualising experiential learning within the institution's learner capabilities framework. This framework was designed to offer students the necessary knowledge and skills to become successfully employed in their field in the future. The trial induction programme was run by the authors as peers within our institution, coming from different teaching backgrounds and subjects (the experiential learning team). Based on a continuing trend for tertiary educators to deliver their classes in a teacher-centred way, this trial induction programme was designed to try and change their perception and to show (mainly through professional conversations with the experiential learning team) that students would get better learning opportunities through a more practical, experiential learning strategy.

The paper explores both teaching practitioners' reflection on what experiential learning means for them, as well as the practical task of applying and incorporating this model into their daily teaching practice. Conclusions are drawn from the findings on both aspects, and some recommendations for the future are made on how a more comprehensive experiential learning curriculum could be further achieved.

Literature Review

Experiential Learning

In education, Kolb's learning cycle of experiential learning (1984) is one of the most well-known experiential learning models. According to this model (based on Lewin's 1951 experiential learning model), experiential learning follows a continuous learning cycle which revolves around having concrete experiences (doing), reflecting on these experiences (reflective observation), followed by processing this information and understanding linkages (abstract conceptualisation), and eventually planning and trying out what has been learnt within other contexts (active experimentation). Summarising Dewey's classic model of the learning

process, Kolb (2015) concluded that experiential learning is a type of learning that "transforms the impulses, feelings, and desires of concrete experiences into higher-order purposeful action" (p. 33), which shows the transferability of these experiences. Not unlike the abstract conceptualisation stage in Kolb's model, Boud's model of learning from experience also stresses the fact that students come with existing knowledge or a personal foundation of experience (Boud, 1994) and all new knowledge needs to be assimilated through this already existing knowledge, in order for successful acquisition of knowledge to occur. Prior learning and new learning are grounded in experience and reflective practice. An important idea to consider here is that learning is a personal matter and not every student learns the same way (Beard & Wilson, 2015). This idea supports Gardner's well-known theory of multiple intelligences (1999), which argues that different students can prefer to learn in seven different ways (such as linguistic, logical-mathematical and bodily-kinaesthetic), depending on their type of intelligence.

Experiential learning activities are commonly classified into two different types: field-based learning and classroom-based learning (Lewis & Williams, 1994). This stresses the practicality of this model of learning, and shows how experiential learning does not need to stop within a traditional classroom-based educational model. Beard and Wilson (2015) list a number of different types of field-based activities that could be experiential, such as adventure learning through outdoor team activities, dramaturgy and field trips. Experiential learning comes with interactivity and participation, and is considered more effective than traditional learning approaches.

Reflection in Experiential Learning
In spite of its growth in popularity, there has been criticism of some teaching practitioners misunderstanding the real meaning of experiential learning. Beard and Wilson point out the risk of an activity trap, where teachers use a multitude of experiential learning tasks in their classes, but these turn out to be uncritical activities, devoid of any reflective component (2015, p.124). Ultimately, without reflection, students might not even end up learning from doing experiential tasks in the classroom.

Reflection is a way of learning through thinking. Dewey (1938, p. 9) defined reflection as "the active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends". There are two major ways of reflection: reflection in action and reflection on action (Schon, 2017). Reflection in action refers to the sequence of thoughts we have while doing an action. Reflection on action refers to the reconstruction process of the action once it has been concluded, to draw lessons from the experience (Brookfield, 2017). What both of these types of reflection have in common is the processing of information based on an event that is occurring or has occurred, in order to learn from it. It is what Moon calls "cognitive housekeeping" or "sorting out of bits of knowledge, ideas, feelings, awareness of how you are behaving and so on". (Moon, 2004, p.187).

Depending on its depth, reflection can be categorised into descriptive writing, descriptive reflection, dialogic reflection and critical reflection. Descriptive writing refers to shallow descriptions that do not include a discussion about what happened. Therefore, it does not involve reflection. In descriptive reflection, there is a description of events. However, only one perspective is acknowledged. Dialogic reflection analyses multiple perspectives outside the events discussed, demonstrating an in-depth reflective result. In critical reflection, actions and events are deeply analysed by multiple perspectives located in and influenced by historical and

social-political contexts (Moon, 2004). Critical reflection would therefore help to create more democratic and inclusive classroom environments (Brookfield, 1995). Moon (2004) argued that reflection could deliver unexpected outcomes (ideas that could have been solutions to dilemmas, creative activities), emotions and recognise the need for further reflection. Therefore, reflection is not only part of a good quality learning process but also important in learning behaviour development (Brookfield, 1995).

It has been noticed that, even though reflection occurs as a natural phenomenon, it is rarely brought up for critical discussions with learners (Cavilla, 2017). Therefore, lecturers might need to review their teaching practice and improve the reflection activities they use in their classes. For instance, it would be good practice to include weekly reflective journals in any type of class, irrespective of the subject taught. Forums, and question and answer sessions, can also be set up in which learners can share their ideas on reflective practices. Boud (2010) argued that when reflecting, the emotions that are associated with the event must be considered (such as fear, panic hesitation, calm or elation). Emotion plays a vital role in quality reflection, as feelings are part of any genuine reflection (Boud, 2010; Pedler, 2011). Therefore, it is suggested to slow down the pace of learning and encourage more emotion to make meaning out of experiences (Moon, 2004). Engaging emotions in reflective sessions would enable both students and lecturers to validate the findings from reflective activities. Eventually, both students and lectures would engage in reflective practices naturally. Ideally, reflection should happen regularly as part of everyday learning (Moon, 2004).

Post-Observation Staff Reflection
The values and beliefs of a lecturer determine their philosophy (Schonell et al., 2016). Post observation reflective sessions could help lecturers to discuss and understand what is essential in the delivery of quality education. Upon understanding what values lecturers hold, they can then develop good relationships with their students, which would grow over time and which would result in an environment conducive to learning (Hamre & Pianta, 2006). The post observation reflective session would ideally also encourage lecturers to reassess their passion for teaching. Similarly, Rashidi and Moghadam (2014) argued that there is a positive correlation between a teacher's sense of complacency and poor student achievement. In order to keep themselves up-to-date through professional development activities, lecturers could benefit from being observed by peers, such as learning and teaching teams, who can provide them with constructive feedback (Ahmed, Nordin, Shah, & Channa, 2018).

Experiential Learning Staff Induction Process

The induction programme was designed in four main stages. It was aligned with the staff peer observation model proposed by Murphy Tighe and Bradshaw (2013) which included preparation, pre-observation meeting, observation and post-observation feedback session.

In the first stage, staff were introduced to experiential learning and reflective practice through an online activity (a short Moodle course with videos and other reading materials). The key objectives of this course were:

- To help the staff to understand what experiential learning means;
- To support the staff in developing ways to incorporate experiential learning and reflective practice into their courses;
- To encourage the staff to contextualise experiential learning within the capabilities' framework.

This was intended to have them experience the process by themselves. Following the online course, the participants had to complete an online questionnaire (eight questions), testing their general knowledge on experiential learning. An automatic email was generated to the experiential learning team when the questionnaire was submitted.

The second stage of the induction programme was a face-to-face reflective session with the experiential learning team, to clarify any specific issues the staff might have had on experiential learning practice following the online course and questionnaire. Staff were then asked to come up with potential ways of incorporating experiential learning activities into their respective courses.

In the third stage, a class observation, using a digital observation tool, completed the induction programme. They were primarily observed on their application of experiential learning activities. The observation tool captured the learning environment in terms of the different types of learner-centred (including experiential learning and reflection) or teacher-centred activities and the positions of the classroom facilitator. It also provided a map of teachers' movements in the classroom every 30 seconds.

The fourth and final stage of the induction programme was a face-to-face reflective session with the experiential learning team to discuss feedback from the class observations. This session was designed to reflect on the class observation results. It provided opportunities for both observer and teacher to discuss their approach to experiential learning and reflective practice and create a development plan for future improvement.

Research Methods

The staff induction programme was initiated by and conducted with the approval of the academic board of our institution. The research participants were informed in advance about the purpose of the staff induction programme, how it was going to be conducted and what was expected of them. The primary data (from the online questionnaire and class observations) were collected in a responsible and ethical manner by using codes instead of participants' names, thus ensuring that their anonymity and confidentiality remained unaffected at all times.

There were 16 new staff members who went through our experiential learning induction process. Our findings from the induction process included both qualitative and quantitative data. A mixed-method analysis was employed to analyse both qualitative and quantitative research findings as it helped to optimise the benefits of both methods (Morgan, 2007). In other words, we increased the validity of our research findings by triangulating qualitative data collected from the online course with quantitative data collected from the class observation results (Bryman, 2016).

The qualitative information received from the online course was analysed using content analysis in order to discover what academic staff knew about experiential learning and reflective practice in theory. The responses received for the eight online questions were tabulated. They were then summarised based on the themes that emerged. It should be noted that one participant might have provided more than one response to a question asked. Therefore, in each question, the popularity of a theme was calculated as a percentage of the total number of responses received. The themes were then ranked based on their popularity to identify the significant themes generated from the online questions. The themes generated are shown in Figures 1-8.

The quantitative data captured by the digital observation tool was statistically analysed to explore the extent to which academic staff applied their theoretical knowledge about experiential learning and reflective practice to their classes. This was done by identifying the frequency of teacher-centred and learner-centred class activities demonstrated during class observations (as shown in Figure 9). The legend for these different types of activities incorporated within the observation tool is shown in Figure 10.

Results

Qualitative Data Analysis and Findings
This section presents the results generated from the qualitative analysis of the responses received from the first stage of the induction programme. As mentioned above, there were eight questions related to experiential learning and reflective practice. The responses are shown in order of popularity (from the most popular to the least popular). The responses with less than 5% popularity were eliminated.

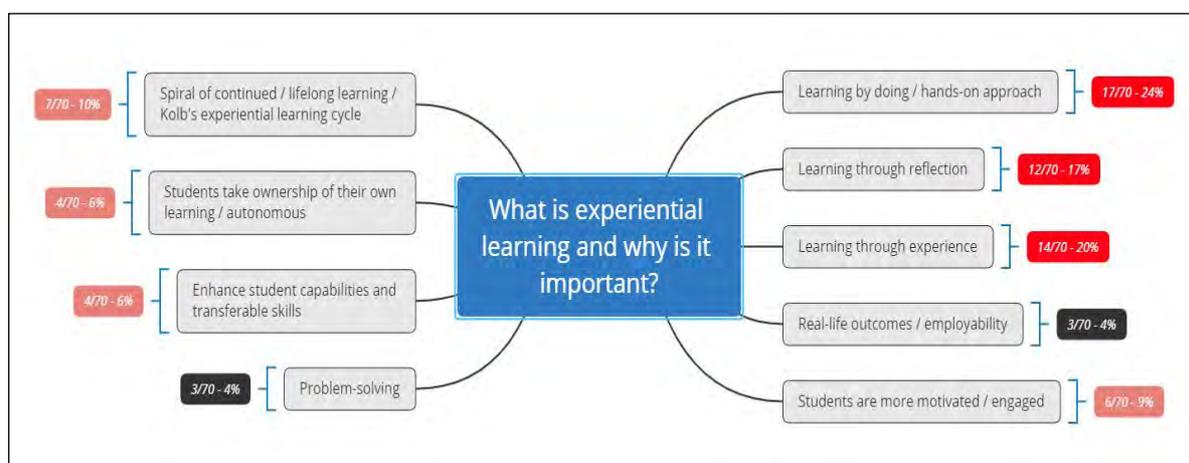**Question 1: What is experiential learning and why is it important?**

Figure 1: The definition of experiential learning and its importance

The most popular response (24%) was that experiential learning suggests a hands-on approach, in which students learn by doing, as well as through reflection (17%) and having relevant experiences in the classroom (20%). One participant said:

> *"As a natural model it mimics what happens to us unconsciously anyway and makes that process conscious to us".*

Many participants also believed that the concept suggests a spiral of continued lifelong learning (10% of responses - some alluding to Kolb's experiential learning cycle), and that students are generally more motivated to learn in this way (9%). Some also believed that experiential learning makes students become more autonomous (6%) and enhance their capabilities and transferable skills (6%). Another participant added:

> *"Experiential learning provides learners access to each stage of problem-solving, and extends the learning experience from limited school life to life-long period".*

Question 2: What makes the experiential approach different from conventional approaches to tertiary education?
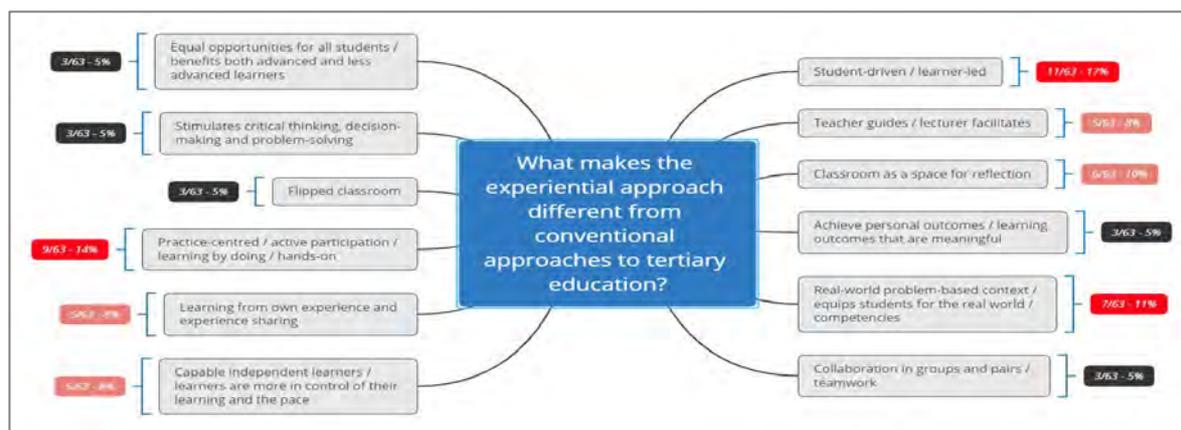

Figure 2: The key characteristics of experiential learning

A high number of responses (17%) stated that the experiential approach is more student-driven than conventional approaches to tertiary education. 14% stated that it is more practice-centred and relies on active participation.

A further 11% of responses showed that the experiential approach equips students more for the real world than a conventional approach, as it is always based on a real-world and problem-solving context. One participant said:

> "Conventional tertiary teaching practice views students as empty containers or filing cabinets that need to be filled. It is teacher-driven didactic learning. Experiential learning views students as knowledge generators; as capable independent learners able to implement ideas and learning in a range of contexts. It is student-driven".

Many responses (10%) also indicated that, with an experiential approach, the classroom is used as a space for reflection. 8% mentioned that the role of the teacher is that of a facilitator that only guides, while the learners are more in control of their learning and the pace of the lesson, thus allowing them to learn better from their own experience and through experience sharing. Another participant said:

> "The teacher guides but the learner is more in control of the path their learning takes".

The least popular responses (5%) were that an experiential approach encourages a flipped classroom model, collaboration in groups or teams, and that it helps students achieve both personal and learning outcomes that are meaningful. A few participants also mentioned that this approach represents equal opportunities for both advanced and less advanced learners, in that it stimulates critical thinking, decision-making and problem-solving in all students.

Question 3: How is experiential learning practiced? What types of activities initiate and reinforce experiential learning?
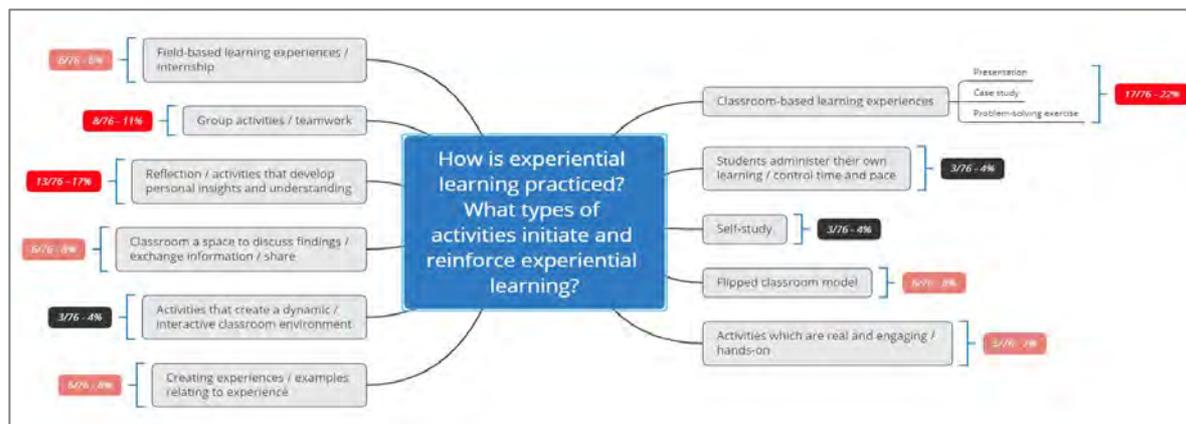

Figure 3: Applications of experiential learning

22% of the responses indicated that experiential learning is based on classroom-based learning experiences such as presentations, case studies and problem-solving exercises. A high number of participants also believed that it is based on group activities and teamwork (11%), as well as reflection or activities that develop personal insights and understanding (17%).

Many answers (8%) suggested field-based learning experiences or internships and a flipped classroom model as activities to encourage experiential learning. Another 8% described that the classroom should be used as a space to share information and discuss findings, and to create experiences. 7% encouraged hands-on class activities which are real and engaging. One participant said:

> "This type of learning can be practiced in a number of ways, both in the classroom and in a real practical environment. With adult students this type of learning is very useful as they would have a great deal of experience that can be shared".

Question 4: Can you name some types of experiential learning activities?
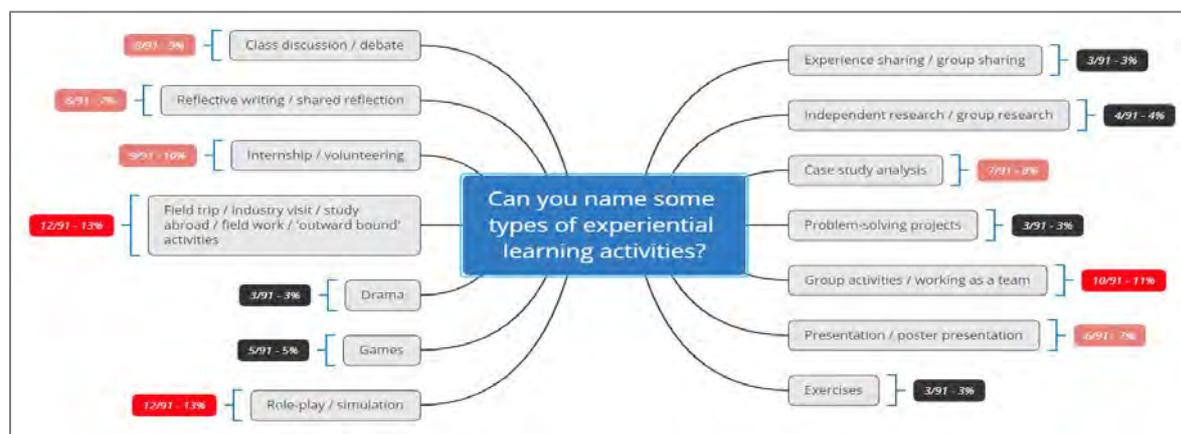

Figure 4: Experiential learning activities

Participants named outward bound activities such as fieldtrips (13%), role-plays or simulations (13%) and group activities (11%) as the most popular experiential learning activities. One participant said:

> "Short case studies with a problem-solving element, so that learners are able to conceptualise, followed by a role-play like application in group work environment, create field-based activities, site visits, reflecting on common problems in the workplace and work in groups to solve the problems, then present the findings".

Many answers suggested internships or volunteering (10%), class discussions or debates (9%), case study analyses (8%) and reflective writing and poster presentations (7%). A less popular activity mentioned was drama (5%), as a more elaborate form of role-play.

Question 5: What is the teacher's role in experiential learning?
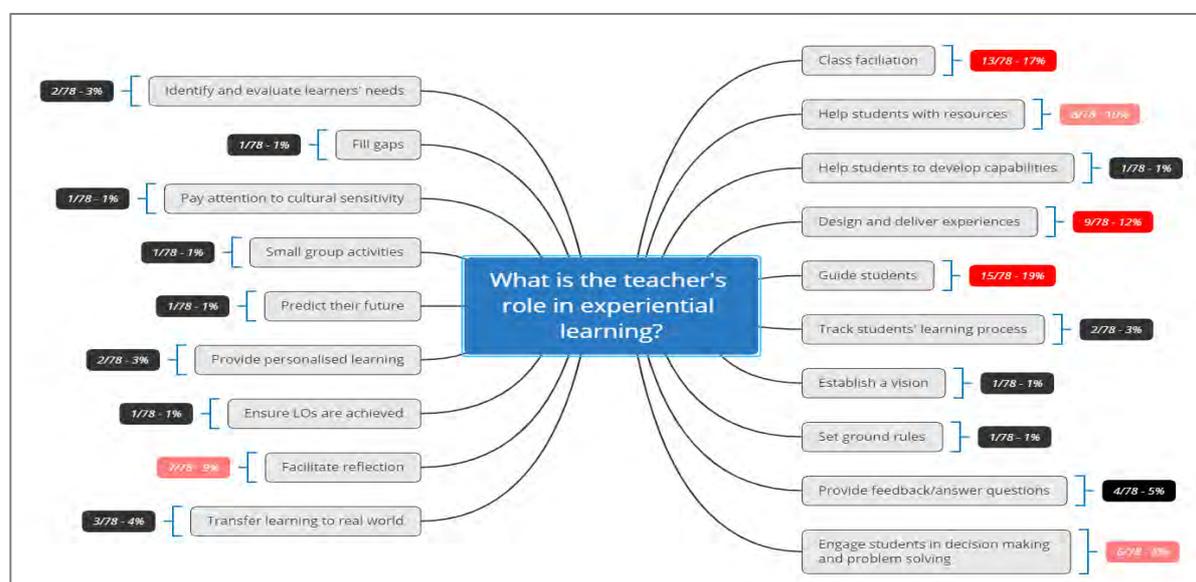

Figure 5: Teacher's role in experiential learning

19% of the responses pointed out that the teacher is a guide who supports students in experiential learning activities. One participant gave an example:

> "The teacher is a facilitator and will offer guidance. It will be important to set the scene with special attention to cultural sensitivities. I used an exercise called Chinese whispers, commonly used in schools and a fun exercise. The leader needs to have enthusiasm and motivation to make this type of learning happen, and the whispers did, it clearly shows how leaders should not communicate".

Many responses (12%) showed that the teacher's role in experiential learning is to design and deliver experiences. Some other responses (9%) highlighted the importance of reflection in experiential learning, and 8% suggested that engaging students in decision making and problem solving helped facilitate an experiential learning environment.

Lastly, 5% of the responses revealed that the teacher's role in experiential learning is to provide feedback and answer students' enquiries. The participants discussed that providing feedback and answering students' questions would enable them to experience critical thinking attributes.

Question 6: How is learning assessed in this approach?
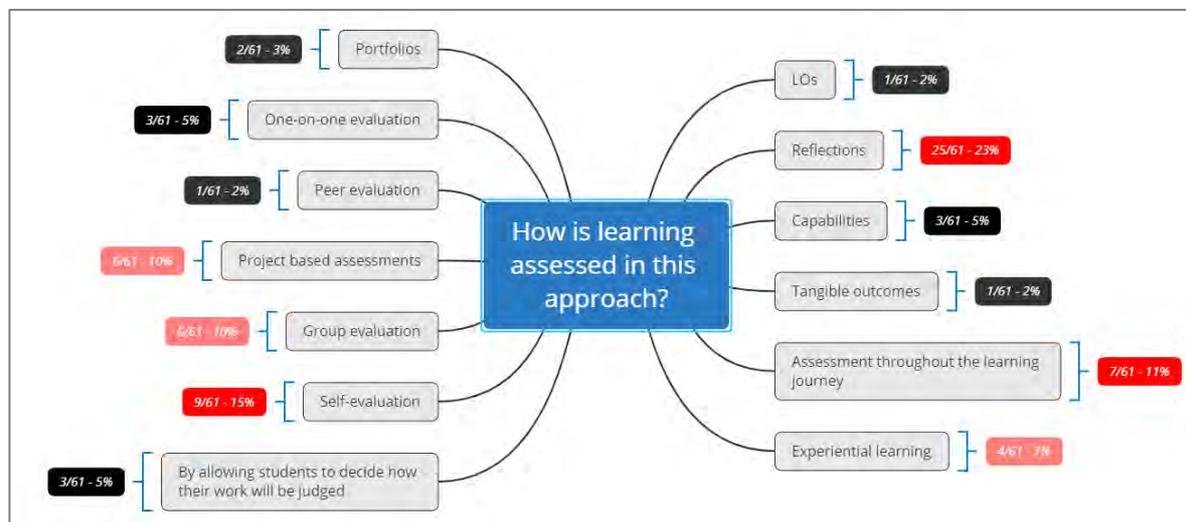

Figure 6: Assessment of experiential learning

The highest percentage of the responses (23%) showed that experiential learning can be assessed through reflection. It was found that the reflective assessments made it easier for learners to measure their progress over the learning period and evaluate their success. One participant said:

> *"The new learning and the growth in knowledge past the experiential learning activities through the self-reflection process shall be an integral part of the assessment. Towards the end of the experiential learning activity experience, the student should be able to describe/document how he will use the new learning in a new environment facing a similar situation".*

The second popular assessment method was through self-evaluation (15% of the responses received). Participants pointed out that self-evaluation-based assessment is a powerful way of measuring experiential learning at any stage:

> *"Learners benefit from the personal and flexible assessment opportunities received from self-evaluation".*

The responses showed that the assessment of experiential learning should be conducted throughout the learning journey (11% of the response rate). Measuring experiential learning through group work was chosen in 10% of the responses. Similarly, another 10% of the responses received showed that project-based assessment could also measure experiential learning. 7% of the responses revealed that experiential learning can be assessed within the experiential learning process itself.

5% of the answers showed that one-on-one evaluation, capability measurement systems and letting students choose their preferred assessment methods are important in assessing experiential learning outcomes.

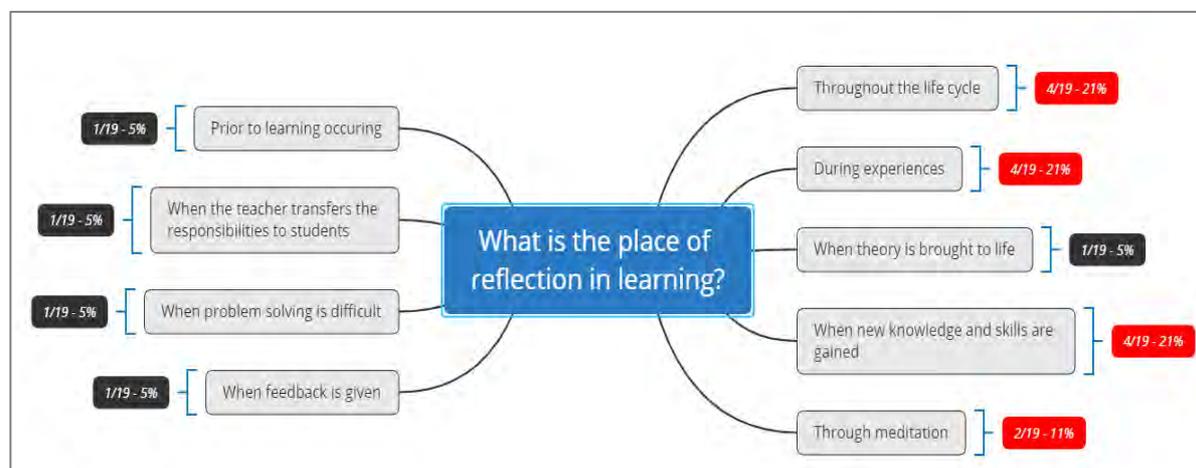**Question 7: What is the place of reflection in learning?**

Figure 7: The importance of reflection in experiential learning

The highest percentage of the responses (21%) showed that reflection should be practiced during experiences. Participants said that the students and teachers should think about what they have done, reflect on what has been learnt or achieved and then modify their behaviour as a result. One participant said that reflection should be conscious and productive:

> *"Reflection will naturally occur from experience. The question is whether it is left to haphazard chance of the unconscious which may lead to unhelpful connections or not be at all effective, versus getting the reflective activities to occur at a more conscious level and be open to feedback to assist that process to build healthy productive reflective practices at the conscious level that builds a better quality learning cycle".*

Another 21% of the responses received revealed that when new knowledge and skills are gained, reflection should be part of the process. Participants said that the reflection process helps the learners to apply the learned principles to a new similar situation. The third answer with 21% popularity was that reflection should be practiced throughout the learning life cycle, joining the past and present learning and consequently preparing them for the future.

Some responses (11%) indicated that reflection is done through meditation as an active, conversive, dialectical exercise that requires as much intellectual work as does every other aspect of the learning process, from analysis to synthesis to evaluation.

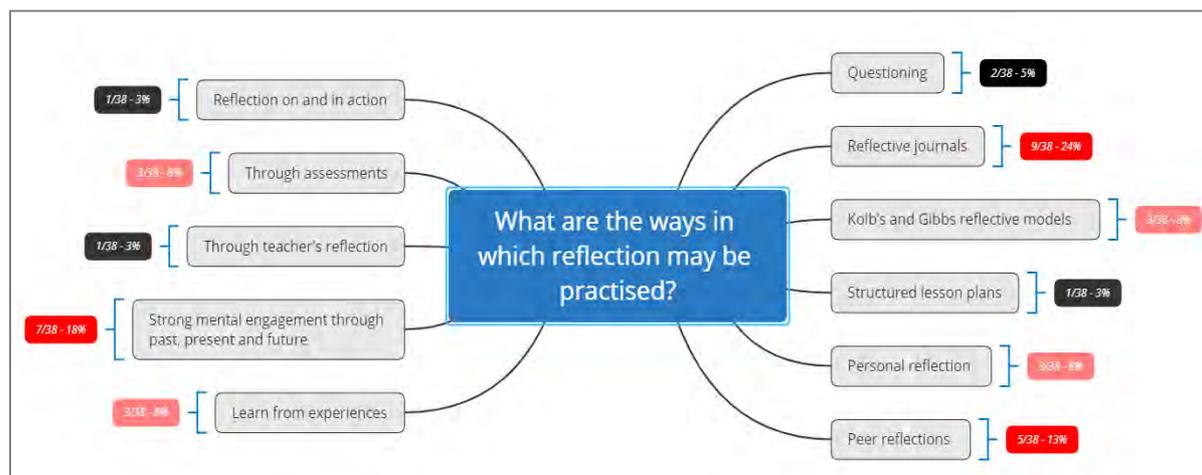**Question 8: What are the ways in which reflection may be practiced?**

Figure 8: Examples of reflective practice in experiential learning

The most popular response (24%) was that reflection should be practiced through reflective journals with a focus on concepts, feelings, thought processes and the possible application of new learning. 18% of the responses said that reflection should be practiced via strong mental engagement throughout the past, present and future.

13% of the answers suggested that reflection be practiced through social and peer learning. Reflective activities such as personal reflections, reflective assessments, and learning from experiences were other popular responses (8%). A few responses (5%) revealed that reflection can be practiced through questioning.

Quantitative Data Analysis and Findings

The next step of the induction programme was the classroom observation process, where the experiential learning team had the opportunity to observe the new teaching staff in order to measure to what extent experiential learning activities were practised at our tertiary institution. Figure 9 represents the statistical analysis of the results from all the class observations. It shows that 27% of the class activities observed were teacher-centred and 73% of them were learner-centred. Giving feedback on learners' ideas (22%), engaging in practical experiential learning activity (11%), listening to student presentations/ideas (10%) and teacher responding to student questions (10%) were the four main leaner-centred activities observed. Reflective practice represented 1% of the activities.

Observers generally remarked that classrooms were well-equipped and arranged to facilitate interaction. All students were reported to have the necessary materials for instruction. Goals for sessions were adequately communicated and learning was guided. Moreover, most of the class observations showed that teachers used real world examples and case studies, together with a wide variety of activities such as in-class team building exercises.
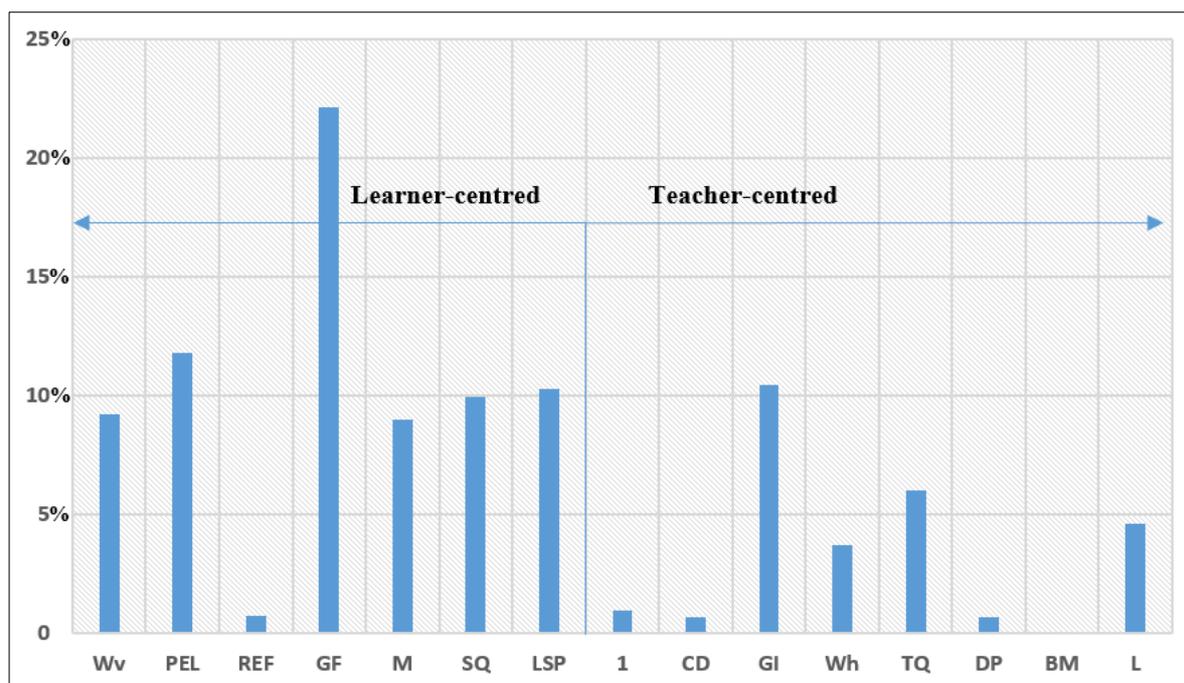
Figure 9: Statistic results of class observations

Teacher Centred		Learner Centred	
1	One on one teacher individual student	**Wv**	Watching a Video or watching student activity
CD	Class teaching demonstration	**PEL**	Engaged in practical experiential learning activity
GI	Giving Instructions	**REF**	Reflective practice - Learners making meaning
Wh	Whiteboard writing (student copying)	**GF**	Giving feedback on learners ideas
TQ	Teacher asking questions	**M**	Moving around the learning setting
DP	Data Projector ppt teacher presentation	**SQ**	Teacher responding to student questions
BM	Behaviour Management	**LSP**	Listening to student presentations/ideas
L	Tutor lecturing		

Figure 10: Legend of teacher-centred and learner-centred activities on the observation tool

Discussion

This study intended to share the findings of a trial staff induction programme designed to promote experiential learning and reflective practice. Based on literature, which promotes experiential learning and reflective practice, the role of the staff induction was very important for us to be able to implement these learning and teaching methods in the curriculum of our institution. Throughout the induction programme, our staff showed a high interest in exploring experiential learning and reflective practice.

The results of the online induction course showed that staff were aware of learning through experiences and reflective practice. Overall, the findings supported the experiential learning theories provided by Boydell (1976), Chickering (1977), Saddington (1992), Cantor (1997), Jarvis (1999), and Beard and Wilson (2002). The findings specifically showed that employing experiential learning and reflective practice brings an authentic learner-centred environment

into the classroom (Beard & Wilson, 2015; Moon, 2004). Therefore, our results support the value of academic staff induction programmes in order to promote student-centred teaching practice, allowing students to play an active role in their learning to successfully achieve higher learning outcomes (Yuen & Hau, 2006).

The responses indicated that, in experiential learning, the teacher's main role is to guide and support students. Moreover, they reported that the teacher also plays a central role in engaging students in decision making, problem solving and providing feedback and answers to students' enquiries, so that students would eventually develop their own values, attitudes, knowledge and skills throughout their learning cycle (Byram & Dube, 2008). The participants noted that, in order to successfully guide and facilitate these activities, the teacher needs to develop the required experience to deliver these types of classes. Overall, the results of this study reinforce that staff induction programmes play a key role in supporting teachers to adopt a more learner-centred role, which promotes student engagement.

The participants reported that experiential learning means a hands-on approach in which students learn by doing and reflecting. It can continue throughout the life cycle of the learning journey, which is aligned with Kolb's experiential learning cycle. The participants' experience also supported Chadha and Nicholls (2006) statement that experiential learning activities make students more responsible for their learning while enhancing their capabilities and transferable skills. Their responses supported that the key characteristics of experiential learning include: a student-driven nature, a practice-centred approach, active student engagement, as well as problem solving and reflective tasks that are connected to the real world. Among experiential learning activities suggested by the participants in the questionnaires, field trips, role-pays, simulations, group activities, volunteering/internships, class discussions/debates, reflective writing and presentations were dominant.

Based on their responses in the online questionnaire, the participants believed that experiential learning is mainly assessed through reflection. They believed that as part of reflective assessment, self-reflection should be considered an integral part of the assessment process throughout the learning journey. The participants also thought that another effective way of measuring learning through experience is group work, as it promotes inclusiveness, teamwork, leadership and communication. The study showed that it is important to embed reflection as an assessment method for evaluating the experiential learning process. It provides opportunities for self-assessment and lifelong learning (Bond, Evans, & Ellis, 2011).

The results of the class observations confirm the participants' understanding of the importance of learner-centred classroom activities, such as giving feedback on learners' ideas, engaging in practical experiential learning activities, listening to students' presentations/ideas and responding to learners' questions. The findings reinforced what staff already knew about experiential learning and reflection and showed that they managed to use experiential learning in their classes. However, the class observation data analysis showed that only a small number of reflection activities were used during classes and that many teachers were not familiar with reflection and its implementation with the students. Even though experiential learning activities filled 11% of observed class time, reflective practice occupied a mere 1%. It became apparent that, although theoretical awareness about experiential learning was not a problem for new academic staff, the practical application of this was not always fully achieved. This was probably due to the fact that most teaching practitioners saw experiential learning simply as isolated class activities, exercises from which students can learn. A deeper approach to experiential learning, one that shows that an experiential learning activity is only complete

when it is accompanied by a short reflective task, was not fully understood. This research supported the idea that further professional development workshops might need to be conducted at this institution, to discuss how experiences can be reflected upon, in order to enable every teacher to use reflection appropriately.

Overall, in contemporary educational practice, academic staff induction programmes can help create better staff relationships through pre-observation meetings, class observations and post-observation meetings. Making teachers aware of the collected data on their performance helps to inform staff future goals and professional development needs. Teacher performance data could also help educational providers report on the overall learning and teaching performance. It provides clear information on what teachers actually do in the classroom and how that aligns with organisational values, goals, student needs and funding requirements. This should hopefully lead to better quality teaching and produce better quality graduates.

Conclusion

The aim of this particular induction programme was to encourage more teaching staff to use an experiential learning classroom environment, as part of the institution's general teaching policy. As highlighted in the literature review, experiential learning and reflective practice are both relevant for current education theories and research, so we conducted this study in order to help the institution to change its learning and teaching methods from the old teacher-centred way to a more experiential approach. The research revealed that staff induction is a successful process that generates mutually beneficial critical conversations between educational professionals.

In theory, academic staff understood what experiential learning is and its overall importance in tertiary education, compared with other more conventional learning approaches. During our discussions, the staff proved to be very familiar with different types of learner-centred experiential learning activities and seemed keen to trial them in their own classes. Most participants in the questionnaire suggested that reflection plays a major role in experiential learning and that this is one of the main ways in which we can assess experiential learning. They also came up with a variety of useful reflective tasks that can be practiced in class.

In practice, following the class observations, we were able to confirm our initial findings that teaching staff were very creative in using experiential learning activities in their classes and making sure that students are having a fun time, trialling a wide variety of practical exercises. However, even though most of the teaching staff knew the theory behind experiential learning (or have found out and consolidated this theory during the short Moodle course and questionnaire), not everyone understood how to achieve real learning through an experiential learning type of lesson.

Overall, this process has proven to be very beneficial for both new staff and the experiential learning team, as this is a great opportunity for everyone to share interesting and original ideas about experiential learning, learn from each other and reflect more on their practice. Based on these findings, we concluded that a better-organised staff induction programme at our institution is key to further increase the quality of learning and teaching.

Limitations of this Study

We acknowledge the limitations of this study. Firstly, the results of the study might appear to not reflect the general situation at our institution, as the number of participants was limited to 16 (due to only having 16 new staff who went through the induction process during the study period). However, the sample was found to be representative for the size of our institution. Secondly, the class observations conducted were all scheduled, giving staff the opportunity to plan their lessons in advance. Therefore, the classroom behaviour observed may not have represented their usual teaching habits. Thirdly, the results of the observations could have been further affected by the stress of being observed, as well as the time limitation of 30 minutes per observation.

Recommendations

The paper aims to highlight the need for creating a cultural shift with improved learning styles, implementing experiential learning and reflective practice among staff and students in the tertiary education sector. The new interesting ideas generated on experiential learning and reflective practice during the research are certainly good resources to apply and practice in the classroom, although this is just the beginning of the process. A more sustained and constructive approach from all the parties involved should be beneficial for better results in the future (institution, academic staff and students).

The willingness of the institution to promote and support this programme is necessary. Implementing experiential learning and reflection practice into the usual staff induction process, to include education and training on the importance of these teaching strategies, would definitely be beneficial. Introducing these strategies into the existing curriculum would require extra work on curriculum design, as well as a specific implementation and a guided assessment process.

Training sessions should be provided to both staff and students on adjusting the traditional teaching and learning methods by introducing more experiences and reflection. The results show that staff might benefit from more training in terms of reflective activities they can employ during an experiential learning lesson, to make sure that this is indeed a meaningful learning experience. Therefore, support services should be in place to guide, support and evaluate the progress for both staff and students. These services should be able to guide and help students to continue learning through experiences and to continuously reflect in their self-directed learning journey.

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