Remodeled Classrooms: Experiential Learning and Its Impact

Mindy Kinnaman
mindy.kinnaman@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

REMODELED CLASSROOMS: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND ITS IMPACT

Mindy Kinnaman, EdD
Department of Counseling and Higher Education
Northern Illinois University, 2021
Dr. Katy Jaekel, Director

This dissertation examined how faculty learn how to host and facilitate experiential learning activities for their classes and how the faculty are impacted by the work. Findings based upon nine semi-structured interviews indicated that fewer than half of participants had been formally trained to host experiential learning activities and some received no training at all. Findings also indicated that faculty experienced several personal benefits to hosting experiential learning activities, as did their students. Recommendations that emerged from this project include training programs for faculty, mentoring programs, and funding of experiential learning programs.
REMODELED CLASSROOMS: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND ITS IMPACT

BY

MINDY KINNAMAN
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The use of transformative experiences in education to facilitate learning is not a new idea. For nearly a century, educators have questioned whether lecture-based classrooms are as effective as those that incorporate experiential education, or education in which students learn by playing an active role in the subjects being taught (Allen, 2007; Astin, 1993; Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Dewey, 1938; Faust & Paulson, 1998; Lewis & Williams, 1994; Prince, 2004; Zingone, Franks, Guirguis, George, Howard-Thompson & Heidel, 2010). According to Kraft (1990), educators who use experiential learning “place the student in a setting that forces appropriate problem-solving behavior” (p. 177). By moving away from lecture, students have the opportunity to learn through hands-on activities that prompt them to use their own experiences and resources to find solutions for themselves.

Also known as active learning, experiential learning has been designated a high-impact practice within higher education (Kilgo, Ezell Sheets, & Pascarella, 2015). Experiential learning has been found to have profound impacts on students, increasing their knowledge on subjects (American Institutes for Research, 2016; Boyd, Williams-Black, & Love, 2009; Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Freeman et al., 2014; Jeong & Chi, 2007; Kilgo et al., 2015; Prince, 2004; Suskie, 2015), retention (Braxton et al., 2000; Hennessy & Evans, 2006; Prince, 2004), interpersonal skills (American Institutes for Research, 2016; Bruffee, 1984; Cabrera et al., 2002; Strayhorn, 2008; Suskie, 2015; Terenzini, Cabrera, Colbeck, Parente, & Bjorklund, 2001; Tinto,
2000), and even their multicultural competence (Cabrera et al., 2002; Cheng & Zhao, 2006; Engberg, 2007; Hennessy & Evans, 2006; Soria, Werner, Chandiramani, Day, & Asmundson, 2019). The benefits show that experiential learning plays a critical role in students’ learning.

Since Dewey (1938) first wrote that students should be exposed to learning based upon experiences, reactions have been mixed. While educators showed an interest in Dewey’s ideas, experiential learning did not become fully integrated as a practice until the latter part of the 20th century. Since then, researchers have studied experiential learning, creating a framework for how experiential learning should be delivered and developing a better understanding for how impactful the practice can be (Breunig, 2017; Gokhale, 1995; Kolb & Kolb, 2005, 2008; Lewis & Williams, 1994; Moore, Boyd, & Dooley, 2010; Prince, 2004). As a result, more and more educators are bringing experiential learning into their practice.

According to scholars, learning works best when students collaborate with one another using hands-on activities and reflect afterward (Breunig, 2017; Kolb & Kolb, 2008; Lewis & Williams, 1994; Moore et al., 2010). Activities considered experiential learning can be conducted in or out of the classroom. In class, students can participate in activities including reading and discussing case studies or playing games (Lewis & Williams, 1994; Prince, 2004). Outside of the classroom, students can participate in study abroad programs and service-learning projects, among others (Cabrera et al., 2002; Wright, 2000). Additionally, activities can be facilitated by faculty members or by students with the guidance of faculty.

Problem of Practice

While a great deal of literature exists about experiential learning as a whole and how it positively impacts students academically and psychosocially, little literature exists on how faculty create experiential learning activities, especially in a community college setting (Estes,
Not only does limited information exist teaching faculty how to administer experiential learning activities, but also it is difficult to determine what, if any, impact experiential learning has upon the faculty who administer the activities. This is important to know in order to have a complete understanding of the impact of experiential learning, as the majority of the literature focuses on how students are impacted by or learn during experiential learning (American Institutes for Research, 2016; Boyd et al., 2009; Braxton et al., 2000; Breunig, 2017; Bruffee, 1984; Cabrera et al., 2002; Cheng & Zhao, 2006; Engberg, 2007; Freeman et al., 2014; Gokhale, 1995; Jeong & Chi, 2007; Kilgo et al., 2015; Kolb & Kolb, 2005, 2008; Lewis & Williams, 1994; Moore et al., 2010; Prince, 2004; Soria et al., 2019; Strayhorn, 2008; Suskie, 2015; Terenzini et al., 2001; Tinto, 2000).

Through the limited research available on how faculty should create experiences for their students, it is clear that experiential learning is a “transactive process between an educator and a student” (Itin, 1999, p. 91). Interaction and engagement beyond simply lecturing is necessary, and it is up to faculty to determine the appropriate method by which to deliver information to the students (Estes, 2004; Itin, 1999). Of course, with limited training opportunities on experiential learning and research that focuses more upon how students are impacted, more studies are needed.

Due to the limitations of the existing literature regarding how faculty create and are impacted by experiential learning, this study benefits the knowledge available. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how faculty are impacted by their work creating experiential learning activities at Rocky Mountain Community College (RMCC; a pseudonym). Specifically, the following questions guided this study:

1. How do faculty learn to develop experiential learning activities?
2. Do faculty feel prepared to develop and host experiential learning activities?

3. What impact does hosting experiential learning activities have upon faculty?

The aim of this study was to add to the literature regarding how faculty experience facilitating experiential learning and to identify what might provide further support for faculty.

**Literature Review**

Because experiential learning has been a subject of debate for nearly 100 years, there is a great deal of literature on the subject. The literature dates back to the formation of the idea in the 1930s. When reviewing the literature on experiential learning, it can be divided into five categories: the historical framework of experiential learning, an overview of experiential learning, faculty-led experiential learning activities, student-facilitated experiential learning activities, and the impact of experiential learning upon students who participate in the mode of study.

**Historical Framework**

The idea of experiential learning traces its roots back to the early 20th Century and John Dewey, who, in his book *Experience and Education* (1938), emphasized the importance of experiences in transforming education from a passive act in which students learned via lecture to one more engaging, in which students were able to take an active role in their learning process. According to Dewey (1938), experiences played a role in the efficacy of education; however, he went on to state that the quality of such experiences could either hurt or hinder a student’s learning. Ultimately, educators needed to ensure that the quality of their activities were positive, “that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth” (Dewey, 1938, p. 39-40). Otherwise, the experiences would not impact
students, or worse, they could negatively impact their views on learning, thus debilitating any future learning the students may encounter (Dewey, 1938).

Since Dewey, others have taken up the idea of experiential learning, conducting research and even developing theoretical models to explain how learning occurs via experiential learning (Breunig, 2017; Kolb & Kolb, 2005, 2008). Lewis and Williams (1994) described experiential learning as “fundamental to meaningful learning” (p. 5). The idea is that, through trial and error in the learning process, students will either confirm what they believe or learn something new (Lewis & Williams, 1994). Students link theory with practice and apply lessons to their own lives (Moore, Boyd, & Dooley, 2010). As a result, students walk away from the activity better able to understand what is being taught due to the practical application to their personal experiences.

In order to be considered experiential learning, the faculty leading the activities should facilitate activities, as opposed to delivering information via lecture (Gokhale, 1995; Prince, 2004). Following the experience, the students must reflect upon it in order for learning to truly occur (Breunig, 2017; Itin, 1999; Kolb & Kolb, 2008; Lewis & Williams, 1994; McClam, Diambra, Burton, Fuss, & Fudge, 2008; Moore et al., 2010). To be blunt, Moore et al., (2010) wrote that “a valuable experience is without meaning unless the experience is carefully considered for its true worth” (p. 48). Examples of experiential learning activities include role playing, games, case studies, debates, peer teaching, and simulations (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Lewis & Williams, 1994; Prince, 2004). Additionally, activities can happen outside of the classroom through co-curricular activities such as exchange programs, field trips, and service-learning projects (Cabrera et al., 2002; Wright, 2000). The variety of experiences can allow
faculty to plan activities closely related to the area of study while still being engaging to students.

David Kolb developed the experiential learning theory (ELT) to show how experiential learning occurs within students (Clark, Threeton, & Ewing, 2010; Kolb & Kolb, 2005, 2008; Mainemelis, Boyatzis, & Kolb, 2002). In creating ELT, Kolb drew upon the works of Paulo Freire, William James, and Jean Piaget (Breunig, 2017; Kolb & Kolb, 2008; Mainemelis et al., 2002). ELT states that learning occurs in a spiral featuring four stages, and in order for learning to occur, a student must experience all four stages (Clark et al., 2010; Kolb & Kolb, 2005, 2008; Lewis & Williams, 1994; Mainemelis et al., 2002). The stages are concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Clark et al., 2010; Kolb & Kolb, 2005, 2008; Lewis & Williams, 1994; Mainemelis et al., 2002). Kolb and Kolb (2008) wrote that students, “by consciously following a recursive cycle of experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting,… can increase their learning power” (p. 297). Of course, in order for experiential learning to be impactful, students must believe that they are capable of learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2008).

**Experiential Learning**

As experiential learning has become more widely used in education, several subsets of experiential learning have been developed: collaborative learning, cooperative learning, and problem-based learning. Collaborative learning brings together small groups for the sake of learning, and all of the participants are graded as a group (Prince, 2004; Smith & MacGregor, 1993). Cooperative learning, a subset of collaborative learning, consists of experiential learning activities designed for groups of three or more; however, students are graded independent from the group (Faust & Paulson, 1998; Felder & Brent, 2007; Prince, 2004; Smith, 1996; Zingone et
A third subset of experiential learning is problem-based learning, where the faculty member provides the class with problems at the outset and then involves students in seeking the answers, whether as groups or individually (Prince, 2004). The subsets show that experiential learning can be done individually or in groups.

Regardless of whether the experiential learning activity is collaborative or cooperative, group work allows students more opportunities to learn and benefit from their peers than activities designed for individuals. Group learning sets up students to share their thinking, work, and “cognitive responsibility” with one another (Palincsar & Herrenkohl, 2002, p. 26). Fiol (1994) suggested that by learning in groups students come together for the ability to “(1) generate diversity and (2) build consensus” (p. 404). The students collectively work on the same goal, which “produces intellectual synergy of many minds coming to bear on a problem” (Smith & MacGregor, 1993, p. 2). In other words, whether the students are participating in activities designed to benefit the entire group or individuals through group work, students walk away learning cooperation and collaboration skills.

Experiential learning should be an intentional activity and can be comprised of short-term activities or those that occur over the course of a semester. Prince (2004) pointed out that experiential learning activities should be created with educational learning outcomes in mind. In order for faculty to create an effective learning experience for students, “an investment of psychological energy is needed to build the community ties that promote student success” (Vetter, Schreiner, McIntosh, & Dugan, 2019, p. 47). Experiential learning consists of four steps: a structured activity, reflection, integration of learning, and applying learning (Van Eynde & Spender, 1988). To implement experiential learning, faculty need to create learning objectives for the assignment, a clear explanation of the activity, expectations, an outline for how they will
monitor learning, and methods by which they can intervene if necessary (Smith, 1996). Without these strategies, students may struggle to complete the activity, or worse, fail to learn from it.

To be most effective, experiential learning should allow for students to collaborate as part of the process of learning (Bruffee, 1984). By working in tandem with others, students work toward the shared goal of learning, as the students are in charge of learning for both themselves and the peers in their groups (Cabrera et al., 2002; Cortright, Collins, & DiCarlo, 2005; Gokhale, 1995). When working with one another on collaborative and cooperative learning activities, students confront biases and misconceptions (Cabrera et al., 2002). In addition to collaborating, the students may come together to build consensus, both in terms of the subject they are learning and how they communicate with one another (Fiol, 1994). Activities can be spread over the course of a semester; however, Wright (2000) found that short-term experiential learning activities were just as beneficial in terms of impact. No matter what, though, faculty have to provide students with adequate time to complete the activity and to learn with understanding, also known as meaningful learning (Cortright et al., 2005). This allows students to get the most from the activity.

Critics of experiential learning often state that it is meant to completely replace lecturing in classrooms. In addition, they state that experiential learning requires too much time to design the activities, as well as time needed outside of class to cover content (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Michael, 2007; Zingone et al., 2010). Prince (2004) even wrote that some critics consider experiential learning to be simply a temporary craze. Additionally, teachers who are unfamiliar with experiential learning feel uncertain about the best time to use active learning in their coursework or believe that students do not know how to learn actively (Bruffee, 1984; Michael, 2007). Size of the course is another factor, with faculty believing that experiential learning
cannot be conducted in large introductory courses, but as Bernot and Metzler (2014) stated, those
courses are precisely the ones where experiential learning is needed to engage students. A study
conducted by Bernot and Metzler (2014) found that students in a large introductory course that
used experiential learning activities fared just as well as those in a lecture-based course.

Countering critics, authors such as Faust and Paulson (1998) point out that experiential
learning is meant to enrich lectures, providing students with alternative means by which they can
learn or seek clarification for the information being taught. Experiential learning activities do not
need to be comprehensive; instead, faculty can pose reflective questions or ask students to
partner and share what they have learned (Faust & Paulson, 1998). For more in-depth activities,
while faculty may need to devote time to creating the activity initially, the most time-intensive
work occurs only at the outset, not during subsequent applications of the activity (Faust &
Paulson, 1998). Of course, spending time at the outset is necessary. If experiential learning is not
implemented intentionally, it can negatively impact students’ learning and cooperation (Felder &
Brent, 2007). Faculty must apply care as well as direction for students so that they understand
expectations and achieve desired learning outcomes.

Faculty-Led Experiential Learning

While a great deal of literature exists sharing general information on experiential
learning, limited information exists on how faculty should use it in their classrooms. In some
classrooms, experiential learning comes easy. For instance, career and technical education (CTE)
courses in programs such as nursing or automotive technology require that students participate in
hands-on lessons as they learn (Clark et al., 2010). Itin (1999) wrote that faculty should not rely
solely upon experiential learning, just as they should avoid using only lecture in their classes.
Instead, Itin (1999) wrote that faculty should use a multitude of teaching strategies to make their
classes more of an “educational experience” (p. 97). Educators should provide their classes with student-centered activities (Estes, 2004). Hennessy and Evans (2006) laud the usage of collaborative and cooperative learning in the classroom, citing that “the small-group discussion process allows students to participate on a level that is less likely to intimidate and more likely to engage learning” (p. 99). They go on to argue that, of all institutions, it is the faculty at community colleges who are best to incorporate experiential learning in their classes as they “are more likely to possess the attitudes and philosophy towards education necessary to use small-group learning successfully in their courses” (p. 104). Of course, dedicated time for reflection must occur, as it allows for autonomy, critical thinking, and self-reliance (Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 1997; Estes, 2004). And faculty should not limit themselves to one experiential learning activity per semester. Hamer (2000) said that the use of multiple experiential learning projects over the course of a semester can be helpful to students in courses where they are expected to learn a great deal of information. It does take time and effort on the part of the faculty to implement, but as shown in the impacts section of this literature review, the work does pay off for students.

The literature does offer some warnings for faculty to keep in mind. Nelson and Crow (2014) caution that, if the outcome for the activity is to teach students critical thinking, then the activities must be “designed to mentally stimulate and engage thinking in a relative context” (p. 79). Additionally, faculty cannot leave all of the learning to the activity; instead, students should go into the activity with a basic knowledge of what is being learned (Powell, Cleveland, Thompson & Forde, 2012). Training of faculty is key, however. Without it, even the most well-meaning faculty member can take a lesson and use a teacher-centered approach instead of a student-centered one (Estes, 2004). Of course, training is the one thing that is missing from the literature.
**Student-Facilitated Experiential Learning**

While limited studies on student-facilitated experiential learning exist, several themes emerged from the literature. First, student-led activities teach students how to be resourceful and solve problems on their own or with the help of their peers (Cortright et al., 2005). The process requires that students learn the material and understand it before imparting that learned knowledge upon their peers (Cortright et al., 2005; Marvell et al., 2013). Cortright et al., (2005) wrote that, through practicing the activity and hearing feedback from peers, students are able to grow in their knowledge and how they share information with others. In other words, the students become better teachers and leaders through the process.

Of course, in order for student-facilitated activities to be impactful, the faculty member simply cannot give the assignment and leave the students to themselves. The instructor must provide students with a framework, time, and feedback so that the students understand what is expected of them and how the work will benefit them, as well as have enough time to achieve meaningful learning (Balasooriya et al., 2013; Cortright et al., 2005). If implemented well, students feel more empowered, are better able to reflect upon the performance of others, empathize with the instructor, and feel responsible for the learning of their peers (Marvell et al., 2013). While student-facilitated experiential learning does take some work to implement, the results show that, if conducted well, it has the power to be transformative for participants.

**Impact**

Just as many papers have been written about the concept of experiential learning, many have detailed the positive impact of experiential learning upon college students. Students have seen positive gains in the classroom as well as with their interpersonal skills, multicultural competence, and more. The work not only benefits students during their time in college but also
produces skills that will benefit them as they move on from their education to their ultimate careers (Cortright et al., 2005; Enberg, 2007; Lewis & Williams, 1994; McClam et al., 2008). Lewis and Williams (1994) wrote that experiential learning provides students with workplace skills including communication, teamwork, and “workplace literacy” (p. 6). Through experiential learning, students are more prepared to work in diverse settings (Enberg, 2007). In terms of race and gender, men and women both benefit from collaborative learning, but students of color are more likely to be impacted than their White peers (Cabrera et al., 2002). Students are more likely to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally (Felder & Brent, 2007; Vetter et al., 2019). In other words, every student who participates in experiential learning is positively impacted by the activities, both in and out of the classroom.

In the classroom, Gokhale (1995) found that students who participated in collaborative learning activities saw increased critical thinking when compared to students who studied on their own for tests. Additionally, students who participated in collaborative learning activities felt less stress as they solved problems (Gokhale, 1995). Students also saw better grades, recalled more information, and were more likely to persist toward their educational goals (Felder & Brent, 2007; Lee, 2018; Prince 2004; Van Eynde & Spencer, 1988). Cabrera et al., (2002) found that cooperative learning helped students with their academic skills, especially in the areas of science and technology. Additionally, students were more likely to thrive in the areas of student-faculty satisfaction and student-faculty interaction when they participated in co-curricular activities (Vetter et al., 2019).

There are other academic benefits to experiential learning. A meta-analysis of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) literature by Freeman et al., (2014) found that experiential learning positively benefitted students’ performance on tests, while students
who took tests after having the same information delivered via lecture saw failure rates increase by 55%. Freeman et al., (2014) went on to say that the lower failure rates in experiential learning classrooms could save students millions of dollars in tuition in just STEM coursework. In a study of high-impact practices, Kilgo et al., (2015) found experiential learning to be of “immense benefit to students” (p. 523), with it helping students in the areas of critical thinking and intercultural effectiveness, among other skills. Several studies cited experiential learning as a positive factor in students’ retention (Braxton et al., 2000; Braxton, Jones, Hirschy, & Hartley, 2008; Tinto, 2000).

Of course, the classroom benefits of experiential learning are not limited to individual growth and development, as experiential learning was found to improve students’ collaborative skills as well (Enberg, 2007; Felder & Brent, 2007). Enberg (2007) found that the diversity experienced by students through co-curricular activities had a direct link to positive collaborative learning in the classroom. The students were more likely to “learn from and educate others about their multiple social identities” in collaborative activities (Enberg, 2007, p. 311). Similarly, Hennessy and Evans (2006) found that, as students move to become actively engaged in their learning, “they are able to speak the language of critical, academic discourse” (p. 94). Wright (2000) found that students saw benefits in four areas: substantive benefits, where students connect information learned in textbooks to real-life situations; methodological benefits, when students link theory to practices; pedagogical benefits, where students take in information via a variety of learning modes; and transitional benefits, which provide students with skills designed to help them transition from undergraduate education to graduate programs. According to Suskie (2015), students are more likely to meet collaborative learning outcomes, growing in areas such as communication, leadership, and problem solving. Collaborating also allows for knowledge
convergence, which Jeong and Chi (2007) described as “an increase in common knowledge” (p. 289). In other words, students saw both short- and long-term benefits academically when it came to experiential learning.

Outside of the classroom, experiential learning also positively benefits students. Cabrera et al., (2002) found that students saw increased analytical skills and intercultural competence. The process of “collaborative learning encourages collective responsibility in a diverse world” (Cabrera et al., 2002, p. 30). Soria et al., (2019) found that, of all races, Black students reported significantly higher leadership development after participating in co-curricular experiential learning activities. Additionally, students who facilitated discussions were more likely to have greater leadership development and multicultural competence (Cheng & Zhao, 2006; Hennessy & Evans, 2006; Soria et al., 2019). Students who participated in experiential learning had greater skills in problem solving, collaboration, communication, interdependence, and creative thinking (American Institutes for Research, 2016; Felder & Brent, 2007; Hennessy & Evans, 2006; Terenzini et al., 2001; Zingone et al., 2010). Additionally, Nelson and Crow (2014) found that students had an improved sense of self, were more confident, and were better able to solve real-world problems. A study led by the American Institutes for Research (2016) showed that all students, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, and achievement, saw positive results. Experiential learning showed positive correlations to students’ personal and social development (Felder & Brent, 2007; Strayhorn, 2008).

The literature regarding experiential learning spans its foundation through modern-day practices. As the practice of experiential learning has been used over the past 80 years, studies have been developed showing how students are impacted. Additionally, faculty have created new methods for instruction via active learning, including student-facilitated experiential learning.
What is missing from the literature is a look at how faculty are trained to facilitate experiential learning and the impact the work has upon them. Through my study, I provide information on how faculty learn to incorporate experiential learning activities in their classrooms and how they are affected by such practices, adding to the existing literature on the subject.

**Research Design**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how experiential learning impacts faculty. More specifically, it sought to understand how faculty learn to develop experiential learning activities with little to no training.

Because the purpose of this case study was to explore the impact of experiential learning upon faculty, the data was gathered using a qualitative case study (Merriam, 1998) through one-on-one interview. Here, case study is understood as a bounded system studied in depth to better understand a natural phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The goal was to ask questions of the participants and study their responses to determine how they believe their teaching using experiential learning has impacted them.

**Background**

**Research Site.** RMCC is a two-year public community college located along the eastern border of the Rocky Mountains. The institution has three campuses spread throughout three metropolitan areas. At the time of the study (2018), the institution had more than 19,000 students between the three campuses (Site institution’s website “Fast Facts,” 2018). Of the students, 58% were female, while 42% were male (Site institution’s website, “Fast Facts,” 2018). The racial demographics of RMCC were 62% white, 21% Hispanic, 5% unknown, 4% two or more races, 4% Asian, 2% Black, and 1% American Indian (Site institution’s website, “Fast Facts,” 2018).
The site of the study was the college’s southernmost campus, which had the largest enrollment of the three campuses, 8,000 students.

The Student Life Office at RMCC partnered with academic affairs to host a co-curricular learning experience (CCLE) grant program during the fall and spring semesters of each school year. Created in 2015, the CCLE program is designed to create experiential learning activities to help facilitate student learning and increase student grades and retention. Additionally, the program was created to help build a bridge between student and academic affairs, both of which had previously been siloed. By partnering on the program, students can have experiences designed to facilitate a greater understanding of the financial and programmatic support of student life.

As part of the CCLE program, the director of Student Life and a faculty member serving in the role of a faculty fellow request applications from faculty interested in participating in the program (Appendix A). Interested faculty propose experiential learning activities for which they would like to obtain funding. The activities can be one-time events or ongoing classroom activities, and they may be conducted by the faculty member or by the students with the guidance of the faculty member. Activities vary each semester, but previous activities have included trips to community-access television stations to record and air videos on the importance of having an unbiased media, facilitating a dialogue between college students and local law enforcement to break down stereotypes and misconceptions, and attending a local play and creating visual metaphors designed to express how the performance impacted the students.

From the faculty fellow and the director of Student Life to the faculty member creating the experience and students, all have roles to play in the experiential learning activity. The role of the faculty fellow is to provide assistance to the participating faculty in designing the
experience, leading reflection following the activity, and determining how to assess whether the students are meeting stated learning outcomes. Meanwhile, the director of Student Life provides funding for the experience and manages the logistics of creating the experience, which could include booking rooms, arranging transportation, coordinating catering, and shopping for supplies. Faculty come up with the idea for the program and plan the details for how to implement and assess the experience. Finally, students participate in the experience, although in some cases they may facilitate an activity for the general student body to experience.

The typical timeline for a CCLE can range from one month to the entire semester. Following the faculty member’s application, the faculty fellow and director of Student Life meet to approve requests. A meeting is then called between the faculty fellow, director of Student Life, and faculty member to determine what is needed to successfully implement the activity, when the experience will occur, and how the faculty member will assess the learning outcomes for the activity. Following the meeting, the faculty member incorporates the experience into the course in order to begin preparing students to either participate in or lead the activity. If the students are facilitating the experience, the faculty member provides them with assistance throughout the process of planning and then implementing the activity.

During the class immediately following the experience, the faculty member leads a discussion reflecting upon the experience and how it impacted the students. Additionally, the students are asked to complete a story-prompt assignment in which students are asked to write two stories based on questions provided by the faculty member: one asking them to reflect upon something they believe they will remember about the event one year from now and one in which the students reflect upon how they believe the activity relates to course content (Appendix B). The story prompts are collected into a report by the director of Student Life, who provides the
information to the faculty member. The faculty member then completes the report, giving an overview of the experience and stating how well the students met the learning outcomes.

**Participants.** Participants for the study were comprised of RMCC faculty who have led experiential learning activities through the CCLE program. The study used purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015) to gather faculty who host experiential learning activities. Purposeful sampling, as described by Patton (2015), seeks to analyze those with first-hand experience with the phenomenon being studied, creating “information-rich cases” (Patton, 2015, p. 53). As such, the faculty allowed for that first-hand experience from those who were leading the experiential learning activity.

In order to obtain the sample for this case study, I used convenience sampling, selecting a sample from the faculty who hosted experiential learning activities through the CCLE program. A convenience sample seeks participants who are readily available, in this case due to their participation in the CCLE program (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To collect participants, I emailed all of the faculty who had participated in the CCLE program since its inception, sharing information about the study and how they could sign up to participate. Those interested in participating were asked to email me to schedule one-on-one interviews.

**Data Collection Methods.** Once participants were determined, the study collected data via two methods. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, i.e., interviews with a set list of questions that allow for follow-up questioning and further probing of information presented by the subjects (Patton, 2015).

Semi-structured interviews were held in two phases. The first interview asked participants about their general experiences with experiential learning and lasted approximately one hour. Then, two weeks later, a second set of interviews were held, focusing on the most
recent experiential learning activity hosted by the faculty member. The second interview lasted 45 minutes. Both sets of interviews were conducted one-on-one and face-to-face with each participant. I audio recorded each interview using a digital voice recorder and took notes of the conversation.

Data Analysis. To record the data collected via the interviews, I used transcription (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Immediately following the interviews, I transcribed the conversations. Because I conducted two interviews with each participant, transcription allowed me to determine the best follow-up questions to ask in the second set of interviews. Additionally, I was able to ask questions to clarify information collected during the first round of interviews.

Following the interviews, I used analytical coding (Richards, 2015) on the data collected. Analytical coding is a process in which materials are reviewed to determine which categories and themes are present across all of them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As I read through the interview transcripts, I found themes that looked at how faculty believed they were impacted when they hosted experiential learning activities. With the data collected, my goal was to find categories that spanned the interviews that allowed me to develop a clear understanding of how the experiential learning activities benefited the faculty who developed them. I anticipated finding themes on the subject of impact as well as categories within that theme, such as skills and experience.

Criteria of Quality. To ensure that my study produced authentic, trustworthy results, I used validity and reliability (Firestone, 1987). As Firestone (1987) wrote, “The qualitative study provides the reader with a depiction in enough detail to show that the author’s conclusion ‘makes sense’” (p. 19). In order to show the findings in my study were reliable, I used two criteria of quality: rich, thick description (Becker, 1986) and peer examination (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
Using interviews as a method of data collection allowed me to provide rich, thick description of the faculty participating in the study with direct quotes from their interviews.

Finally, I used peer examination and shared my results with the faculty fellow. In addition to providing support to the participating faculty members, the faculty fellow also plans experiential learning activities. By sharing my results with her, I was able to determine whether my research matched her experiences of working with experiential learning projects. Once I determined the themes and categories via analytical coding, I shared the raw data to see if the faculty fellow found similar categories and themes.

**Researcher Reflexivity / Positionality Statement.** As the director of Student Life, I have worked with the CCLE program since the spring of 2017. I ran the risk of allowing my personal bias to affect my research. I have more than three years experience that could have shaped how I interpreted the data collected. Additionally, I had an assumption that the experiential learning would have a positive impact upon the faculty I interviewed. As I worked to understand how faculty were impacted, I needed to ensure that I did not let my bias and assumptions guide my research, even if the results contradicted what I thought and believed.

An additional issue I faced was that, as a coordinator of the CCLE program, faculty might have believed that their funding of future experiential learning activities could be impacted by whether or not they participated in my study. Further, for those who did participate, they may have felt as though they needed to provide me with positive experiences to make the program look good. With each participant, I was clear that their role would not impact future funding.

**Limitations.** As I prepared for my study, I foresaw three potential limitations to my research. First, the sample used in my study might not have been representative of other faculty who host experiential learning activities. Additionally, because the experiential learning
activities vary among all participating faculty, the results I found in my research might be specific only to my sample and not to other faculty who host experiential learning activities at RMCC. Finally, the participating faculty might not have been trained on how to conduct experiential learning activities. As a result, the lack of training might have impacted the results and might not be indicative of faculty who have been trained to conduct experiential learning activities.

**Significance**

The research I conducted is significant for several reasons. First, experiential learning has been shown to have greater positive impacts on students’ cognitive and psychosocial development than traditional lecture-style learning, regardless of whether the activities are facilitated by the faculty member or students. Additionally, due to the ongoing evolution of teaching methods, further study of experiential learning from the faculty’s perspective could provide more information on the benefits students experience in and out of the classroom. As a result, this study had the potential to show another way in which students are impacted by experiential learning.

Another reason why this study is significant is that, while there are many books and articles written about the benefits of experiential learning, little information exists regarding how to structure experiential learning activities. Additionally, the literature is lacking about how faculty are impacted by their work facilitating experiential learning activities. As a result, this study was necessary to help further the discourse on the subject of experiential learning, its benefits for students, and how activities should be structured for maximum benefit.
CHAPTER 2: THE POWER OF EXPERIENCE: UNDERSTANDING FACULTY’S ROLE IN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Introduction

In his 1938 book *Experience and Education*, John Dewey wrote that experience had a major impact on education and, depending on the experience, could help or hinder the student’s learning. Since then, educators have come together to recognize the importance of experiential learning, delving further in examining how it can benefit students, both in and out of the classroom (American Institutes of Research, 2016; Boyd, Williams-Black, & Love, 2009; Braxton, Jones, Hirschy, & Hartley III, 2008; Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Bruffee, 1984; Cabrera et al., 2002; Cheng & Zhao, 2006; Engberg, 2007; Freeman et al., 2014; Jeong & Chi, 2007; Kilgo, Ezell Sheets, & Pascarella, 2015; Nelson & Crow, 2014; Prince, 2004; Soria, Werner, Chandiramani, Day, & Asmundson, 2019; Strayhorn, 2008; Suskie, 2015; Terenzini, Cabrera, Colbeck, Parente, & Bjorkland, 2001; Tinto, 2000). Experiential learning allows faculty to move beyond lectures, giving students a hands-on opportunity to learn via problem solving (Braxton et al., 2008; Kraft, 1990). As a result, students are required to use their own experiences to find the solutions needed to solve the problems posed by the faculty.

Experiential learning, also known as active learning, is a style of learning in which students play an active role in the subject being taught. Examples of the experiential learning activities students can participate in include service-learning projects, role playing, case studies, exchange programs, field trips, and simulations (Lewis & Williams, 1994; Wright, 2000). Experiential learning has had such a profound impact upon students that it was named a high-
impact practice (Kilgo et al., 2015). It has been found to have positive impacts on students’
grades (American Institutes for Research, 2016; Boyd et al., 2009; Braxton et al., 2000; Freeman
et al., 2014; Jeong & Chi, 2007; Kilgo et al., 2015; Prince, 2004; Suskie, 2015) and personal
development (American Institutes for Research, 2016; Cheng & Zhao, 2006; Kilgo et al., 2015;
Nelson & Crow, 2014; Soria et al, 2019; Strayhorn, 2008; Terenzini et al., 2001). Whether in or
out of the classroom, students can experience positive growth from their exposure to experiential
learning.

While Dewey (1938) first wrote that students should learn via experiences, nearly a
century has passed where educators continue to question the value of experiential learning. It
was not until the end of the 20th century that experiential learning became a common form of
learning; although today, educators continue to question its importance, despite the creation of a
framework for how students learn via experiential learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, 2008;
Mainemelis, Boyatzis, & Kolb, 2002). In addition to the framework, literature has focused on
research showing how it should be taught (Breunig, 2017; Gokhale, 1995; Kolb & Kolb, 2005,
2008; Kraft, 1990; Lewis & Williams, 1994; Moore, Boyd, & Dooley, 2010; Powell, Cleveland,
Thompson, & Forde, 2012; Prince, 2004). The research has helped convince more educators to
bring experiential learning into their classes.

While experiential learning has been shown to help support students’ growth and
cognition, little research exists which discusses how faculty can facilitate experiential education.
As such, this study served to explore how faculty learn to host experiential learning activities and
are impacted by their work. Findings suggest that faculty primarily learned to host and facilitate
experiential learning activities from their peers but hosted the activities because they wanted
their students to experience the subject beyond what a lecture could provide students.
Additionally, faculty believed that hosting experiential learning activities allowed them to improve skills, including communication, organization, and event planning.

**Literature Review**

With experiential learning being a subject of study for nearly a century, a great deal of literature has discussed this topic. This review categorized two sections: first, this literature review provides an overview of experiential learning. Next, the review presents the literature that discusses promising practices for faculty to approach and execute experiential learning.

**Experiential Learning Overview**

With experiential learning, the educator places students in settings that encourage and facilitate problem-solving behavior (Kraft, 1990). The experiential activity is then followed by reflection “to develop new skills, new attitudes, or new ways of thinking” (Lewis & Williams, 1994, p. 5). Activities need to be intentional (Breunig, 2017). When building activities for their students, faculty need to keep in mind that students need to have a base understanding of the material (Powell et al., 2012). Then, following the activity, praxis or authentic reflection must occur (Breunig, 2017; Freire, 1970; Moore et al., 2010). Importantly, while hands-on career and technical education programs, such as nursing or automotive technology, tend to be experiential in nature, that does not inherently equate to experiential learning. Instead, the process of creating experiential learning activities takes time whereby students are asked to engage in an experiential activity followed by reflection and meaning making.

There are three subsets of experiential learning that are typically created in educational settings: collaborative learning, cooperative learning, and problem-based learning. Collaborative learning and cooperative learning both bring together small groups of students to work on an activity. The difference is how the learning is assessed. With collaborative learning, students are
assessed as a group (Prince, 2004; Smith & MacGregor, 1993), whereas in cooperative learning, students are individually assessed (Faust & Paulson, 1998; Felder & Brent, 2007; Prince, 2004; Smith, 1996; Zingone et al., 2010). With problem-based learning, students are given a problem to solve and then must solve it, either individually or in groups (Prince, 2004). The subsets mean that faculty have several options for how to engage their students in experiential learning and assess different skill sets and content.

Drawing upon the works of Paulo Freire, William James, and Jean Piaget, David Kolb developed experiential learning theory (ELT) as a way to better understand how learning occurs within students who participate in experiential learning (Breunig, 2017; Clark, Threeton, & Ewing, 2010; Kolb & Kolb, 2005, 2008; Mainemelis, Boyatzis, & Kolb, 2002). ELT is a spiral comprised of four stages: concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Clark et al., 2010; Kolb & Kolb, 2005, 2008; Lewis & Williams, 1994; Mainemelis et al., 2002). As a student learns, she touches all of the stages. In order for ELT to be effective, she must believe she is capable of learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, 2008). “When a concrete experience is enriched by reflection, given meaning by thinking, and transformed by action, the new experience created becomes richer, broader, and deeper” (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p. 309). ELT provides a lens through which faculty can better understand how their students learn from experiential learning activities.

Experiential learning is not without criticism. In fact, despite being a style of teaching for nearly a century, some faculty consider experiential learning to be a fad (Prince, 2004). It was designed to enhance learning, as opposed to replace it, as faculty often criticize experiential learning (Faust & Paulson, 1998). Some of the criticism stems from the fact that faculty are unsure of how and when to use collaborative learning (Bruffee, 1984). Additionally, often
faculty do not want to devote extra time to creating the activities and to studying material outside of a formal classroom setting (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Michael, 2007; Zingone et al., 2010). Another criticism made by faculty places blame on the students, stating that students often do not know how to learn appropriately to participate in experiential learning (Bruffee, 1984; Michael, 2007). Another complaint lobbied by faculty is that experiential learning cannot occur in large, introductory coursework; however, scholars such as Bernot and Metzler (2014) have indicated that students who participated in experiential learning in a large, introductory course did just as well in the course as those who attended a lecture-based version of the same course.

Research by Faust and Paulson (1998), among others, has shown that experiential learning gives faculty alternatives for sharing information with students, such as partnering with peers to share what they have learned or asking the class to reflect on questions. Those alternatives do not require much in the way of preparation. Other activities may be more in depth at the outset, as faculty will need to create the activity, but once the activity has been created, it does not require too much effort to implement in subsequent semesters (Faust & Paulson, 1998). Importantly, to be effective, faculty must spend time at the beginning to intentionally design activities that facilitate experiential learning in meaningful, intentional ways (Felder & Brent, 2007). The idea is to create a setting for shared learning and shared thinking for the students. While this step may take time at the outset, the payoff—including better performance and engagement from students—makes the work worthwhile for faculty (Palincsar & Herrenkohl, 2002).

**Literature for Faculty Who Host Experiential Learning**

Faculty play a key role in experiential learning, as what they do can have a lasting impact upon students (Dewey, 1938). Whatever a faculty member chooses to implement, the activity
must be intentional and genuine (Bruffee, 1984). Itin (1999) wrote, “The teacher must assess the learning needs of the students, select appropriate teaching strategies to meet the students’ needs, and be willing to use multiple teaching strategies to make it an educational experience” (p. 97). Faculty have the opportunity to choose the best way to encourage students to take charge of their learning, making the educational experience more student centered (Estes, 2004). For example, collaborative and cooperative activities allow students to feel less intimidated, opening the doors for them to feel confident as they teach and learn from their peers (Hennessy & Evans, 2006). Additionally, if the course is such that students will be required to learn a large amount of factual information, using multiple experiential learning activities can help students stay on top of the information (Hamer, 2000). Knowing the benefits, both academically and socially, can help faculty lead rewarding experiential learning activities for their students.

As mentioned previously, the faculty member must be intentional when designing the activity for students. Part of that intentionality includes the faculty member’s role as a facilitator of learning, as opposed to them merely lecturing (Gokhale, 1995). The faculty member must create engaging experiences with learning outcomes in mind (Prince, 2004). For example, if the faculty member wants students to demonstrate critical thinking through the experiential learning activity, then the activity must be one that calls forth such an outcome (Nelson & Crow, 2014). During the activity itself, the faculty’s role is more of a guide, helping the students toward understanding (Powell et al., 2012). It is important for the faculty member to remember that the experience does not end once the activity ends. Instead, the faculty member must allow time and space for meaningful reflection on the part of the students, preferably through conversation with one another (Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 1997).
Additionally, students must be assessed to show whether or not they have learned from the activity (Moon, 2004). Of all faculty in higher education, Hennessy and Evans (2006) argue that community college faculty “are more likely to possess the attitudes and philosophy towards education necessary to use small-group learning successfully in their courses” (p. 104). So long as faculty have a strong framework or peers who are well versed in experiential learning to guide them, they can provide meaningful experiences for their students.

**Student-Facilitated Experiential Learning.** Faculty are not the only ones who can facilitate experiential learning activities. Students can lead them with the guidance of faculty, and as a result, students benefit from the process. By serving as teachers, students must first learn and understand the material before sharing it with their peers (Cortright et al., 2005; Marvell et al., 2013). As a result of learning the material and sharing it, students then hear feedback, allowing them to grow in their knowledge and better understand how to communicate with others (Cortright et al., 2005). In addition to learning how to communicate better, students learn how to solve problems, both on their own and with the help of their peers (Cortright et al., 2005). By allowing students to take the lead in facilitating experiential learning activities, faculty give students the opportunity to become teachers and stronger leaders as a result.

As with all experiential learning activities, student-facilitated activities must be created and implemented intentionally. The instructor must give students expectations for the activity, the time to work on the activity, and feedback on how they did during the activity (Balasooriya et al., 2013; Cortright et al., 2005). The experience allows students to feel encouraged with themselves, empathy with the instructor, and responsibility for their peers’ learning (Marvell et al., 2013). While student-facilitated experiential learning takes some care on the part of the instructor, it can have positive benefits on the students who participate in the experience.
Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore how experiential learning impacted faculty, specifically how faculty learn to develop experiential learning activities with little to no training. To fully understand the impact upon faculty, a qualitative case study (Merriam, 1998) was the methodological approach to collect data. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described case study as a bounded system studied in depth to better understand a natural phenomenon. Here, the bounded system is the community college faculty who use experiential learning in their classrooms. Use of a qualitative case study allowed for the study of responses given by faculty on how they believe their teaching has been impacted by experiential learning.

Research Site

RMCC is a two-year public community college located along the eastern border of the Rocky Mountains. The institution is comprised of three campuses spread throughout three metropolitan areas. Between the three campuses, the institution had more than 19,000 students at the time of the study (2018). Of the students, 58% were female, while 42% were male (Site institution’s website, “Fast Facts,” 2018). The racial demographics of RMCC were 62% white, 21% Hispanic, 5% unknown, 4% two or more races, 4% Asian, 2% Black, and 1% American Indian (Site institution’s website, “Fast Facts,” 2018). The site of the study was be the college’s southernmost campus, which had the largest enrollment of the three campuses at 8,000 students.

Participants

Seven full-time faculty and two adjunct faculty members from one of the RMCC campuses participated in this study. The faculty work at the college’s southernmost campus, which had the largest enrollment of the three campuses, 8,000 students. Three men and six women participated in the study. Eight participants identified as White, one identified as Latinx.
The participants’ experience teaching ranged from two years to more than twenty years. Of the participants, five taught English, three taught history, and one taught math.

**Data Collection**

Participants were recruited from those who had participated in RMCC’s co-curricular learning experience (CCLE) grant program. Created in 2015, the CCLE program is a partnership between academic affairs and Student Life that provides funding and support for faculty seeking to create experiential learning activities in their classrooms. Recruitment emails were sent to the 28 faculty who had previously participated in the program. Once the participants were determined, data were collected through two one-on-one, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, which are interviews with a set structure but that allows the interviewer to ask follow-up questions as needed (Patton, 2015). The first interview lasted approximately one hour and sought participants’ general experiences with experiential learning. Two weeks following the first interview, a second interview was held focusing on the participant’s most recent experiential learning activity. The second interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interviews were organized around the following questions:

1. How do faculty learn to develop experiential learning activities?
2. Do faculty feel prepared to develop and host experiential learning activities?
3. What impact does hosting experiential activities have upon faculty?

**Data Analysis**

I used transcription (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to record the data collected via the interviews. I transcribed each interview immediately following the conversations with each participant. Transcription allowed me to ask follow-up questions and clarify information during the second set of interviews with participants. Following the interviews, I used analytical coding
(Richards, 2015) to determine categories and themes present in the interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As I read through the transcripts, I found themes based upon how faculty believed they were impacted by experiential learning activities. For example, as faculty spoke about how they learned how to conduct experiential learning activities, whether through graduate school, on their own, or via their peers, I determined that the appropriate code would be “foundation” and the theme would be “active learning.”

**Trustworthiness**

In order to prove that my study produced authentic, trustworthy results, I used goodness of fit (Merriam, 1998), focusing specifically on rich, thick description (Becker, 1986) and peer examination (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interviews allowed me to provide rich, thick description with direct quotes from the participants in the study. In addition to the rich, thick description, I shared my results with the faculty fellow for the CCLE program, who also plans experiential learning activities. Sharing the raw data from my results with her allowed me to determine whether my results matched her experiences of working with experiential learning activities.

**Findings**

Through the data collection from this project, three themes emerged from the data analysis: actively engaged learning, personal impact, and the experiential aspect of learning. The information below presents the findings supporting the three themes. The names of all participants presented below are pseudonyms.

**Actively Engaged Learning**

Participants overwhelmingly shared that they engaged in experiential learning primarily to engage students in what they understood to be a form of actively learning. While participants
had varying degrees of preparation and foundations in experiential learning, each shared that they utilized experiential learning because it provided students opportunity to more actively engage with the content of the classes. For participants, this idea of active learning was a key tenet of experiential learning, despite not always knowing the importance of things like reflection as a component of experiential learning.

Interviews indicated that few faculty members were familiar with the foundation of experiential learning. In fact, only one participant, Anna, who was an English faculty member, cited an understanding of Dewey and Kolb, among others, regarding the foundations of experiential education. Three participants did, however, mention the power of experience. Anna said, “Dewey said that one experience can set the stage for others.” Another faculty member, James, who taught math at the institution, said that he wanted to give students experiences that they would have in their careers following college, giving authenticity to their education. James said:

And…in the math for teachers, for elementary teachers, class, …it's a great opportunity to be able to weave that in and so using kind of experiences that the students are going to be basically doing for the rest of their careers in education really provides…an education like for them that optimize kind of the opportunities of the classroom environment. Like it basically, it provides a time and space for them to try things out and not just, not just attempt these experiences but also reflect and think about how they, did they enjoy it? And that opportunity to basically be like, “Well, you know what, if I don't like this, maybe this isn’t the right career path for me.” You know, it's almost like career counseling in a way, and that benefit, you know, of not only getting to feel and see kind of first-hand how this is being used but also then to use that experience to recognize, you know, or help guide them in where they're going, you know, more long-term in their careers, it was just kind of a no-brainer to start working and setting up some of these types of experiences.

James used his experiential learning activities as a form of career counseling, giving his Math for Elementary Education students a chance to teach elementary-aged children math using game
theory. As a result, James’ students walked away from the activity with a better understanding of whether elementary education was the field in which they wanted to work.

While few of the participants expressed a familiarity with the foundation for experiential learning, the number of those who received formal training was just under half. Two participants were trained through their teacher education programs, while another two participants learned how to conduct experiential learning activities during their graduate school education. Three participants learned by collaborating with peers who already knew how to do experiential learning. However, two participants had received no training whatsoever on the subject. As a result of the lack of training, one participant, Gina, a history faculty member, shared that she did not realize that reflection was a necessary step of the experiential learning process. She offered:

You know, in terms of specific content, we don't usually end. Sometimes I end with like an exit ticket or some kind of, right, like here, you know, think about this question or this thing and bring it to me before we leave. But not always. Um, that's not like a consistent aspect.

Thus, while Gina was familiar with experiential learning, limited training meant that she did not consistently offer a reflective component after exercises. She did, however, note the importance of experiential learning as active learning, understanding that her students learned more from the experiential learning activities than traditional lecture.

Interestingly, nearly half of all participants spent a large amount of their preparation time connecting the activity to the student learning outcomes. Three of the participants selected their activities based upon the learning outcomes they would like the students to meet. The same number also spent a great deal of time scaffolding their coursework to build up to the experiential learning activity but said that the amount was no more than they spent on other class assignments and activities. Kerri, an English professor, said, “So that actually starts day one, because you really have to scaffold and build this assignment and you have to help the students
understand how this is an integral part of the course and why it's connected.” Here, Kerri seemed to understand the importance of offering a scaffolded approach for the successful implementation of experiential learning. For participants, the importance of using experiential learning to actively meet their learning objectives was clear.

Participants also shared that they utilized experiential learning because they wanted their learners to do more than listen to lectures; they wanted their students to interact with the content. Bonnie, a history professor, said, “…once I started teaching, I was feeling like there was something missing. Mmm, for students to just, you know be the intake of content and not interacting with the content, content in a much broader, a broader scope.” Thus, participants also seemed to understand that interacting with content was more beneficial than lecturers whereby students were only asked to passively sit and listen.

For three of the faculty, they wanted more than interaction. They wanted immersion into cultural experiences such as theater or museum visits. Tomás, an English faculty member, took his students to see a play at a Latinx playhouse. He offered that he used experiential learning because he found it effective. He shared:

The live element, the, the immersion, the witness, I mean, for me that is so very effective, because again, drama in particular, and that's why I keep going back to Su Teatro is drama is meant to be performed. So, to get the full effect of it on a live stage some might even argue, uh, not on a, a movie adaptation like Zoot Suit is, but, um, you know, there's a certain appreciation that students have, too, because a lot of the actors at Su Teatro are their age or high schoolers, even younger, perhaps for some of them…. I have yet to have a student tell me that it was a waste of time.

He believed that it allowed his students to be more present in the experience, allowing them to better understand what they were witnessing. In this way, immersion became a form of active learning for this participant.
Personal Impact: Challenges and Successes of Experiential Learning

Findings also indicated that many of the participants in this study experienced discomfort the first time they hosted an experiential learning activity. Participants noted that as they first began implementing experiential learning activities, they were unsure of themselves and even unsure if students would attend. Yet, participants noted that as they progressed, they felt more comfortable each subsequent time they hosted the same activity. Participants noted that the discomfort and unsureness was worth it as the positive student learning impacts were evident.

Participants shared that, especially at the start of offering experiential learning opportunities, they experienced uncertainty and discomfort. Participants worried that they might get something “wrong.” James shared:

For me, it's, it's very similar to kind of classroom experiences, in that the first time I'm doing it, I'm never really quite sure, you know, if I'm doing it right, right? Like, I kind of, there's that expectation that there's always going to be, you know, something wrong. It's just, what is it going to be, you know? And how quickly can I identify it and, you know, kind of mitigate it here? And so, the first time through, I'm not very confident at all.

Why the participants experience discomfort varied among participants. For James, it was tied to the first time he hosted an activity. One participant—Melinda, an English professor—said that she experienced a great deal of anxiety the first time she hosted her experience, a visit to a theater to see a play. Now she feels only a small amount of anxiety before the event. Melinda said:

My discomfort only comes in a few places and that is in wondering if people are going to show up for it. So, if I'm going to put so much time and effort into prepping them for this play experience and buying tickets and things like that, that, um, are they actually going to show?

Melinda was not alone in her fear of whether or not students would actually be on board with the active learning experience. Nearly all of the participants expressed concern that their students might not buy into the activity prior to hosting it.
Yet, while participants noted discomfort and uncertainty, they also noted that experiential learning activities became easier the more they offered them. James, who was worried that he would do something “wrong,” went on to share:

Second time through, is, is really, I feel like, you know, the biggest learning that happens and reflections, for me, is after the second, or after the first time, before the second time, and so I'm feeling much, much more confident that second time. And so, yeah, I'd say, I'd say first time, I'm feeling eh, I'd say right about in between, you know, not feeling confident and confident, and then, if it's the second or third time, and then going forward, I feel, I feel pretty comfortable.

Importantly, like James, participants felt more confident and more comfortable after the first time they offered an experiential learning activity.

As their comfort levels increased, participants noted the positive impacts the experiential learning activities had in their learning spaces. For example, participants shared that these activities created community within their classes that lasted throughout the remainder of the semester. Tomás shared not just how his class became more of a community but how he, too, was a part of that community:

After Su Teatro, everyone's voice is heard in the classroom, and I'm not exaggerating, everyone says something. …I'm very Socratic in my approach to discussion. We throw out questions. So, for example, when we went to Su Teatro, I asked people to bring notebooks and I asked them to craft three to five questions that they came up with while experiencing the play. Then we cut those questions into small strips of paper, and we put them in this top hat that I have, and then I walk around with the top hat, mix up those questions, and then they draw from the hat. They cannot draw their own. If they do, they gotta put back, draw another, then they take those questions, and they get into groups. They talk about those questions in small groups. Then they share out to the entire class. There's not one voice that I don't hear during that discussion after Su Teatro, and that's not the first time I brought out the hat. I brought out the hat and the Socratic method before, but I have found that I have to draw more from students like using physical proximity, standing closer to them.... My whole playbook I put away usually after Su Teatro, because and I consider that back to the question success, because they're going to build confidence. I am part of this discourse. I'm not an outsider looking in. I was there. I witnessed it. I was present. I was immersed. Now I have something to say, and they'll say it.
Participants also noted that, because of these feelings of community, communication with students increased due to hosting experiential learning activities. Participants listed communication as the skill they used the most. Cassie, a history professor, shared how she used her communication skills:

I think that communication skills are the big thing there. Providing students that background so that they understand the importance of what it is that they are seeing and hearing and experiencing. I think that was super important. If they were to just show up, I think they would have gotten something out of it because the tours are planned in an exceptional way, but I think it was richer for students to know more about the time periods so that they appreciated those things more. So that was a challenge for me to make sure that I communicate all of that to the students and to make sure that I communicate and get to new, to remind students about, this is coming up, this is what to expect, you know, let's do these things.

Other participants who cited communication as a skill they improved when hosting experiential learning activities also wanted to ensure that their students understood the context of the experience prior to its occurrence, helping to create a sense of buy-in from the students. Thus, while participants noted being nervous, experiencing discomfort, and not having confidence before offering their first experiential learning activity, they noted that not only did it come easier the more they did it, it had personal impacts upon them, such as increased feelings of community and increased levels of communications with students.

**The Experiential Aspect of Learning**

Throughout their interviews, many of the participants shared that they engaged in experiential activities not just to meet course learning outcomes but also because they wanted their students to experience something they had never done before and/or experience something meaningful. For participants, experiential learning became a way to not just meet specific learning goals; it became a way to motivate and encourage students and their learning. For
example, Gina, an adjunct history professor, took her students to an art museum, which most of her students had never before experienced. Gina said:

… like I said, um, my decision to kind of let them be a little more free form in the museum itself and then to do the extension activity outside of the museum was very much based on that class. Um, for two reasons. One, because I trusted them to take it seriously and to actually like go through the museum and not just like bail as soon as they could. Right? Um, but also because, like I said, knowing that most of them had never been to an art museum. Um, you know, had I had a class that like visited the art museum all the time, I might've had them focus on a specific gallery or something like that, but I wanted them to be able to explore. Um, so I think for sure the keeping in mind those specific, um, students and what I felt like would be an optimal experience for them, um, as well as obviously connecting it to the class.

While Gina wanted students to make key connections between things from the museum and class to support the course learning outcomes, she also shared that she wanted students to experience an art museum, a space most of her students had never experienced before. In this way, the experiential learning activity supported more than course goals; it supported exploration for students, too.

Like Gina, Adam, an English professor, shared that he also wanted his students in introductory classes at RMCC to experience something that they would not have had they not enrolled in the class. Adam designed an assignment where students were able to have off-campus experiences, such as visiting TEDx, that their peers at four-year institutions were unable to have due to the size of introductory courses at those institutions. He said:

I think it’s really important…to have the community college-level, um, one, because I think we’re giving students an opportunity they wouldn’t have otherwise. Um, I think, you know, like I’ve, I have colleagues who’ve taken students to plays, which kind of broadens their horizons. And I think, you know, like how many introductory classes that are at a four-year do this kind of thing? Not many, I would imagine in terms of just cause 300 or some lecture halls or whatnot.
While an introductory course, Adam felt it was critical that students have an opportunity to experience something they would not have otherwise. He believed that the experiences his students had in the community were “valuable” to their education.

Not only did students have an opportunity to experience something their peers at four-year institutions might not, but the participants who led the experiential learning activities also went out of their way to ensure that all students in their classes had an equitable opportunity to participate. For example, tickets to TEDx cost $40; however, the participants who took their students to TEDx – Anna, Kerrie, and Adam – only charged students $10 for the tickets. The fee was waived for students who were experiencing a financial hardship. With other activities, including Melinda and Tomás’s class trips to the theater, students did not pay for tickets. Even transportation to events was considered. The participants encouraged carpooling, and Student Life provided free tickets for public transportation or rented buses as well. Melinda shared that having a smaller class made it easier for her to coordinate with her students regarding their needs for events.

And so, um, in some ways, it makes it easier, because I can work more one-on-one with each student to make sure that they are getting to the event or that they have a ride to the event. Um, because they class is smaller, they feel maybe less inhibited to ask for help to get transportation, for instance.

The idea was for the entire class to benefit from the experience. The participants did not want someone to miss out simply because they could not afford the experience or did not have transportation to off-campus events. Kerri said that it was rare that students missed the experiences, and if they did, it was typically due to work, religious observances, or family obligations. In those cases, the students completed an alternative assignment similar in nature to the experiential learning activity.
In addition to experiencing something they have never done before, participants also shared that they wanted to give students an assignment that mattered to them. For Anna’s assignment, an on-campus version of TEDx, she found that her students went above and beyond in preparing to give their presentations. She offered:

Oh, we talk a lot about like the, the delivery of the talk, and so part of it is about, um, making sure that we kind of have a really clear hook to grip people in and a clear through line or thesis. And I feel like students were able to have those moments where it was super clear that they were like getting their point across. Um, and then also thinking about like we talk a lot about how TED speakers have very few slides and when they have slides, they’re mostly images, um, and that they’re kind of like, you know, certain points to capture interest in a, like students reflected, making their talk very TED-like in its delivery. Um, and I would say the same is true with my students that did the symposium. What I noticed with those students was what I’ve experienced myself. That there, when you have the opportunity to share an idea, that there is this moment of your, you kind of wonder like, what is my idea and how do I make it super clear? Then you start to move forward with it and then you realize like, oh my gosh, now I have to add this and then I need to change this, and then I could also add this or that and both my students, Sam and Wendy, uh, within a week’s time, they knew that they were finishing up their idea, and then they were going to present it to the class and then present it to the big symposium. And with that week in between, both of them probably revised their idea, added more stuff, made some changes, practiced. Um, you know, they, they made, I know Sam made at least seven revisions the day that he was going to speak. Um, he came and he practiced with me the day before. He skipped class that morning so he could get practice on this own. He was, you know, practicing right up until the time of the, he delivered his talk. Uh, I know with Wendy, she did similar stuff. She was in my studio class and she, um, practiced like twice in that class before she delivered her piece. So, um, just noticed so many good things, but that they took their idea very seriously and they really cared about it so much that they wanted it to make a strong impact. And so, they did the type of work where they were sharing, um, personal stories and personal research and really followed the arc of a TED Talk to make their talk impactful for their audience.

This experiential activity provided students opportunities to create and reflect upon something meaningful to them and, as Anna shared, allowed two of her students to work hard to make an impact on something about which they cared. The fears participants had regarding student buy-in for the events often were unfounded, as students connected with the experience and went out of their way to engage with it.
Discussion and Implications

The emergent findings from this study show that few faculty had formal training in how to actually develop, host, and facilitate experiential learning, yet faculty found the experiential learning key to not just student success and learning, despite not being formally trained. Faculty found that these experiential learning activities had personal impacts on not just students, but on themselves, too. Finally, faculty discussed motivations for why they chose to use experiential learning in their classrooms. While they cited that they used experiential learning to support class learning goals, they also used these experiences to provide opportunities for students to experience something they otherwise would not have and to work on something that was personally meaningful for them.

Engaging in Active Learning

Overwhelmingly, participants noted that they felt experiential learning was important because it provided opportunities for active learning. Participants noted that they knew the lecturing was not as effective as immersion into course content through these experiential activities. As Bonnie, a history faculty member, noted, when she began teaching, she felt “like there was something missing…for students to just, you know be the intake of content and not interacting with the content, content in a much broader, a broader scope.” This sentiment was echoed by other participants who noted that they wanted those active learning engagements so that their students would make connections with the content.

Yet, participants also noted that few of them had any formal training or instruction on how to actually engage their students with the experiential learning activities. One participant noted that she did not recognize the importance of reflection and the role it played in the experiential learning that she had hoped her students would gain from. Thus, while participants
noted it was important, that they saw benefits, they had little instruction or guidance on how to scaffold for their experiential leaning, how to engage in critical reflection, and/or how to appropriately assess. As noted earlier, experiential learning must be designed in a manner that is intentional (Breunig, 2017), uses scaffolding to ensure students’ base understanding of the material (Powell et al., 2012), and then engages in authentic reflection (Breunig, 2017; Freire, 1970; Moore et al., 2010).

This finding is congruent with the literature and it comes as little surprise that most of the participants in this study had not been formally trained on how to develop, host, and/or facilitate experiential learning. While experiential learning has been discussed, theorized about, and implemented for decades within educational systems, higher education has been resistant to implementing it in classrooms or providing opportunity for educating faculty on how to properly implement it (Wurdinger & Allison, 2017). According to Wurdinger and Allison (2017), many faculty have not been properly educated about how to engage in experiential education. While many faculty may know that it is important for student learning (Coker & Porter, 2015; McIntyre, Webb, & Hite, 2005), most remain unaware of how to execute experiential learning and/or foundational aspects of experiential learning (Hou & Wilder, 2015; Wurdinger & Allison, 2017). This finding is echoed by this literature in that faculty knew the importance of experiential leaning, but they did not get training regarding the “how” of it.

**Personal Impact: Discomfort and Positive Impacts**

Most of the participants shared in their interviews that they felt a level of discomfort the first time they hosted an experiential learning activity. Participants shared that they were worried that they would make mistakes or even that their students would not show up to an event. Yet, as they repeated activities, they reported that they began to feel more confident, although a few still
worried about whether or not students would be willing to engage in the activities. One participant who taught herself how to use experiential learning used it to fill out her lectures in a world history class she did not feel as confident teaching. She admitted that she did not feel comfortable hosting the activities the first time but grew more comfortable with time and experience. An English faculty member commented that partnering with a more experienced faculty member helped ease some of her discomfort: “I think you need a mentor, if you will, for the first time,” she said. This lack of comfort and worry is certainly understandable as, again, few faculty are given training and development on how to effectively engage in experiential learning activities (Wurdinger & Allison, 2017).

As participants’ levels of comfort and confidence grew after offering the activities more than once, they noted that several positive outcomes came from the experiential learning activities. Moreover, participants noted that they experienced positive personal impacts from the activities. One participant shared that he felt that he and his students were more of a community and that because of the experience, “…everyone's voice is heard in the classroom, and I'm not exaggerating, everyone says something.” For him and other participants, the experiential learning activity provided a space where they, together with their students, could become immersed in the content. This, in turn, led to participants feeling like they had increased levels of communication with their students. Many of the benefits described by the participants in this study are also echoed in the literature. Literature notes that things like communication, critical thinking, and feelings of connectedness are often results of experiential learning (Hesser, 1995; Wurdinger & Allison, 2017).
Meeting and Exceeding Outcomes

Finally, an interesting finding that emerged from this project was motivations for why participants used experiential learning in their classroom spaces. While participants cited that they ensured that the experiential learning activities mapped onto course outcomes, participants also shared that they used these as experiences to ensure students participated in activities that they had never done before and/or would not have done had they not enrolled in the class. As Gina shared, she had students attend an art museum in part to make connections with the course material, “but also because, like I said, knowing that most of them had never been to an art museum.” For Gina, as well as other participants, experiential learning provided opportunity for students to explore something that they never had experienced before. Students not only had a chance to connect course material, they had an experience that was new for them.

Equity was important to the participants. By drastically cutting the price of event tickets or providing them for free, providing transportation, or encouraging carpooling, the faculty were able to ensure that all students were able to participate, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Melinda went out of her way to help her students, sharing that “…I can work more one-on-one with each student to make sure that they are getting to the event or that they have a ride to the event.” If a student did miss the activity, it was often due to work, religious observances, or family obligations, and in that instance, the student completed an assignment that was similar to the experiential learning activity.

Participants also shared that they included experiential learning activities in part to give students an opportunity to work and create something that was meaningful for them. Anna shared the powerful impact her project had on her students who “…took their idea very seriously and they really cared about it so much that they wanted it to make a strong impact.” Participants
noted that students felt strongly about making an impact with their work, feeling as if they were immersed in the material, were able to experience things that they never had before. In this way, experiential learning became a gateway for so many students to further their learning and gain access to spaces, ideas, and experiences that they never had before.

For the participants in this study, experiential learning was more than just a means to an end; rather, it provided students deep learning, rich experiences, and pathways for future learning. This sentiment is also discussed in the literature as research indicates that it is key for experiential learning to continue over time, include reflection (Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 1997; McClam, Diambra, Burton, Fuss & Fudge, 2008; Moore et al., 2010), and be transformational (Kosnik, Tingle, & Blanton, 2013). Literature has called experiential learning transformational when it serves to change students’ attitudes about learning and when it impacts how students view their world, values, and experiences (Kosnik, Tingle, & Blanton, 2013). In this way, faculty in this study worked hard to utilize experiential learning for these reasons. This is significant because, as previously presented, participants had little training about experiential learning. Moreover, participants felt intimidated and uncomfortable engaging in these activities. Yet, they were willing to take these risks in order to work towards students having an opportunity to engage in these transformational experiences.

Kolb and Kolb (2008) wrote that “when a concrete experience is enriched by reflection, given meaning by thinking and transformed by action, the new experience created becomes richer, broader, and deeper” (p. 309). The participants in this study, regardless of their training on experiential learning, sought to provide their students with deep, rich experiences that broadened their knowledge of the subjects being studied. The result was a community of students who benefitted academically and psychosocially, giving them skills that could set them up for
life (American Institutes for Research, 2016). The literature shows that experiential learning reduces failure rates (Freeman et al., 2014), retains first-year students (Braxton et al., 2008; Hennessy & Evans, 2006), is beneficial in smaller classes (Freeman et al., 2014), and increases undergraduate learning (Hennessy & Evans, 2006; Kilgo et al., 2015), all of which benefit community colleges. Hennessy and Evans (2006) even wrote that community college faculty are better prepared to host experiential learning activities than their colleagues at four-year institutions. The participants in this study strived to provide their students with opportunities to engage deeply with the information being taught, and as a result of the experiential learning, they believed that the students had positively benefitted from the activities. The students built community, met learning outcomes, and went above and beyond the assignments’ requirements to show how much the work meant to them. In other words, the benefits to students went well beyond what the faculty had anticipated when creating the assignments.

**Recommendations for Practice**

Given the findings that emerged from this project, three primary recommendations for practice are offered here. To ensure students have access to quality experiential learning activities, it is important that institutions provide faculty opportunities to learn about experiential learning and how to design, implement, and assess it. As participants shared, they had no formal training or assistance in designing these activities for students. One participant did not even realize that reflection was a key component. Thus, institutions need to provide formal workshops for faculty to help them implement these activities. Another recommendation for practice would be a mentoring program, which would partner faculty who already host experiential learning programming with novice faculty. By partnering with one another, the mentors could teach their mentees the essential components of experiential learning, from selecting learning outcomes and
scaffolding coursework to hosting the experience and reflecting afterward. Such training could be from a faculty development office and/or a departmental mentoring program.

A final recommendation for practice would be for institutions to support experiential learning with funding. The Center for Community College Student Engagement’s (2020) survey lists active learning as one of its benchmarks for student success. With such importance placed upon this high-impact practice (Kilgo et al., 2015), it stands to reason that institutions would want to devote time and resources toward experiential learning. By devoting funding toward this practice, not only would more faculty take advantage of this opportunity and more students benefit from it, but institutions would likely see improved student outcomes, including improved grades and retention rates.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to better understand the impact of experiential learning upon the faculty who implement it in their classrooms. The study found that not all faculty members are trained on how to host experiential learning activities and as a result may miss important components of the process. Additionally, the participants wanted their students to experience more than lectures in their classrooms. The faculty members experienced discomfort hosting experiences the first time but became more comfortable the more times they hosted the activities; however, they worried that their students would not buy into the activity when they hosted it. Participants in the study believed they improved skills including communication, event planning, organization, and confidence. The faculty wanted their students to experience something that mattered to them while meeting student learning outcomes. The implications of this research are that reflection is an important step of the process that may not always be part of
the process, especially with faculty who have not received formal training on how to host experiential learning activities.

Additionally, faculty stated that they do not spend additional time working on creating experiential learning activities, but they need to be intentional to scaffold the coursework to the activity and share its importance with students. A final implication is that community colleges are in a unique position to host experiential learning activities due to smaller class sizes. Future research on experiential learning should focus on how faculty learn to implement experiential learning activities and how faculty benefit when they host experiential learning activities.
CHAPTER 3: SCHOLARLY REFLECTION

I wish that I could say that the process of writing this dissertation has been an easy one, but even before COVID-19 hit, my dissertation hit roadblock after roadblock. Fortunately, I finally found something that worked, and I am able to write this reflection on a completed project, even though it is completely different from what I originally envisioned. When I first started work on my dissertation, I had planned to study the impact of experiential learning on students who lead experiential learning activities. While diving into the research available, I could not find much that spoke to students when they actually led activities, something that I saw several times a year in my work with experiential learning. With the limited literature, it seemed like the perfect topic to cover. Of course, things that seem perfect rarely are.

Last fall, when I started work on my dissertation, there were only two student-led experiential learning activities scheduled for the semester. The first was early in the semester—too early for me to defend my proposal, get Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, and then conduct my study. The second was scheduled right before Thanksgiving break. I had plenty of time. Or so I thought. My IRB approval did not come through until the week of the event, which meant that I was unable to conduct a pre-interview with the students, though not for lack of trying. For the event itself, things seemed to go well. I was able to observe the event and talked to several participants about their experiences. Everyone seemed interested in my study, so I figured I would have no problem getting participants for the post-interview. Of course, I was wrong. Over the course of the next two months, I tried on multiple occasions to get participants;
however, only two students reached out. The first was too young to participate, and the second wound up canceling her appointment and never returning my emails to reschedule.

I think I know why things did not go my way. The study took place at the end of the semester, a time of the year when students are preoccupied with finals and holidays. The majority of the students in the human development class I was working with were all pre-nursing majors and had a series of hard courses they were taking. When they returned from break, they had already moved on and did not have time to go back and spend time reflecting on an event that had happened two months earlier. Also, I did not offer an incentive at first. Had I done so, maybe things would have turned out differently. Who knows?

After the first study did not pan out, I reached out to the professor I had been working with for the event, as I knew she had a similar experiential learning activity coming up in the spring semester. She agreed to let me try again with her class. This time around, I would have plenty of time to conduct the study, and I would offer incentives from the get-go. I was excited. Nothing was going to go wrong. Until COVID-19 happened. A little more than a month before the event, my institution moved to remote learning due to COVID-19, and as a result, the experiential learning activity was canceled. Once again, I had no subjects for my study. Once again, I needed to pivot and find something new in order to move forward.

If there is one thing I am good at doing, it is coming up with a Plan B, or C in this case. I wracked my brain trying to figure out how I could move forward with my study when we could no longer host experiential learning activities. That is when it hit me. I could not study an event, but I could develop a greater understanding of what went into creating the activities for students. Faculty were limited in how they could conduct experiential learning activities due to online learning, but I could still study how they conduct experiential learning activities during this time.
After five months of trying, I finally had an idea I could move forward with. For the record, I am not complaining about having to use faculty as the subject of my study. In fact, I have learned a lot from them. I actually wish that I had chosen to study them from the beginning.

With my new subjects approved by IRB, I finally got to work. I reached out to all of the faculty I have worked with over the who supported experiential learning and managed to wind up with a group of nine faculty members who were willing to participate in my study. I scheduled both rounds of their interviews and spent hours transcribing the results. I did not mind, however, because I was finally collecting data. After transcription came the coding, which seemed to take forever, but it gave me time to better understand my data and start to look at it from the role of a researcher. I began to see how the data collected from each respondent meshed and created a picture of how experiential learning looked according to those who participated in my study.

Although I had good information, I continued to experience roadblocks. By the time I got to the point where I could finally start writing my paper, doubt began to creep in. My imposter syndrome kept popping up, telling me that I did not know what I was doing, that I was not good enough, and similar tales. I will admit that, throughout this journey, it was hard not to compare myself with my peers. I still want to, even though I know that their work and circumstances were completely different from my own. I cannot help it because I have yet to reach the goal that I have set for myself of having completed this dissertation. It was not easy to overcome my feelings of inadequacy. Some days, I would write an entire section of my paper, and other days, I would look at this document in fear, not knowing where to start. While it took longer than I planned and a lot of courage, I finally faced down my fears and wrote this paper. If there is anything I would change, besides the subject of my dissertation, it would be giving myself
courage and strength to write every single day and telling myself that I could do this, no matter how challenging it may have seemed.

Despite the obstacles that I have faced since starting this dissertation, I am grateful for the journey. I have learned so much about myself and my area of study. I have learned persistence and to push myself, even when I feel overwhelmed with feelings of inadequacy. I have learned that I am capable of doing this, even when it feels like something beyond my reach. All I have to do is take it one step at a time so it does not feel quite so daunting of a task.

With regard to my area of study, I have learned a great deal regarding experiential learning. When I first developed the idea of studying experiential learning, all I really knew about it came through an event-planning lens. In my role as director of Student Life, I partner with faculty to help them bring their experiential learning ideas to life. I provide the funding and the event planning while my faculty fellow helps the faculty with the assessment piece of the project. Through our planning meetings with faculty, I came to understand the importance assessment and reflection play in experiential learning, but more from a practical frame of reference. I was there to help the faculty member with things such as purchasing theater tickets, reserving rooms, planning event menus, and so on. Because I did not have a background in pedagogy like the faculty fellow and several of the faculty members I worked with, I stayed in my own lane.

When I started this program, I had a different idea in mind for my dissertation; however, I wanted to work with a subject that directly related to my day-to-day work. It was a natural choice to switch to experiential learning at that point, and I am glad that I did. Diving into the literature on the subject, I have learned so much about experiential learning, from its roots to how students learn and benefit from it. I also have developed a greater understanding of why we emphasize
reflection as a necessary step in our process. Originally, I assumed it was simply a way to collect data, a way of showing that the program was working. I had worked in student life and residence life offices where we collected data from events without studying the data to truly learn from it or make changes based upon what the data said. It did not matter that I shared that reflection data with the faculty who hosted the experiential learning activities because I did not see changes being made based upon the data; the reflection process did not seem so important. Of course, now I know better. Now, I read through students’ reflections with a greater understanding that it is a necessary step in their learning process.

I have learned more about experiential learning than the importance of reflection, though. By studying faculty and their experiences, I have developed a greater understanding of why they conduct experiential learning activities. Whether they felt something was missing from their classes or they wanted to make a subject they were not as familiar with more exciting, the faculty wanted their students to engage with the subject. They recognized that students benefitted from the activities, even if they had not been formally trained in experiential learning. I found that very powerful. They each wanted the best for their students, to bring education to life in a way that students could connect to beyond lecture, and to create experiences that students would remember long after their time in community college, especially experiences the students may not have otherwise experienced, such as visiting TEDx or creating a video on bias in the media at a community television station.

Another way in which this information helped me is that it allowed me to further my understanding on the subject overall. In February, my faculty fellow and I presented on our experiential learning program at the League for Innovation annual conference. In addition to sharing information regarding our program, I was able to bring in research that helped us fill out
our presentation with data on how experiential learning benefits students, giving us a much stronger presentation to share with those in attendance.

So, how does knowing all of this information benefit me? It has been difficult to determine that this semester, as faculty have been limited in the experiential learning opportunities they can offer to their classes. In a normal semester, I would host anywhere from ten to fifteen experiential learning activities; this semester, I will be hosting two. Most of the classes this semester are remote, and as a result, the only experiential learning activities that have happened so far have been online. For example, instead of taking his class to the public television station to record videos on media bias to later screen on campus, Adam is hosting an online panel of local journalists to share their experiences with his students. Even coordinating the event is very different. Instead of having a meeting to review all of the steps needed, confirming dates, reserving transportation, and so on, I simply need Adam to confirm names and dates, and then I fill out two forms to pay the presenters. However, I should not just look at what is happening now. I should look to the future and see how this information could benefit me.

Undertaking this study taught me that I should not take it for granted that each of the faculty I work with know what they are doing when it comes to experiential learning. Some do, but others may only have a limited understanding of what it means to host experiential learning activities in their classes. With the information I have learned from my study, I know that I can use it to redesign our Co-Curricular Learning Experience (CCLE) program in ways that better support the faculty who use the program. Because so few faculty know how to host experiential learning activities, I want to be certain that our program provides faculty the guidance and support necessary for them to fully understand what it means to create and host experiential learning activities. My goal would be that, even if a faculty member only participated in the
CCLE program once, she would walk away with the knowledge for how to host experiential learning activities correctly in her classroom moving forward.

Along with the changes to the CCLE program, I would like to host workshops on the subject of experiential learning for both full-time and adjunct faculty members. During my interview with Anna, one of the ideas she brought up was a hands-on workshop for faculty to learn how to conduct experiential learning. What better way to learn how to implement this in a classroom than through practical application? Plus, the positive aspect of hosting a workshop would be that it could be opened up to faculty from all of our campuses, benefitting more students in the process. Ultimately, the best thing the college could do would be to dedicate funding toward an experiential learning education program for faculty. It could be led by faculty like Anna who have a great deal of knowledge on the subject and could mentor the participants through the process of creating activities for their classes. The payoff for such a program could be huge in terms of student success.

One thing I would like to do is continue to write. My faculty fellow and I have been wondering if there is another application for the CCLE data that we have collected over the years. Between my greater understanding of experiential learning and having written a journal article, I feel confident with the idea of taking the data, studying it further, and using it to write another journal article with the faculty fellow and sharing what we have found from the previous three years’ work with experiential learning. In addition to research using the data we already have collected, there is so much I could do looking at experiential learning. I could do further study on the faculty who work with experiential learning to provide greater understanding of how faculty host and benefit activities. Additionally, I could go back to my original idea of studying students who host experiential learning activities to see how they grow as leaders.
throughout the process. There really is no limit to the research I could conduct on the subject of experiential learning, and I am not limited to experiential learning. I could also study other subjects within my office, including student engagement and student leadership development. The list is endless.

At this point, I feel a lot more comfortable saying that I would write a journal article. From the first time I learned that we would write a journal article as part of our dissertation of practice, I was excited for the opportunity to potentially be published if we chose that route. As a former journalist, I am used to being published, but being published in higher education is a major accomplishment. Every working journalist gets published, but not every person working in higher education is published. Of course, so many people read journal articles to stay on top of what is happening within higher education. Ever since my master’s program, I have wanted to be published, but the one chance I had to partner with my graduate advisor to publish a paper did not pan out after he took a position as president of an area community college and no longer had the time to partner on the paper. I could have written a paper on my own, but my imposter syndrome held me back. It did not matter that I had been published for years in a major newspaper. I had no idea where to start and no idea what to write. Fortunately, that has changed since starting this program.

When I first started this program, the idea of conducting any research—qualitative or quantitative—terrified me. Quantitative research still does to an extent. Of course, now that I have taken coursework on research methods and practiced it before actually conducting the research, I can say that I feel more comfortable with the practical application, from IRB application to writing up my findings. I have no doubt that I could easily take on the process of
conducting another study in the future. I doubt that my imposter syndrome would even rear its ugly head, which would make the process run so much smoother than it did this time.

I wish I could say that the process of writing a journal article was easy. As I have mentioned previously, I battled a great deal of anxiety while working on this dissertation. For the journal article, specifically, not only did I face feelings of inadequacy but I also felt lost. Having never before written a journal article, I had no idea where to start, or so I thought. At that point, I decided that the best way to overcome this feeling would be to arm myself with knowledge. I went to a few journals that I thought might run my article in the end—The Journal of Experiential Education and Journal of College and Character to name two—and I sought out as many case study articles I could find. I figured that reading through each of those articles would give me a better understanding of how to format my journal article. To be honest, that helped immensely, although it did not completely erase my imposter syndrome. That said, though, I do feel more confident. I know that, if push comes to shove, I can do this on my own. I just need an idea, research and data to back it up, and belief in myself that I am capable of doing this. I am capable; I know this now.

Having conducted my own research and written a journal article on my own, I feel comfortable saying that I could do this again with fewer issues. I do not necessarily believe that the next time I conduct research everything will run smoothly, but I will be better prepared when I come across roadblocks and know the process for how to move past them with as few issues as possible. I will no longer feel intimidated by the IRB process, especially having completed it for multiple institutions and with multiple revisions. From the beginning, I’ll know to have incentives for those who participate in my research to encourage participation. Finally, I will know that there are plenty of resources out there that I can refer to for support. Of course, there
are plenty of people I can turn to for support as well. I do not have to go through this process alone. I can partner with others to write papers, and that is what I hope to do in the future.

All in all, the process of working on this dissertation has been tough. It has pushed me outside of my comfort zone, but it has shown me that I am capable of doing it. I just needed planning, hard work, and persistence. I am grateful for everyone who helped me along the way because they encouraged me to do something this first-generation college student had only dreamed of. I may have taken a little longer than my peers to finish, but all told, I did something that will only benefit me in the future as I continue to grow in my career and push myself to conduct research and publish. Thank you for this opportunity.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

CO-CURRICULAR LEARNING EXPERIENCE APPLICATION

YOUR INFORMATION

Name*

First Name

Last Name

Email*

Phone

Department*

Discipline(s) You Teach*

Supervisor/Chair*

Name of Event:

Type of Learning Experience

(e.g. discussion/demonstration, presentation, project, assignment, field trip, etc.)

STEP 1: DESIGN & DELIVER THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Include as much of the following information as you know regarding the details of the Learning Experience. We realize that you will not know all of the details, but if it is an event, tell us your event title, intended date, time, and location (on or off campus).

How many students do you anticipate will participate in the Learning Experience?

How will the experience help enhance the students' understanding of the content and learning outcomes?

How much money are you requesting from Student Life? (Typical grants are around $500; however, we will entertain higher amounts if requested.)

How will you spend the money? See COLE Guidelines and COLE Price Guide for how the money can be spent. Please provide a detailed budget.
STEP 2: CHOOSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

PRCC Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

Critical Thinking
- Identify
- Analyze
- Evaluate
- Infer

Effective Communication - Written
- Content
- Organization
- Documentation
- Audience
- Style & Mechanics

Effective Communication - Spoken
- Content
- Organization
- Documentation
- Audience
- Style & Mechanics

Information & Technology Literacy
- Prioritize
- Analyze
- Synthesize
- Evaluate
- Communicate

Quantitative Reasoning
- Calculate
- Represent
- Interpret
- Analyze
- Apply
- Evaluate
- Communicate

Professionalism
- Responsibility
- Character & Engagement
- Interpersonal Communication
- Appearance
- Teamwork & Leadership

Assessment Method

Determine what assessment methods will provide the best evidence of students having achieved your stated learning outcomes. Three examples of assessment methods are: student self-evaluation, peer evaluation, etc.

Describe each assessment/instrument:

Tell Your Story Survey Link

In addition to any assessment techniques or feedback forms, we ask that you provide your participants with the “Tell Your Story” survey link. For detailed information regarding the “Tell Your Story” survey, see the Co-Curricular Learning Experience (CCE) Overview.

OPTION 1: This option is the least amount of work for the group. The default story prompt will be used (“Tell a story about how the learning experience impacted you.”) We will need you to provide your participants with the survey information. Once the survey is completed by the students, we will provide you with the results. Students will have two weeks to complete the survey after the Learning Experience.

OPTION 2: Create your own story prompt(s) using one or more from the Story Prompt list. We will email you a link to help you decide what story prompt you whom to provide your participants with the survey information. Once the survey is completed by the students, we will provide you with the results. Students will have two weeks to complete the survey after the Learning Experience. Story prompts include:

- Tell a story about how the learning experience changed you as a person
- Tell a story about how the learning experience stimulated your intellectually
- What story would tell your best friends if you were trying to convince them to participate in the learning experience?
- A year from now, when someone asks you what you learned in the learning experience, what would you say?
- A story about the most memorable part of the learning experience.
- Tell a story describing what you have learned or change that you did not know before.
- Tell a story about the single most important place of knowledge you gained from the learning experience.
- Tell a story about a “Wow” moment you had during the learning experience.
- What is a metaphor for the learning experience?

Which option will you use?
- Option 1: Default Story Prompt
- Option 2: Create Your Own

If selected, I understand that I will need to have a face-to-face meeting with the Student Life Faculty Fellow and Student Life Director the week prior to the semester starting to discuss my grant.

Submit Form
APPENDIX B

STORY PROMPT ASSESSMENT EXAMPLE

The [REDacted] Campus Student Life Office invites you to tell us a story about your recent learning experience. You will be asked to tell stories responding to a series of prompts. You will also be asked to give titles to your stories and to numerically rate the learning experience. This is voluntary. You may exit Formstack at any time by closing the browser window.

The survey is confidential. If you choose to reveal any identifying information about yourself, we will remove those details before sharing your stories in order to preserve your confidentiality.

The information we learn from these stories will help us plan future experiences for students. Your stories, or parts of your stories, may be used to market [REDacted] events and learning experiences, as well as be used for educational presentations or conference presentations.

If you agree to continue with this survey, scroll down and start answering questions. Otherwise, EXIT your browser.

Thank you for your time!
1. Tell a story about the thing you learned at the Human Development Exhibition that you imagine you will still remember one year from now.

Write story here...

2. For the above story, think of tags/keywords that identify your story. For example, if someone wanted to search for your story among many others, what word or words would someone use in a search to identify your story. Separate your keywords with commas.

Write tags here...
3. How can you connect this field experience to our course content?

Write story here...

4. For the above story, think of tags/keywords that identify your story. For example, if someone wanted to search for your story among many others, what word or words would someone use in a search to identify your story. Separate your keywords with commas.

Write tags here...

On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = not worthwhile to 5 = very worthwhile, how worthwhile was participating in the Human Development Exhibition?

Choose one:
- 1 - not worthwhile
- 2
- 3 - somewhat worthwhile
- 4
- 5 - very worthwhile
If you would like to earn the class credit (which was explained in class), enter your name below. Your name will be separated from your story. Your instructor will receive a separate list of names NOT connected to any of the stories.

Name...
First Name
Last Name

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!!!
APPENDIX C

EVENT APPLICATION

Submitted at 05/13/19 3:39 PM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>[Redacted]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td>[Redacted]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone:</td>
<td>[Redacted]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Department:** Social and Behavioral Sciences

**Discipline(s) You Teach:** Psychology

**Supervisor/Chair:** [Redacted]

**Name of Event:** Human Development Exhibition

**Type of Learning Experience:** Exhibitions for students to present their project-based learning assignments. The Human Development Exhibition is hosted by students enrolled in my PHY 235: Human Growth and Development class during the Fall 2019 semester. Where they take on a developmental concept and then act as museum curators to develop an interesting and engaging exhibit that they present to the campus community.

**How many students do you anticipate will participate in the Learning Experience(s)?** Approximately 150 students

**How will the experience help enhance the students’ understanding of the content and learning outcome(s)?** Each semester that I have done this project, students tell me that it is one of the most impactful projects they have done because it puts them in charge of deciding strategies to "teach" and guides them into the tasks for the campus community. TheHuman Development Exhibition is a course of work, including formulating how to use museum exhibits, which are presented in a particular area of development, allowing them to think through the applications of the content in how they would explain it, link multiple concepts to the human lifespan, think critically about the information, and practice valuable skills in explaining the information to a general audience.

**How much money are you requesting from Student Life?** (Typical grants are around $500; however, we will entertain higher amounts if requested.) $500

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5/8
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (FIRST INTERVIEW)

1. How did you get started using experiential learning in your classroom?

2. What training did you receive regarding experiential learning?

3. What are some of the small-scale experiential learning activities you have led in your classes?

4. What are some of the large-scale experiential learning events and activities you have implemented in your classes?

5. How do you determine which activity you want to use with your class?

6. What prep work did you do to create the activity?

7. Approximately how much time did you devote to creating the activity?

8. How comfortable do you feel with the activity you led?

9. What skills do you believe you used as you led the activity?

10. Do you believe that you already had the skills, or did you need help enacting the activity?
    a. Why do you feel that way?

11. What fears did you have regarding what was expected of you for this event?

12. What made you excited about this event?

13. What expectations did you have for your students in regard to the activity?

14. What skills / abilities did you hope your students would gain in addition to the course material?

15. How did you know if a student has successfully completed the activity?
16. Looking back at the history of experiential learning, John Dewey said that experience is meaningless without reflection. What role does reflection play in the experiential learning activities you lead?
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (SECOND INTERVIEW)

1. How would you describe the activity you hosted for your class?
2. How did it feel to plan this activity?
3. What skills did you use as you planned and hosted the activity?
4. How did your class influence the skills you used to plan and host this activity?
5. What was the most impactful part of this event on you as a leader?
6. How do you believe your work on this event benefitted your leadership skills?
7. How did the students do on the activity? How well did they meet the learning outcomes you set up for the activity?
8. Do you believe students met the skills/abilities you hoped they would gain?
9. Would you host this activity again?
   a. Why or why not?
10. Would you recommend that your colleagues host experiential learning activities such as this for other students?
    a. Why or why not?
11. Should the institution provide training to faculty on how to host experiential learning activities?
    a. Why or why not?