

# COMMUNITY- CONNECTED EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

A POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR ONTARIO SCHOOLS,  
KINDERGARTEN TO GRADE 12

*DRAFT FOR  
CONSULTATION*

Winter 2016

Une publication équivalente est disponible en français sous le titre suivant : *Apprentissage par l'expérience axé sur la communauté : Cadre stratégique pour les écoles de l'Ontario de la maternelle et du jardin d'enfants à la 12<sup>e</sup> année, 2016.*

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# Preface

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This consultation document sets out a proposed policy framework for community-connected experiential learning in Ontario schools, from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

Consultations will occur in winter 2016 and will provide opportunities for a broad range of stakeholders, from educators to business and community organizations, non-profit agencies, and postsecondary institutions, to provide feedback that will inform the further development of the policy. Stakeholders will be asked to consider the following questions:\*

*From your organization's perspective:*

- What are some current opportunities for experiential learning that you can connect to the proposed policy framework?
- What are some innovative opportunities for experiential learning that might be possible under the proposed policy framework?
- How can you support students, during their experiential learning opportunity, in developing the skills needed for success in the future, such as critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, communication, and collaboration?
- What are some of the challenges or barriers to providing these experiential learning opportunities for all learners? What are the solutions?
- How can the ministry support your efforts in providing experiential learning opportunities for all students, as outlined in the policy framework?

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\*Feedback in response to these questions may be sent to: [studentsuccesspolicybranch@ontario.ca](mailto:studentsuccesspolicybranch@ontario.ca).

The final policy document, which will be developed with the benefit of feedback from the consultations, will supersede *Cooperative Education and Other Forms of Experiential Learning: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Secondary Schools, 2000*. It will include sections that detail policy and procedures for: the revised cooperative education program; a new stand-alone cooperative education course; credit recognition for students' demonstrated acquisition of skills and knowledge through community-connected experiential learning beyond the curriculum; and enhanced and new opportunities for short- and medium-term experiential learning for students from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

# Introduction

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This document, *Community-Connected Experiential Learning*, outlines the role of experiential learning in helping to achieve Ontario’s vision for education, as described in *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). That document articulates a vision and plan of action for the province based on a commitment to the success and well-being of every student and child. Providing our learners with opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills that will lead them to become personally successful, economically productive, and actively engaged citizens remains at the core of Ontario’s education system.

Key themes in *Achieving Excellence* include commitments to provide students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 with “a wide array of opportunities both inside and outside school that are compelling and contribute to their success” (p. 4); to foster student engagement and achievement by “creating more relevant, applied and innovative learning experiences that spark students’ curiosity and inspire them to follow their passions” (p. 4); and to provide students with “more flexibility and ownership in their learning, allowing them, for example, to determine whether they want to spend more time on e-learning or on learning outside of the classroom” (p. 6).

The action plans outlined in *Achieving Excellence* underline the importance of expanding “learning opportunities outside the school to include community-based, civic, humanitarian, scientific, and artistic activities, as well as cross-cultural and international experiences” (p. 7). One of the ways of achieving this vision is to “partner with community organizations and business to provide students with more experiential learning opportunities” (p. 19). The involvement of and partnerships with community organizations and businesses are essential to the new and enhanced experiential learning opportunities envisaged for all students from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

This document outlines policy, procedures, and mechanisms for deepening and broadening the role of experiential learning for students from Kindergarten to Grade 12. This new policy framework reaffirms

the Ontario government's commitment to provide students with educational experiences and opportunities that strengthen the sense of engagement and motivation to learn that are foundational to all students' success.

Section 1 of the document provides information on the background, purpose, rationale, and considerations for implementation associated with an expansion of experiential learning connected to the community in Ontario schools. Section 2 sets out the design and scope of the new policy framework in two broad areas of community-connected experiential learning – learning tied to the curriculum, and learning beyond the curriculum. In both areas, strategies are described for enhancing existing experiential learning programs, providing new experiential learning opportunities for students from Kindergarten to Grade 12, and enabling students in secondary schools to earn credit for experiential learning.

# 1

## **Community-Connected Experiential Learning: Purpose, Rationale, and Considerations for Implementation**

### **1.1 Background and Rationale**

Early experiential learning theories emerged from an effort to have students actively engaging in their learning. These theories proposed that students would learn by doing and, by applying knowledge to experience, develop new knowledge and skills. Rather than simply being presented with abstract concepts, students would be “immersed” in learning (Lewis & Williams, 1994). Experiential learning is not simply learning by doing; mere participation in a set of learning activities does not make the learning experiential (Chapman, McPhee, & Proudman, 1995). It is the process of reflecting on an experience, both during and after the experience, extracting meaning from it, and then applying what has been learned that makes the learning truly experiential for students.

Experiential learning assists students’ learning transfer; that is, it helps students to see the connections between the course content and its application in other contexts (Lee & Kahnweiler, 2000, cited in Furman & Sibthorp, 2013). It also has psycho-social benefits for students, including increased self-esteem and engagement in the workplace or school, improved motivation, and improved social and leadership skills (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009).

Community-connected experiential learning builds on research that indicates that students are more engaged, more motivated to learn, and more successful when they can connect what they are learning to situations they care about in their community and in the world. Research has also found that experiential learning that takes place in the community contributes to the development of 21st century



competencies by “giving opportunities for authentic learning, engaging students actively, fostering co-operation and collaboration, meeting individual interests, empowering learners and extending horizons beyond comfort zones” (Furco, 2010, p. 227).

There can be significant benefits to communities in providing experiential learning opportunities for students. Community partners can take pride in knowing that they are contributing to the education of children and youth, and to Ontario’s future workforce. Involvement in experiential learning also enables community partners to develop new networks and skills and offers them opportunities both to mentor and to learn from students.

## 1.2 Definition and Goals

Community-connected experiential learning is an approach to student learning that provides students with opportunities to participate actively in experiences connected to a community outside of school (local, national, or global); reflect on those experiences to derive meaning from them; and apply their learning to their decisions and actions in various aspects of their lives.

In this document, the term *community-connected*, rather than *community-based*, is used, signalling a shift in emphasis from the physical location of the experiential learning opportunity to *the connection to the community* that it can provide. A connection to the community that is authentic and dynamic is now seen as foundational to the experience and to the learning derived from it. The community in question can be local, national, or global, and the connection can involve being physically present (an *on-site* experience), being present through the use of various communication technologies (a *virtual* experience), or a combination of the two (a *blended* experience), as illustrated in Figure 1, on page 10.

The goals of community-connected experiential learning as defined in this document are to provide and/or recognize learning opportunities with a community that assist students in:

- deepening their understanding of the knowledge and skills within the curriculum and of their life experiences beyond the curriculum;
- acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to make informed education and career/life choices;

- developing their capacities for deeper learning, including learning for transfer, and helping them to acquire important 21st century competencies<sup>1</sup> (such as critical thinking and problem solving, communication, and collaboration) so that they have the talent and skills they need to succeed and lead in the global economy;
- contributing to a local, national, or global community and developing competencies related to their identity as individuals and as members of their community, society, and the world.

Community-connected experiential learning opportunities enhance the already rich learning environments of our schools, providing students with alternative ways of engaging in their learning. As noted in the ministry’s education and career/life planning document, *Creating Pathways to Success*, it is through these experiences that students “develop confidence in knowing that their school programs are created with them in mind, that the world beyond school has something to offer them, and that they have something to offer the world” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a, p. 7).

### 1.3 The Experiential Learning Cycle

The definition of experiential learning outlined in section 1.2 includes reference to a cycle of learning that comprises three necessary phases: students *participate* in community-connected learning experiences; *reflect* on those experiences to derive meaning from them; and *apply* their learning in various aspects of their lives.<sup>2</sup>

There are many models that describe the experiential learning cycle. Although there are differences in how they are depicted and the specific language used to describe them, they all share a common foundation: they all begin with the student’s immersion in an experience. That is, the student is an active participant in the experience, not merely an observer of it. Secondly, the student thinks about and/or analyses

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1. Ontario’s renewed vision for education and plan of action, as outlined in *Achieving Excellence*, commits the ministry to defining higher-order skills for the 21st century and developing measures for assessing them.

2. The learning cycle and the associated questions discussed in this section are based on Rolfe, Freshwater, & Jasper, 2001.

(reflects upon) the experience, both during the experience and after it, to make meaning from it and identify what has been learned. It is through a structured reflective process that students develop new skills, new attitudes, and new ways of thinking (Lewis & Williams, 1994). Finally, the student applies the learning by using the newly acquired knowledge and/or skills to inform current and future decisions and actions.

The simplicity of the experiential learning cycle makes it appropriate for students of all ages. By altering the reflective questions and prompts at each stage of the cycle, educators can adjust the complexity, focus, and depth of the process to suit the developmental needs of the students.

Experiential learning requires educators to provide explicit instruction in the skills of reflection and to assist students in developing the habit of looking for the learning that can be drawn from all life experiences. Reflection is a strategy that develops skills of metacognition – the process of thinking about one’s own thought processes. Metacognition includes the ability to monitor one’s own progress towards achieving a learning goal, a skill that is reinforced in curriculum expectations and assessment policy (assessment *as* learning).

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*The development of a reflective mindset gives students the ability to turn every experience into a learning experience.*

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The experiential learning cycle is depicted in Figure 1. Although the “participate-reflect-apply” cycle appears as a three-stage process, it is not a rigid or strictly sequential process but rather a dynamic and highly personal one.

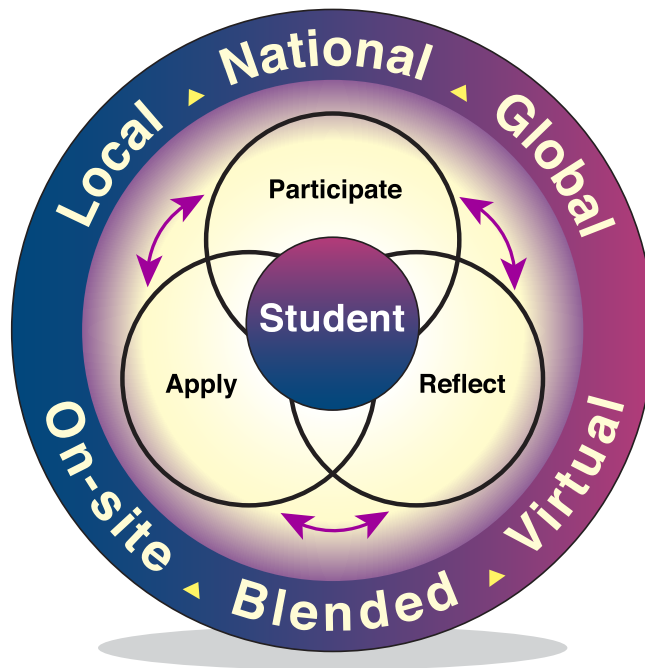
Three questions – *What?*, *So what?*, and *Now what?* – are associated with each stage of the process, respectively, and help to focus students’ thinking and drive the process, as follows:

**Participate: *What?*** Students are immersed in an experience, acknowledging what they are doing, what they are thinking, and what they are feeling during the experience.

**Reflect: So what?** Students think about their experience, guided by reflective questions and prompts, and identify what they learned as a result of the experience – about themselves, other people, the world, their opportunities, or the subject of study.

**Apply: Now what?** Students describe how their learning stimulates further inquiry; how it has influenced – or may influence – their decisions, opinions, goals, and plans; and what they might do differently if they have a similar experience in future.

Figure 1. The Experiential Learning Cycle



Source: Adapted from Rolfe, Freshwater, & Jasper, 2001.

## 1.4 Creating Community Connections

Experiential learning opportunities, as described in this document, must have a connection to a local, national, or global community outside the school (as shown in Figure 1). Creating and sustaining authentic community connections is essential in order to provide students with rich opportunities, appropriate to their age and stage of development, that will deepen their understanding of the curriculum, inspire them to explore learning beyond the curriculum, and enable them to apply their learning in varied, engaging environments.

Partnerships can take many forms, with varying degrees of involvement by and benefit to the partners. This document envisages community partnerships where the goals are shared by all partners and where the cooperation of all the partners is required for success (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998; Keith, 1999).

When creating community connections and planning for community partnerships, school and board staff should be guided by the following considerations:

- All partners should be involved in the planning of the experiential learning opportunity (students, teachers, and a community mentor or supervisor).
- All parties to the partnership need to understand and consider one another's mission, goals, and capacity when planning experiential learning opportunities.
- Experiential learning opportunities should be of benefit to all partners.
- Ongoing communication among all parties is critical.
- All parties need to acknowledge and respect one another's expertise.

(Based on Gazley, Bennett, & Littlepage, 2013, p. 575)

Students and parents<sup>3</sup> may be a rich source of partnership opportunities. Students may contribute to the planning of community-connected experiential learning opportunities by providing preliminary ideas and potential contacts. Parents, too – through their work, experiences, expertise, and community connections – are a potential source of partnership opportunities.

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3. In this document, the word *parents* is used to refer to parent(s) and guardian(s). It may also be taken to include caregivers or close family members who are responsible for raising the child.

In identifying potential local, national, or global community partners, schools can also build on existing links with their local communities and/or create new partnerships.

Educators may consider connecting with school or board advisory committees, industry education councils, not-for-profit agencies, municipalities, postsecondary institutions, training agencies, community-living associations, and/or local business organizations. They may also consider leveraging current partnerships or relationships developed through programs such as community arts or heritage councils, international development agencies, and board cooperative education and Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) contacts.

Other educators – both teachers and administrators – may also be able to contribute to the development of new partnerships through the connections they have developed in the community, within or beyond their subject specializations. They may even have particular skills and talents, developed through their educational background and previous experience, that can be leveraged to provide students with valuable experiential learning opportunities.

- ◆ Every year, the students at École secondaire catholique Renaissance in Aurora participate in a humanitarian trip with Habitat for Humanity's Global Village program, with destinations in Central America and the Caribbean. These trips provide an excellent international learning experience in which students become immersed in the local culture, working as a team and building homes for those in need.
- ◆ Grade 6 students from Conseil scolaire Viamonde participated in a reciprocal exchange program with students from Rawdon, Quebec. The one-week exchanges in each community, together with virtual contacts prior to the exchange, allowed the students to discover different cultures and to reflect on their own lives from a new perspective. The exchange program provided the students with a memorable and important life experience.

- ◆ Students in the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board have the opportunity to learn from their teacher, who is also a licensed archaeologist. Students may enrol to complete a five-week authentic excavation project at Fort Willow, a War of 1812 site owned by the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority. Participating students can earn two credits – one in a Grade 12 Canadian history course and one in a Grade 12 interdisciplinary studies course focusing on archaeology – while learning both in the classroom and at the dig site. They are also mentored by a university student studying archaeology at Wilfrid Laurier University.

In some instances, community organizations and businesses might approach the school or board to find out how they can support students in experiential learning opportunities. These organizations and businesses might be able to provide elementary and secondary school students with job-shadowing opportunities or short-term work experience, and/or with longer-term cooperative education placements for secondary school students, including students enrolled in the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) or a Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) program.<sup>4</sup> They may also be able to provide support by collaborating with the school or board to devise and implement a project or inquiry that would respond to particular student interests and that would benefit both the student(s) and the organization.

To establish and maintain strong partnerships, it is essential for schools and boards to work collaboratively with their community partners to ensure that they understand the goals and benefits of experiential learning, that all partners are supported throughout their participation, and that their contributions are valued and recognized.

Partnerships must adhere to ministry, board, and school policies and procedures and should be evaluated on a regular basis to ensure that they provide ongoing benefit for student learning.

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4. See the Glossary for a description of these programs.

- ◆ Through a partnership between the Upper Grand District School Board and the Dufferin County Museum and Archives (DCMA), the Digital Historian Project (DHP) offers students an authentic experiential learning opportunity in the community. The students, enrolled in Grade 12 Canadian history, data management, and interdisciplinary studies and Grade 11 Native studies courses, spend nine weeks at the museum working with teachers and museum staff on a project that involves deep archival research and data gathering to develop statistical analyses of historical patterns, with a focus on veterans of 20th century Canadian conflicts. Several community partners, including the Archives of Ontario (at York University), the Juno Beach Centre (Canada's Second World War museum in France, with its head office in Burlington), the Library and Archives of Canada (Ottawa), and the DCMA, have been integral to the development and implementation of this innovative model of learning. In 2015, the DHP students were invited by the Juno Beach Centre to be the "official Canadian Youth Ambassadors" at three commemorative ceremonies marking the seventy-first anniversary of D-Day in Normandy, France.

## 1.5 Leadership in Support of Experiential Learning

*Achieving Excellence* recognizes the importance of partnering with the community and educational leaders to expand the range of rich experiential learning opportunities available to all students. The development and recognition of experiential learning for students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 requires strong, shared leadership, both formal and informal, at the classroom, school, and board levels, and from community partners.

The conditions needed to successfully encourage, develop, and promote community-connected experiential learning opportunities for students must be fostered collaboratively within a culture that is supportive and welcoming of innovation. The voices and expertise of all involved in the experiential learning process, including students, must be valued, and promising practices must be recognized, facilitated, and promoted.



Two critical questions for educators to consider are as follows:

1. What are the conditions and supports required to provide students with multiple and varied experiential learning opportunities from Kindergarten to Grade 12?
2. What is my role in creating and sustaining those conditions?

In developing answers to these questions, educational leaders work with all stakeholders, including business and community partners, to:

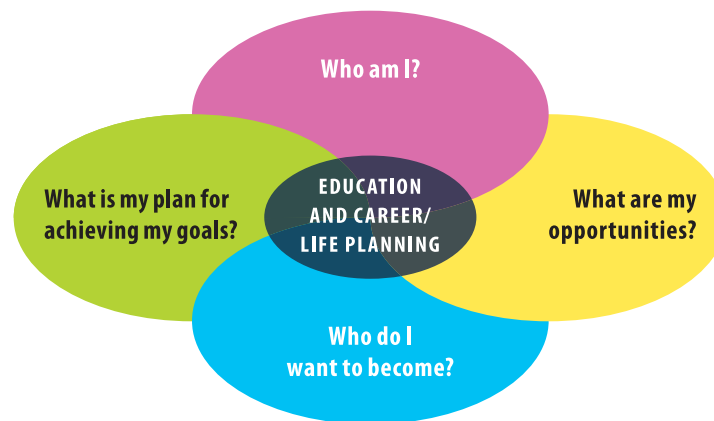
- build a collaborative process that ensures that all voices are heard;
- create and articulate a shared vision of experiential learning, designed to enhance student learning through clearly stated, achievable goals and to address program needs;
- create alignment and coherence among the experiential learning policy framework; the policy governing the education and career/life planning program in Ontario schools, articulated in *Creating Pathways to Success*; policies outlined in the Kindergarten program document and the Ontario curriculum documents; and other ministry policies and initiatives;
- ensure the provision of enabling structures (e.g., flexibility in scheduling and timetabling to accommodate experiential learning opportunities) and the allocation of the necessary resources available within the school and board;
- develop strategies and structures to encourage individuals, businesses, and community organizations to become partners in providing experiential learning opportunities;
- provide embedded professional learning opportunities for educators, parents, and community partners to support their understanding and incorporation of experiential learning as an effective approach to learning and teaching;
- develop communication strategies that ensure that students, parents, teachers, and community members are aware of and encouraged to participate in experiential learning opportunities offered by the school and board;
- incorporate the development, implementation, and evaluation of experiential learning opportunities in school and board planning (such as development and implementation strategies undertaken by the Education and Career/Life Planning Program Advisory Committee and processes related to the School Effectiveness

Framework [SEF], the Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement [BIPSA], and the School Improvement Plan for Student Achievement [SIPSA]).

## 1.6 Connections to Education and Career/Life Planning

As outlined in *Creating Pathways to Success: An Education and Career/Life Planning Program for Ontario Schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a), all students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 participate in an education and career/life planning program. The program is based on a four-step inquiry process built on four questions (see Figure 2) that are linked to the four areas of learning in education and career/life planning – Knowing Yourself; Exploring Opportunities; Making Decisions and Setting Goals; and Achieving Goals and Making Transitions.

Figure 2. The Education and Career/Life Planning Framework – A Four-Step Inquiry Process



Source: Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a, p. 13.

Experiential learning provides rich, authentic opportunities for students to develop the skills and knowledge associated with education and career/life planning. Through these opportunities, students come to see the connections between their learning in school and their lives beyond school and acquire the tools they need to make decisions, set goals, and develop plans to achieve those goals. Students document, reflect on, and consolidate their learning in their “All About Me” portfolio (Grades 1 to 6) or Individual Pathways Plan (IPP; Grades 7 to 12).

Parents have an important role in supporting their children in both education and career/life planning and experiential learning. Ongoing communication about their children's interests, challenges, and aspirations involves parents as informed and active partners in their children's education. When parents become familiar with the education and career/life planning program and the inquiry process and encourage their children to participate in community-connected experiential learning opportunities, they help them become competent, confident career/life planners.

Given the potential of experiential learning to support students in their education and career/life planning program, schools may wish to incorporate the development of community-connected experiential learning opportunities into the work of the Education and Career/Life Planning Advisory Committee described in section 6.2 of *Creating Pathways to Success*.

- ◆ In the Waterloo Region District School Board, students in Grade 11 and 12 computer studies or communications technology courses developed and created a "mobile" educational app to meet the needs of Grade 5 and 6 student "clients". Community industry mentors shared their expertise in project management, developing quality applications, and satisfying client needs. The project focused on the application of the curriculum in an authentic learning experience as well as on development of 21st century competencies, including skills and knowledge in collaboration; communication; critical, entrepreneurial, and creative thinking; and problem solving. In addition, students explored entrepreneurial careers and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) careers. Both elementary and secondary students were able to document and record their Apps4Learning journey in their "All About Me" portfolio or IPP, using digital portfolios, blogs, videos, and journal writing. Student learning culminated in an Apps4Learning Convention where the apps developed by students were presented and shared with community partners, parents, and educators.

## 1.7 The Role of Technology in Community-Connected Experiential Learning

Current technology can significantly expand and enrich the experiential learning opportunities available to students.

Innovative technologies allow for more equitable access to experiential learning opportunities by removing barriers to participation that may have stood in the way of some students, including those living in remote areas and those with special education needs. Communication technologies can connect students with experts, mentors, and peers anywhere in the world, providing increased opportunities for them to communicate and collaborate with others who share their interests and/or who can support and enhance their learning. Such authentic learning experiences help students see the relevance of what they are learning by connecting it to the world beyond the school. This heightened sense of relevance fosters student engagement and supports students' commitment to learning.

The prominence of mobile digital tools in the daily lives of many students is already having a profound effect on how students obtain information, communicate with others, and generally interact with the world. Students have enthusiastically embraced these tools. This reality challenges and provides an opportunity for educators to develop innovative strategies that use these digital tools for the delivery of experiential learning opportunities. It also enables educators to expand the range of individuals and organizations in the wider community (physical and virtual) that can play a role in supporting experiential learning.

- ◆ Grade 7 and 8 students from École St-Denis in Conseil scolaire catholique du Nouvel-Ontario connected with students in Belgium and Singapore, communicating via Skype. The students learned about other cultures – the lifestyle, schooling, and experiences of other students their age in other parts of the world.

- ◆ Since 2010, the Foundation for Student Science and Technology (FSST) has been partnering with co-op teachers in more than twelve school boards to deliver the Ontario Student Science and Technology Online Research Co-op. This program explores the principles and practices of independent, inquiry-based research. FSST matches secondary school students with top researchers to work on research projects and be immersed in professional online communications and work environments. The one- or two-credit co-op program is a collaborative development between the FSST and the federal Science and Technology Cluster to prepare emerging scientists, researchers, managers, and leaders for future careers in science and technology. The online format of the learning makes it accessible to all students, including those who require more flexible schedules and those living in remote areas. The research is reviewed, edited, and published in the *Journal of Student Science and Technology*.

## 1.8 Assessment and Evaluation of Community-Connected Experiential Learning

The primary purpose of assessment and evaluation is to improve student learning. Effective assessment, evaluation, and reporting practices lead to improvement of learning for all students. To improve student outcomes, assessment and evaluation procedures and practices must align with the principles outlined in *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010).

Student success in all community-connected experiential learning opportunities requires the establishment of clear learning goals and success criteria that are tied to the expectations of the learning opportunity. The learning goals should be established collaboratively by the student and teacher, and, whenever possible, the success criteria should be co-constructed by the student, teacher, and community mentor or supervisor of the experiential learning opportunity. The learning goals and success criteria form the basis for descriptive feedback from the teacher, the mentor or supervisor, peers, and the student, as well as for the evaluation of the student's learning from the experience by the teacher, with input from the mentor or supervisor.

By its very nature, community-connected experiential learning provides rich opportunities for students to acquire knowledge and skills in a variety of ways, and this richness should be reflected in the assessment and evaluation of student learning. In the experiential learning cycle, the integration of assessment *for* and *as* learning into the experiential learning approach correlates to improved student outcomes. When determining a grade, educators should consider evidence of student learning gleaned through conversation, observation, and the completion of products or performances. Gathering evidence of student learning from multiple and varied sources ensures that evaluation will be both valid and reliable and will most accurately reflect the learning that has occurred through the experiential learning opportunity.

## 2.

### **The Policy Framework for Community-Connected Experiential Learning, Kindergarten to Grade 12**

#### **2.1 The Expanded Role of Community-Connected Experiential Learning**

In promoting an expanded role for community-connected experiential learning for Ontario students in Kindergarten to Grade 12, the framework:

- focuses on what students learn and how that learning is demonstrated and assessed;
- identifies the essential characteristics of community-connected experiential learning (see the Appendix); and
- considers new structures that can support the development of community-connected experiential learning and incorporate both informal and formal recognition of that learning.

The policy framework builds on current successful practices, as reflected in *Cooperative Education and Other Forms of Experiential Learning* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000), and provides for an enhanced community-connected experiential learning program that:

- offers all students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 a broader range of choices of learning environments connected to a variety of communities;
- emphasizes student-directed/co-constructed learning opportunities (i.e., where students play a significant role in the design of their learning opportunities, in collaboration with teachers and community mentors or supervisors);
- places increased emphasis on an inquiry approach (i.e., where students' questions, ideas, and observations guide the learning experience);
- differentiates experiences to meet students' particular learning needs and strengths;

- structures learning opportunities in ways that reflect the experiential learning cycle (participate, reflect, apply);
- supports students in developing the knowledge and skills outlined in the four-step inquiry process of the education and career/life planning program; and
- recognizes and supports planned and incidental learning through student-directed experiences in the local, national, or global community.

## 2.2 The Design of the Framework

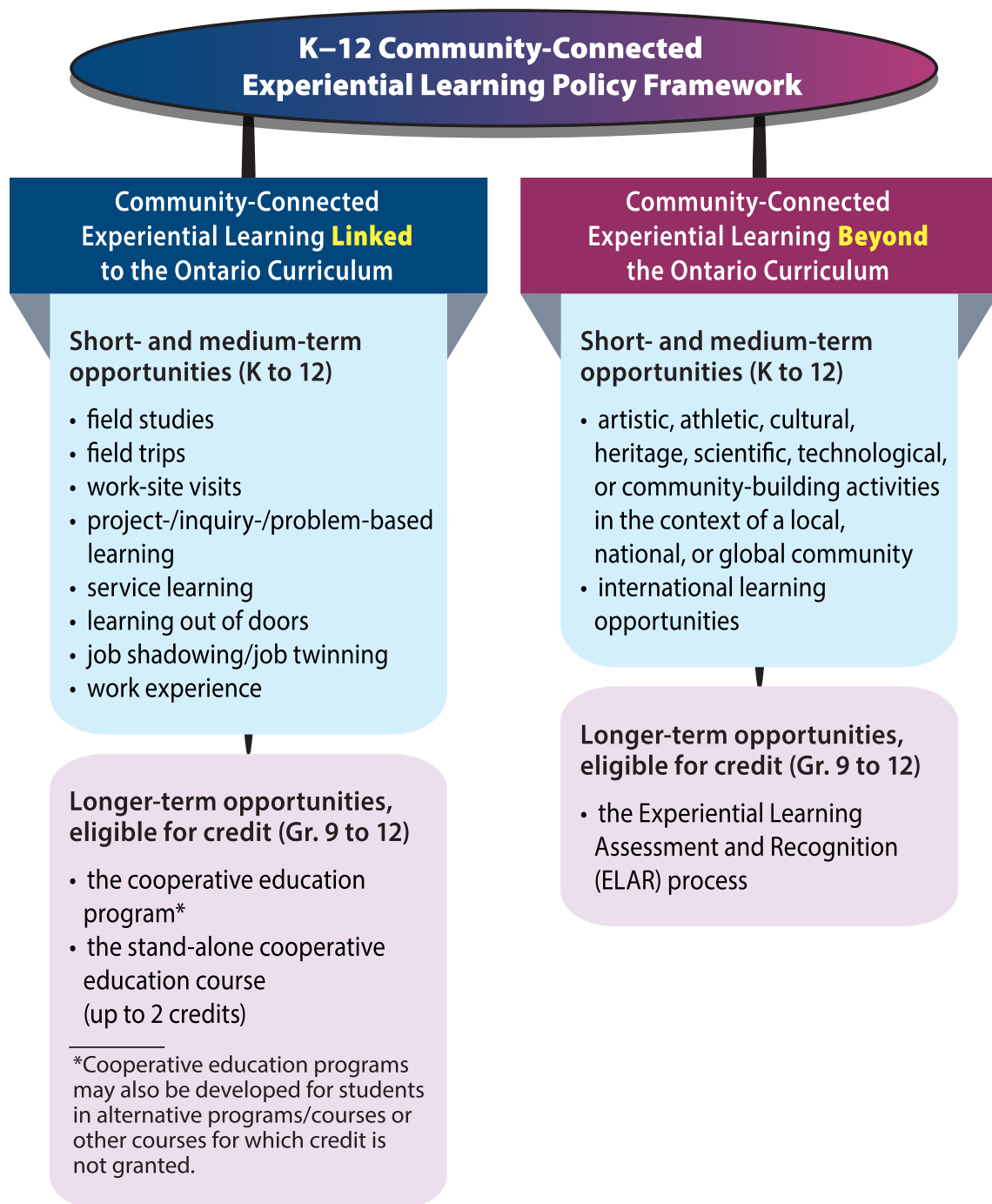
The policy framework encompasses two broad areas:

- community-connected experiential learning that is specifically linked to the Ontario curriculum (outlined in section 2.3);
- community-connected experiential learning that extends beyond the Ontario curriculum (outlined in section 2.4).

Within each of these areas of experiential learning, the policy framework provides for short- and medium-term opportunities for elementary and secondary students as well as credit-earning opportunities, as illustrated in Figure 3 and as described in further detail in sections 2.3 and 2.4, respectively.



Figure 3. The K–12 Community-Connected Experiential Learning Policy Framework



## 2.3 Community-Connected Experiential Learning Linked to the Ontario Curriculum

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*Community-connected experiential learning can be part of teaching and learning in all Ontario classrooms, from Kindergarten through Grade 12.*

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Experiential learning connected to a community provides teachers with an opportunity to “partner with their students in deep learning tasks characterised by exploration, connectedness and broader, real-world purposes” (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014, p. 7), thereby enabling students to deepen their understanding of classroom learning (knowledge and skills), apply that learning in various settings, and explore education and career/life options. All students should have access to experiential learning opportunities. For some students, additional planning will be necessary in order to address special circumstances or safety needs.

### Opportunities for Elementary and Secondary School Students

In both elementary and secondary schools, community-connected experiential learning opportunities of short or medium duration may include activities and experiences such as: field studies; field trips; project-based, inquiry-based, or problem-based learning; service learning; learning in the out of doors; job shadowing or job twinning; and work experience. These activities and experiences are described in the following paragraphs. *It is essential that each experiential learning opportunity enable the student to engage fully in the experiential learning cycle – participate, reflect, and apply* (see Figure 1 on p. 10).

**Field study** is an experiential learning opportunity involving exploration of the outdoors or other environments or organizations. The experience can be open-ended – students might investigate similarities and differences between local environments – or it can be organized for a specific purpose – for instance, to investigate garbage build-up with the intention of developing an action plan to address the problem. Field study is described in the elementary social studies, history, and geography curriculum as an opportunity for hands-on learning in the out of doors, which “provides an abundance of resources and materials that can

support learning” (*The Ontario Curriculum: Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6; History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8, 2013, p. 36*).

Field studies may be tied to various curricula at both the elementary and secondary level. Connections to support learning through field study can be made with various community partners, including but not limited to city or town councils, economic development planners, national parks, hospitals, environmental partners, and non-profit community agencies.

- ◆ Grade 4 and 5 students from the Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario furthered their learning in science and technology by conducting environmental inquiries into habitats, life systems, and the impact of stewardship and human activity on the environment at the local Cooper Marsh Conservation Area and Visitors Centre. The experience allowed students to think about questions related to the four areas of learning in the education and career/life planning program, such as *“What opportunities have I discovered through this experience that captured my interest and that I might like to get involved in?”* and *“How does what I have learned add to my plan for achieving my goals?”* Students recorded their thinking and learning in their “All About Me” portfolio.
- ◆ Students in Grade 7 in the Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District School Board engaged in a three-day experiential learning program called “Disaster Assessment” at the local Ganaraska Forest Outdoor Education Centre. This scenario-based program required students to act as search-and-rescue workers dealing with the outcomes of a simulated natural disaster relevant to their local environment – the flooding of the Ganaraska River. Students with special education needs who participated in the program were provided with the accommodations outlined in their Individual Education Plan. In addition to learning related to curriculum expectations in geography, science and technology, mathematics, and physical education, students had a valuable opportunity to practise teamwork and collaboration skills. Students were also exposed to a new career – that of “water technician” – and were able to incorporate what they learned about it in their Individual Pathways Plan.

In addition to field study, *field trips* offer multiple and varied opportunities for community-connected experiential learning related to the various subjects and disciplines in the Ontario curriculum. Museums, heritage sites, conservation lands, community gardens, and various businesses, organizations, and non-profit agencies provide rich learning environments for field trips and for the exploration of the community and its resources.

A promising model of learning identified in *Achieving Excellence* is *project-based learning*. According to Dr. David Hutchison, although “there is no one agreed-upon definition of [project-based learning], the following definition incorporates several of the key principles that define [it] in the literature: Project-based learning empowers learners to collaborate in teams, mentored by their teachers, as they research real-world questions, pose solutions to real-world problems, and design real-world products in a rigorous way” (Hutchison, 2015, p. 2). Community-connected project-based learning gives students the opportunity to engage actively with local, national, or international community partners, who act as mentors and share their expertise in response to students’ questions and proposed solutions.

Similar to project-based learning is *problem-based learning*, which focuses learners on solving problems in a real-life context, encouraging them to consider the context and/or the situation in which the problem exists. Key features of problem-based learning include the use of the following: a real-life problem as the organizing focus, a student-centred approach, and collaborative small-group work, with the teacher acting as a facilitator (Nasir, Hand, & Taylor, 2008; Barrows, 1996).

- ◆ Grade 6 students from the Kenora Catholic District School Board engaged in the project of designing and creating learning pods/nooks that would be integrated into the beauty of their northwestern Ontario surroundings. In partnership with a local carpenter, artists, and environmental advisers, and through global connections, students conducted research and designed the learning pods. The students’ research involved consultation via Skype with students at a school in England who had transformed an old double-decker bus into a library.

- ◆ As part of their school’s enrichment program, Grade 7 and 8 students from the Limestone District School Board conducted inquiries into current local issues that reflected their own interests and involved learning related to the curriculum areas of language, math, science and technology, health and physical education, and geography. In partnership with South Frontenac Community Services and a variety of other local community organizations, students worked to improve food security in their area. Under the guidance and mentorship of a professional market gardener, students grew seedlings, transferred them to the greenhouse and garden for further study, and processed the produce for the local food bank and community centre.
- ◆ Kindergarten children in a French Immersion program in the Rainbow District School Board worked with faculty and students from the Laurentian University School of Architecture on designing pavilions. This learning supports the expectations in the Kindergarten program that focus on developing children’s awareness of the natural and built environment through: making observations, asking questions, and making their learning visible; conducting simple investigations; and using inquiry and problem-solving skills. The children developed skills in critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and innovation as they worked together to develop original ideas for pavilion designs. Throughout the process, the children’s learning was recorded in their “All About Me” portfolios using photographs, drawings, and transcribed reflections.

An *inquiry-based approach* “places students’ questions, ideas, and observations at the centre of the learning experience . . . For students, the process often involves open-ended investigations into a question or a problem, requiring them to engage in evidence-based reasoning and creative problem solving” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b, p. 2).

*Service learning* provides the opportunity for students to participate in experiential learning with a focus on service in the community. In this approach, students focus on an authentic need within a community, which may be local, national, or global in scope, and seek to provide a service, such as researching, developing, and/or implementing solutions to address that need. Service-learning experiences, developed in partnership with a community, are intended to benefit both the provider

and the recipient of the service (Furco, 2010, p. 229). “The research on . . . service learning suggests that it can enhance students’ academic, civic, personal, social, ethical, and career development” (p. 235).

*Outdoor education* provides a rich opportunity for community-connected experiential learning and contributes to the ministry’s goal of reaching every student by providing a range of options tailored to students’ individual strengths, goals, and interests. Each year, funding is provided to school boards to provide learning activities with community partners to support outdoor education.

*Job shadowing* and *job twinning* provide short-term opportunities for students to observe a worker at a place of employment, or a cooperative education student at a placement, respectively. An annual example of job shadowing is Take Our Kids to Work™, when Grade 9 students are able to accompany parents, friends, relatives, or volunteers to their workplace.

*Work experience* or *virtual work experience* is a planned learning opportunity within any course that provides students with a short- to medium-term experience at a work placement, either on site or through an electronic or web-based connection.

- ◆ The Algoma District School Board organized a local youth empowerment event called “YouTheSoo”, which was inspired by “Me to We”. A key purpose of this one-day celebration and motivational event was to acknowledge the service that youth provide to the community. Students in Grades 7 to 11 prepared for the event by researching local and global community-improvement opportunities and causes. Powerful speakers, including Craig Kielburger and Spencer West, challenged students to take on one local cause and one global cause. Curriculum expectations from various subject areas, including expectations related to awareness of social issues and to presentation skills, were reinforced. Student learning gained through the students’ research, and their commitment to a local/global cause was consolidated in the students’ Individual Pathways Plan.

- ◆ In the Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est, Grade 11 and 12 students in communications technology courses prepared televised programs and broadcast them in collaboration with a local television production company. Depending on the specific content of the show, students from various discipline areas (e.g., science, technology, literature, history) contributed to the research and the preparation of interviews with guests from the community. Episodes highlighted people and events from the local francophone community. The students' involvement promoted the francophone culture and helped strengthen students' awareness of its local presence.

### **Opportunities for Secondary School Students**

In addition to the opportunities described above, students in secondary schools may participate in or extend their community-connected experiential learning activities into longer-term opportunities for credit through the cooperative education program (see section 2.3.2.1) or the new stand-alone cooperative education course (see section 2.3.2.2) (in development), both of which incorporate the cooperative education model of learning. These credit-earning opportunities may follow a traditional workplace model or a student-constructed model that allows students to pursue experiences related to other types of career/life goals, such as: community, international, athletic, or artistic development; innovation; and entrepreneurship. They may also support students in developing knowledge and skills that will better prepare them for the jobs of tomorrow. Cooperative education programs and the stand-alone cooperative education course may be part of specialized programs such as the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) and the Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) program, which enable students to further their career goals while earning credits to graduate with an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (see the Glossary for additional details).

Cooperative education programs may also be developed for students in alternative education courses (K-courses) and other courses that have no credit value. In these cases, the programs are not eligible for credit.

### 2.3.1 Key Components

Community-connected experiential learning opportunities linked to the curriculum have four key components that are designed to reflect the experiential learning cycle and that require varying degrees of involvement by students, educators, community partners, and parents. These components provide direction to the educators implementing and monitoring the delivery of community-connected experiential learning opportunities, guidelines related to the conditions required for learning, and protocols for the assessment and evaluation of students' learning and the students' demonstration and application of their learning.

#### **Component 1: Planning the Experiential Learning Opportunity**

Planning an opportunity that focuses on the identified learning goals includes:

- establishing the terms and conditions of the community connection;
- establishing the learning goals, co-constructing success criteria with all partners, and communicating the requirements for the assessment and evaluation process;
- ensuring that the experiential learning opportunity provides for the health and safety of the student, is appropriate to the student's age and stage of development (including meeting minimum age requirements under the Occupational Health and Safety Act), and is tailored to the student's educational interests and individual needs;
- identifying potential challenges and ensuring that any necessary supports are available;
- communicating with parents and obtaining permission and informed consent, as required.

#### **Component 2: Preparing for the Experiential Learning Opportunity**

Preparing students for the opportunity includes ensuring that:

- all students are aware of health and safety requirements, including their own and others' roles and responsibilities, and have completed training required for all Ontario workers;
- students have the knowledge and skills required to benefit from the experiential learning opportunity (e.g., in relation to the expectations of community partners and communication protocols);



- students have an understanding of the experiential learning cycle and effective strategies for reflection;
- students have the appropriate resources to participate in the opportunity (e.g., schedules, transportation, equipment, accommodations);
- all administrative requirements related to ministry, board, and school policies and procedures have been met.

### **Component 3: Supporting Student Learning during the Experiential Learning Opportunity**

Supporting student learning during the opportunity includes:

- ensuring that the opportunity continues to be healthy, safe, and appropriate to the age, educational interests, and needs of students;
- monitoring progress and assessing and evaluating achievement of the learning goals;
- ensuring that students are reflecting on and documenting evidence of their learning;
- adjusting the learning goals and/or success criteria and providing additional support, as required.

### **Component 4: Consolidating Student Learning from the Experiential Learning Opportunity**

Consolidating student learning after the opportunity includes:

- ensuring that students:
  - ✧ identify and/or demonstrate what has been learned as a result of the experience;
  - ✧ identify how they have applied, or are likely to apply, their learning to make decisions or take action in various aspects of their lives;
  - ✧ document their learning in their “All About Me” portfolio or Individual Pathways Plan;
- recognizing and reporting on student learning, as appropriate.

Policies and procedures related to community-connected experiential learning opportunities, including short- and medium-term opportunities and cooperative education, in their broader and deeper role, will be outlined in a future edition of this document, which will supersede *Cooperative Education and Other Forms of Experiential Learning* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000).

### 2.3.2 Cooperative Education: Community-Connected Experiential Learning Linked to the Curriculum and Eligible for Credit

In secondary schools, students are able to earn cooperative education credits through longer-term curriculum-linked experiential learning opportunities that are connected to a community and typically (though not invariably) based in the community. The basis of all cooperative education programs and of the stand-alone cooperative education course is a partnership between a student, a teacher, and a community partner. Cooperative education allows students to apply and extend their classroom learning in a community or workplace setting and learn more about themselves and the opportunities available to them as they plan their pathways through secondary school to their initial postsecondary destination (apprenticeship training, college, community living, university, or the workplace).

In order to reflect the changing nature of work, research on effective student learning in the 21st century, and the importance of meeting the needs of all learners, schools are required to expand their cooperative education opportunities to include:

- an emphasis on a student-directed/co-constructed approach to learning, including:
  - ✧ supporting students in developing and implementing solutions to important community issues (e.g., service learning);
  - ✧ supporting students in creating and implementing innovative ideas (e.g., entrepreneurship);
- increased opportunities for students in applied or college pathway courses;
- expansion of skilled trades opportunities (through OYAP);
- increased attention to opportunities for students with special education needs;
- greater consideration of the unique needs of adult learners;
- provision of opportunities for students to connect to the community through technology as part of an e-cooperative education (“e-co-op”) program; and
- expansion beyond the local community to include national or international connections.

The final policy document will include sections outlining policy and procedures related to the cooperative education program and the new

stand-alone cooperative education course. These sections will provide additional details and examples relating to the requirements and implementation of this expanded vision for cooperative education in Ontario secondary schools.

In planning experiential learning opportunities, educators must ensure that all administrative requirements related to ministry, board, and school policies and procedures are met.

A purple starburst icon with the word "Enhanced" written inside in white text.

### *2.3.2.1 The Cooperative Education Program*

Cooperative education allows students to earn secondary school credits while completing an experiential learning opportunity connected to a community. A cooperative education program (no longer referred to as a “course”) will include a classroom component and a community component, and will continue to be recorded in the provincial report card using a course code that reflects the “related course”. The related course may be a course from *any* Ontario curriculum policy document or a ministry-approved locally developed course in which the student is currently enrolled or which he or she has successfully completed. Students apply and further develop the knowledge and skills described in the expectations from the related course through their experiential learning opportunity.

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### *2.3.2.2 The Stand-Alone Cooperative Education Course*

The new stand-alone cooperative education course will allow students to earn up to two secondary school credits while completing an experiential learning opportunity connected to a community. Unlike the current cooperative education program, in which students are required to apply and extend the expectations of a related course, in the stand-alone course, students will apply and extend the curriculum expectations of this new course. The course will include a 55-hour classroom component based on expectations that outline the knowledge and skills students will need to be successful in their community-connected experiential learning opportunity and in their lives beyond school. Students will demonstrate their learning during the classroom component and further develop their knowledge and skills through their community-connected learning experience(s). This stand-alone course will meet the needs of all students, particularly those without an appropriate related course.

The expectations for the new stand-alone cooperative education course will be made available on the ministry website. The final policy document on community-connected experiential learning will set out details regarding related policy and procedures.



## 2.4 **Community-Connected Experiential Learning beyond the Curriculum**

In addition to the rich community-connected experiential learning opportunities linked to the curriculum that are outlined in section 2.3, students of all ages engage in significant formal and informal community-connected learning involving content that is not part of the Ontario curriculum. This may consist of a variety of learning opportunities, including but not limited to artistic, athletic, cultural, heritage, scientific, or community-building activities that take place in a local or global community.

As outlined in *Creating Pathways to Success*, section 5.3, “Education and Career/Life Planning through Activities in the Community” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a), students and their parents should be encouraged to reflect on the importance of activities in the community to students’ development of knowledge and skills related to education and career/life planning.

In elementary and secondary schools, the insights gained in this way can assist teachers in developing student profiles and/or class profiles, as described in *Learning for All: A Guide to Effective Assessment and Instruction for All Students, Kindergarten to Grade 12* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013c). Significant community-connected learning beyond the curriculum is also recognized and valued, informally, through references to these activities in a student’s “All About Me” portfolio or Individual Pathways Plan.

More formally, a classroom or school-wide recognition system granting badges or points might be instituted to honour students’ accomplishments in experiential learning outside the school. In secondary schools, credits towards the OSSD might also be granted, as outlined in section 2.4.1, below. Valuing and recognizing learning beyond the curriculum can significantly increase a student’s sense of belonging.

### 2.4.1 Experiential Learning Assessment and Recognition (ELAR): Community-Connected Experiential Learning beyond the Curriculum and Eligible for Credit

This section outlines provisions for recognizing students' demonstrated acquisition of skills and knowledge through their involvement in a community-planned and community-supported experience beyond their home school at the local, national, or global level. Examples might include First Nations, Métis, and Inuit heritage activities, international exchanges, and/or volunteer activities (not including the 40 hours of community involvement activities required to obtain the Ontario Secondary School Diploma). Recognition for secondary school credit of community-connected experiential learning not linked to the Ontario curriculum acknowledges that significant learning, both formal and informal, can result from experiences that are independently pursued by students.

Provisions are being introduced to make it possible for students to earn experiential learning credits through a formal evaluation and accreditation process known as Experiential Learning Assessment and Recognition (ELAR).<sup>5</sup> These provisions will enable students enrolled in Ontario secondary schools to earn credit for the skills and knowledge articulated in their ELAR learning plan and demonstrated through their ELAR culminating activity. Students' demonstration of learning will be evaluated in order for the students to be granted secondary school optional credits. Through the ELAR process, students may earn *a maximum of two Grade 11 Experiential Learning optional credits* towards their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). As in the cooperative education model, a teacher will mentor the student and provide support throughout the experience, and will also assess and evaluate the student's learning. ELAR procedures will be carried out under the direction of the school principal, who will grant the credits. Some students may require additional support in order to take advantage of this opportunity.

The ELAR process involves three components: pre-approval, participation, and recognition. The involvement of a teacher responsible for

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5. Note that ELAR differs from PLAR, which is a process for the granting of credits for prior learning *based on the Ontario curriculum*. See "Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)" in the Glossary.

experiential learning is an integral part of all three components. The process is designed to reflect and demonstrate the experiential learning cycle. To receive recognition for their community-based experiential learning activity, students must have entered into an agreement with their school or board prior to participating in the opportunity. In the agreement, the school or board will indicate the timeline for recognition of the opportunity, the learning goals and criteria for assessment and evaluation of the learning, and the number of experiential learning credits to be granted upon successful completion. The pre-approval component will align with the school's course selection process for the following school year.

All schools and boards will be required to establish and communicate policies and procedures in compliance with ministry policy to implement the recognition of formal and informal experiential learning beyond the curriculum. An upcoming policy/program memorandum, to be titled "Experiential Learning Assessment and Recognition (ELAR): Implementation in Ontario Secondary Schools", will outline in detail the policy and requirements that apply to regular day school students.

#### *2.4.1.1 The ELAR Process*

Three required components under ELAR will ensure that the process duly addresses student learning, student demonstration and application of learning, and requirements governing recognition of the learning.

##### **Component 1: Pre-approval**

As part of the course-selection process for the following school year, students are required to submit, prior to the learning opportunity, a detailed proposal for recognition of their experiential learning to a teacher designated as responsible for experiential learning. This proposal will outline:

- the location and duration of the learning opportunity;
- the community connection/sponsor;
- anticipated roles, activities, and specific tasks to be performed;
- potential challenges, possible solutions, and resources;
- learning goals (including academic, social, and education and career/life planning goals); and
- health and safety requirements.

The proposal will be reviewed by the teacher, and a meeting will be arranged with the student and the student's parent (if the student is under 18) to develop an ELAR learning plan and an ELAR agreement that together will identify the following:

- learning goals and success criteria (including an understanding of the experiential learning cycle and effective strategies for reflection)
- the tools, such as the Ontario Skills Passport (OSP), the provincial report card, and the Individual Pathways Plan (IPP), that will enable students to track and reflect on their learning, including but not limited to the OSP Essential Skills, 21st century competencies, the learning skills and work habits, and knowledge and skills related to the education and career/life planning program
- tools and processes (e.g., rubrics) for evaluating student learning based on the student's ELAR learning plan
- health and safety requirements
- communication and protocol requirements
- a timeline for recognition of the opportunity and the credit(s) to be granted upon successful completion, and
- evidence that all administrative requirements related to ministry, board, and school policies and procedures have been met.

### **Component 2: Participation**

As outlined in the schedule and required protocols described in their ELAR agreement and the learning goals and evaluation strategies set out in the ELAR learning plan, students (with the support of the teacher, as needed) will:

- participate in the experience, making adjustments to support their learning as required and using a variety of tools and processes to track their learning;
- reflect on their experiences in order to identify their learning;
- apply their learning and gather artefacts as evidence of their learning;
- fulfil all communication and policy and procedural requirements at their school.

### Component 3: Recognition

Following the experiential learning opportunity, students will demonstrate their learning to their teacher in the manner outlined in the approved ELAR learning plan. The demonstration will show evidence of the learning based on the experiential learning cycle, as follows:

- **Participate – Evidence of Student Participation**

The evidence that students will provide of having successfully completed the learning activities described in the ELAR learning plan will include:

- ✧ artefacts depicting roles, activities, and specific tasks performed (e.g., performance appraisals, letters of reference, credentials, videos);
- ✧ evidence of how the anticipated and unanticipated challenges were addressed.

- **Reflect – Evidence of Student Learning**

The evidence of learning that students provide will include:

- ✧ demonstrations of ongoing reflection on their formal (planned) and informal (incidental) learning (e.g., journals, blogs, videos);
- ✧ demonstrations of their formal (planned) and informal (incidental) learning (e.g., skills inventories, OSP Work Plan, performance appraisals, letters of reference, digital recordings, credentials).

- **Apply – Evidence of Student Application of Learning**

The evidence of the students' application of their learning, to be shared in their Individual Pathways Plan (IPP), will include:

- ✧ a description of how the learning has influenced their thinking, decisions they have made, and related actions they have taken or intend to take;
- ✧ a description of how the learning has informed their postsecondary transition plan and may have influenced their goals and future actions in various aspects of their lives.

Upon completion of all the requirements as outlined in the ELAR agreement, the teacher will determine a grade. The experiential learning credit(s) earned and the student's grade will be recorded on the Ontario Student Transcript (OST).



## Appendix: *Characteristics of Experiential Learning*

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Experiential learning is:

- **knowledge- and skill-based:** learning activities focus on helping students to deepen their understanding of both curriculum-based and non-curriculum-based learning and to acquire knowledge and skills related to education and career/life planning;
- **community-connected:** experiential learning opportunities have an authentic and meaningful connection to a community that may be local, national, or global, and either physical or virtual or a combination of the two;
- **inquiry-based:** learning activities place students' questions, ideas, and observations at the centre of the learning experience;
- **based on a three-stage cycle (participate, reflect, apply):** the cycle is not rigidly sequential; rather, it is a dynamic and highly personal learning process;
- **developmentally appropriate:** learning activities are appropriate to the interests, strengths, needs, and aspirations of the students at each stage of their development;
- **student-directed/co-constructed:** students have a significant role in the design of their learning opportunities, in collaboration with teachers and community mentors;
- **differentiated:** learning activities are personalized to meet students' particular learning and motivational needs and strengths;
- **assessed and evaluated in relation to identified learning goals and success criteria:** experiential learning opportunities include structures to assess and, where appropriate, evaluate and report on student achievement, based on the learning goals and success criteria outlined in the student's learning plan;
- **inclusive:** the learning activities are designed to engage all students, in accordance with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles.

## Glossary

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**“All About Me” portfolio.** A record of learning compiled by students in Kindergarten to Grade 6 as they explore and participate in experiences that support them in education and career/life planning.

**assessment *as* learning.** A process of developing and supporting student metacognition. Students are actively engaged in this assessment process: that is, they monitor their own learning, and use assessment feedback from teachers and peers, along with their own assessments, to determine next steps and set individual learning goals. Assessment *as* learning requires students to have a clear understanding of learning goals and success criteria. *See also* **assessment *for* learning.**

**assessment *for* learning.** The ongoing process of gathering and interpreting evidence about student learning for the purpose of determining where students are in their learning, where they need to go, and how best to get there. The information gathered is used by teachers to provide feedback and adjust instruction, and by students to focus their learning. Assessment *for* learning takes place while the student is learning and serves to promote learning.

**community-connected experiential learning.** An approach to student learning that provides students with opportunities to actively participate in experiences connected to a community (local, national, or global) outside the school; reflect on those experiences to derive meaning from them; and apply their learning to their decisions and actions in various aspects of their lives.

**cooperative education program.** A program that allows students to earn secondary school credits while completing an experiential learning opportunity connected to a community. In the context of the policy framework proposed in this document, a cooperative education program includes a classroom component and a community component. The community-connected experiential learning opportunity enables students to apply and further develop the knowledge and skills described in the expectations of a related course from the Ontario curriculum.

**cooperative education stand-alone course.** A new cooperative education course that will include a 55-hour classroom component based on expectations that outline the knowledge and skills students will need to be successful in their community-connected experiential learning opportunity and in their lives beyond school. Students will demonstrate and further develop their knowledge and skills through their community-connected learning experience(s).

**descriptive feedback.** A form of feedback that supports learning by providing students with precise information about what they are doing well, what needs improvement, and what specific steps they can take to improve.

**e-cooperative education program** (*also known as virtual cooperative education*). A program that allows students to complete all or part of the placement component of their cooperative education program remotely – that is, using electronic communications technology.

**education and career/life planning program.** A whole-school program designed to help students achieve their personal goals and become competent, successful, and contributing members of society. The program is delivered both through classroom instruction linked to the curriculum and through broader school programs and activities.

**Education and Career/Life Planning Program Advisory Committee.** A committee that each elementary and secondary school is required to establish to coordinate the development, implementation, and evaluation of the school's program. The representatives who must be included on the committee and their roles and responsibilities are outlined in the document *Creating Pathways to Success*.

**ELAR.** *See Experiential Learning Assessment and Recognition (ELAR).*

**evaluation.** The process of judging the quality of student learning on the basis of established criteria and assigning a value to represent that quality. Evaluation is based on assessments of learning that provide data on student achievement at strategic times throughout the grade/subject/course, often at the end of a period of learning.

**Experiential Learning Assessment and Recognition (ELAR).** A process that allows for the recognition, for secondary school credit, of knowledge and skills students may develop through their involvement in a planned and community-supported experience beyond their home school and

outside the Ontario curriculum. The experience may be at the local, national, or global level. The ELAR process acknowledges that significant learning, both formal and informal, can result from experiences that are independently pursued by students.

- **ELAR agreement.** An agreement between a student and the student's school or board jointly developed prior to the student's participation in a for-credit experiential learning opportunity in the community that is not linked to the curriculum. The agreement specifies the timeline for recognition of the opportunity, the learning goals and criteria for assessment and evaluation of the learning, and the number of experiential learning credits to be granted upon successful completion.
- **ELAR learning plan.** A plan that outlines the learning goals for a community-based experiential learning opportunity not linked to the curriculum, the knowledge and skills to be assessed and evaluated, and the assessment and evaluation strategies to be used in granting credit(s) to students upon their successful completion of the opportunity. The ELAR learning plan is developed jointly by the teacher, the student, and the student's parent (if the student is under 18).

**experiential learning cycle.** In the context of the proposed policy framework, a three-stage learning process that requires students to: (1) *actively participate* in community-connected learning experiences; (2) *reflect* on those experiences to derive meaning from them; and (3) *apply* their learning in various aspects of their lives.

Although the cycle comprises these three necessary components, it is not a rigid or strictly sequential process but rather a dynamic and highly personal one.

**field study.** An experiential learning opportunity involving exploration of the outdoors or other environments or organizations. The opportunity may be open-ended – students might investigate similarities and differences between local environments – or it can be organized for a specific purpose.

**field trip.** An excursion by a class or group of students beyond the school environment. The purpose of the trip is usually observation for educational purposes or to provide students with experiences outside their everyday activities.

**Individual Pathways Plan (IPP).** A web-based record of learning maintained by students, starting in Grade 7 and building on their K–6 “All About Me” portfolio. The IPP provides the structure for students to document evidence of their ongoing inquiry and development in the four areas of learning as outlined in the education and career/life planning program.

**inquiry-based learning.** An approach to teaching and learning that places students’ questions, ideas, and observations at the centre of the learning experience.

**job shadowing.** In the context of the proposed policy framework, a one-on-one observation of an individual at a community placement.

**job twinning.** In the context of the proposed policy framework, a one-on-one observation of a cooperative education student at his or her community placement.

**learning goals.** Brief statements that describe for a student what he or she should know and be able to do by the end of a period of instruction (e.g., a lesson, series of lessons, or subtask) or by the end of an experiential learning opportunity. The goals represent subsets or clusters of knowledge and skills that the student must master to successfully achieve the overall curriculum expectations. In the context of experiential learning opportunities not linked to the curriculum, the learning goals, recorded in the ELAR learning plan, are descriptions of the learning that will be evaluated on completion of the experience.

**metacognition.** The process of thinking about one’s own thought processes. Metacognitive skills include the ability to monitor one’s own learning.

**Ontario Skills Passport (OSP).** A web-based resource that provides clear descriptions of the “Essential Skills” and “work habits” that are important for work, learning, and life. The Essential Skills are used in virtually all occupations and are transferable from school to work, job to job, and sector to sector. The OSP is designed to help students, teachers, and employers assess and record the demonstration of these skills and work habits by students and job seekers.

**Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP).** A specialized program that enables students who are 16 years of age or older to meet diploma requirements while participating in a cooperative education program in the context of an apprenticeship occupation.

**Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR).** A formal evaluation and accreditation process where students may have their skills and knowledge evaluated against the overall expectations of a course or courses outlined in a provincial curriculum policy document in order to earn credit(s) towards the secondary school diploma without taking the course or courses in an Ontario school. Students' credentials from other jurisdictions may also be assessed for the purpose of granting credits.

**problem-based learning.** An approach to teaching and learning that focuses learners on solving problems within a real-life context, encouraging them to consider the situation in which the problem exists when trying to find solutions. Key features of problem-based learning include the use of collaborative small-group work, a student-centred approach, the teacher as facilitator, and the use of real-life problems as the organizing focus. (Adapted from Barrows, 1996; Nasir, Hand, & Taylor, 2008)

**project-based learning.** An approach to teaching and learning that empowers learners to collaborate in teams, mentored by their teachers, as they research real-world questions, pose solutions to real-world problems, and design real-world products in a rigorous way. (Adapted from Hutchison, 2014)

**School Effectiveness Framework (SEF).** A self-assessment tool designed to help educators build coherence and align practices across the whole school. The framework is outlined in the ministry document *The K–12 School Effectiveness Framework (2013): A Support for School Improvement and Student Success*. The framework identifies evidence-based indicators of successful practice in a number of components of effective schools. The indicators, with samples of evidence, help educators determine the effectiveness of their practices in the areas of assessment; leadership; student engagement; curriculum delivery; pathways planning and programming; and home, school, and community partnerships.

**service learning.** An experiential learning opportunity with a focus on service in the community. Service learning is intended to benefit both the provider and the recipient of the service.

**Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) Program.** A ministry-approved specialized program that allows students to focus their learning on a specific economic sector while meeting the requirements for the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). The program assists students in their transition from secondary school to apprenticeship training, college, university, or the workplace. An SHSM enables students to gain sector-specific skills and knowledge in the context of engaging, career-related learning environments. Every SHSM must include: a bundle of credits, sector-recognized certifications, and/or training; experiential learning activities within the sector; “reach ahead” experiences connected with the student’s chosen postsecondary pathway; and development of Essential Skills and work habits as described in the Ontario Skills Passport (OSP).

**success criteria.** Specific descriptions of what the successful attainment of learning goals “looks like”. The descriptions are developed by teachers on the basis of criteria in the achievement chart and are discussed and agreed upon in collaboration with students. The criteria provide guidance to the teacher and student in gathering information about the quality of the student’s learning and are used to determine to what degree a learning goal has been achieved.

**virtual work experience.** A planned learning opportunity, within any credit course, that provides students with a short- to medium-term experience at a work placement. Virtual work experience is facilitated through the use of communications technology at the school.

**work experience.** A planned learning opportunity, within any credit course, that provides students with a short- to medium-term experience at a work placement.

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