

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

# Who are we in this tent, what do we do in here, and who else needs to come in?

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There is a vigorous debate in the field about *how we define what is it that we do*. Some are referring to our work as *Work-Integrated Learning*, others are naming it *Experiential Education*, and still some others are labeling our work as *Career Education* or *Professional Practice* or *Cooperative Learning*.

All over the nation, offices, programs, and academic communities are rebranding their missions and visions in an effort to adequately describe to stakeholders ***who we are and what we do***. Perhaps more importantly, many are wrestling-with what we do not do, asking important questions about what does not fit into our work.

Many stakeholders are searching for an identity and asking very good questions along the way.

Some of these questions include should we include Service Learning and Community-Engaged Learning? What about Clinicals, Practicums, Mentorships, and Job Shadowing? Do programs like Undergraduate Research placements and Action research make sense for us? While fun-sounding, do things like Adventure Learning fit into our tent?

These debates and questions indicate that the field is going through a resurgence – a growth spurt, of sorts – which of course comes with it the expected and accompanying growing pains.

The resurgence is not a new one, however, as learning through experience is an ancient concept (350 BCE). In Book Two of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle wrote “*for the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them*” (translated by Chase in 1886).

Our tent, it could be said, is an old and established one.

Naming and visioning aside, regardless of what we call ourselves, perhaps the most important question is ***what makes our work unique?***

We know that Experiential Learning is distinct from didactic learning in that students are not permitted to take a passive role in the process (Freire). Rather, they are encouraged to stretch and grow, to feel the difficulty in the learning (Dewey). Throughout these learning opportunities, students are asked to become active participants (Kolb), embracing the adventure of the process (Lewin) by cooperating with others

(Schneider) and holistically serving the learning situation (Piaget).

Some say that relocating the learning to outside of the traditional classroom is what makes our work unique. Others may say that hands-on learning is key, providing students rich opportunities to reflect upon real-world applications. Still some others may argue that career readiness is the unique hallmark of our work.

To that question of uniqueness, each of these answers – both academic and pedestrian – are correct. What is interesting, however, is that each of these answers also apply to teachers and professors, to employers and educational partners, to staff members and administrators, and to anyone involved in the our field.

Really, these questions apply to anyone who wants to be in our tent.

As a modest reflection of the evolving field, this publication is also unique, but not just for the reasons listed above. Rather, and like the field, *Experience Magazine: Practice and Theory is reflexive*, responding to the ever-changing landscape of education and the connection of education to the global village.

*Experience Magazine: Practice and Theory features academic and practitioner submissions that cover best practice highlights, field trends, how-to articles and relevant information and resources for scholars and practitioners in the field of experiential learning. The audience for this publication reflects the diverse global field of experiential learning and will provide evidenced-based and practitioner-oriented resources for a wide array of experiential learning stakeholders.*

What you will see in this issue is a revisioning and retooling of this platform. Our aim is to meet the ever-changing field, full of new challenges and new opportunities, holistically and authentically, but we cannot do it alone.

CEIA is the leader in work-integrated learning and promotes best practices for co-ops, internships, clinical study, and service learning. Our upcoming conference, “Experiential Learning on the Rise”, will provide helpful resources for practitioners in the field. We hope to see you there.

We are confident that you will find your voice, and hear it echoed by others, in these pages. More so, we hope that you also become active participants in its evolving creation. We do not want passive readers. We want to encourage you to stretch and grow. We ask that you embrace the adventure with us.

**Come on in. While old, the tent is a big one.**

Sincerely,



Michael J. Sharp, Editor