

## Examining Theory in Practice Assignment Case Study: Open Minds & Round Square

Two case studies will be evaluated through frameworks of connecting the classroom with the greater community. The first case study will be with Campus Calgary Open Minds program. The program uses experiential learning through a week-long curriculum based experience, which is used as a catalyst for year long learning activities. The second case study will be with Round Square (RS), which is a framework used by 160 schools worldwide that also promotes experiential learning. The framework RS uses is based on the IDEALS - Internationalism, Democracy, Environment, Adventure Leadership and Service.

Experiential learning is learning by doing. It first immerses learners in an experience and then encourages reflection about the experience to develop new skills, attitudes or ways of thinking. (Schwartz, 1) The Open Minds program exemplifies this in the thirteen schools that run varying experiential programs. Students engage in a week long curriculum based experience, which is further used as a “catalyst” for year long learning activities. It’s the mission of the schools “to transform teaching and learning by increasing student engagement through community, funder, and educational partnerships.” (Open Minds)



Looking at the Science School, Cross Conservation School, and Glenbow Museum School - each one has a formulated program with:

- **a mixture of content and process** with the choice to pick what interests them in the subject area,
- **the role of reflection** with the use of journals,
- **learning outside one’s perceived comfort zones** at different sites, and
- **engaging in purposeful endeavours** with the school board and the funders involved. (See Fig. 1)(Schwartz, 2 and Open Minds)

The content is supported with the curriculum, it allows students to explore their community and interests. There are planned activities which also provide some teachers with an in-service to prepare. (Open Minds) Students gave positive feedback on their realizations and personal pursuits while they had gone through the program.

According to the educational philosopher, Kurt Hahn from the mid-1900s, "I regard it as the foremost task of education to insure the survival of these qualities: an enterprising curiosity, an undefeatable spirit, tenacity in pursuit, readiness for sensible self denial, and above all, compassion." (Kurthahn.org) Based on this, the founding



Figure 2: RS IDEALS

IDEALS is the concept behind each RC school and are characterized by this shared educational approach. (Round Square) Hahn was known for his progressive thinking in the mid to late 1900s when he had established Salem in Germany and the Gordonstoun School in Scotland. He established the concept of "purposeful activities that were intellectual, spirited and practical". (Veevers & Allison, 8) He had established a 'paradigm shift in educational thinking' in a time when experiential learning was not at its peak. (Lock, 1)

RS shares similar pedagogical support in experiential learning as Open Minds. The difference lie in the IDEALS - a framework used by member schools, despite what curriculum is used. (See Fig. 2) As a result, there is flexibility and ownership on the student to build relationships. The teacher 'delegates the authority to the student' to guide their learning through expeditions, RS conferences, outreach programs locally, nationally or internationally. (Schwartz, 7)

Along with the experiential involvement comes the development of skills. As an example, in Open Minds - Science School curiosity, creativity and innovation can be linked together.

(Science School). Throughout the year, student reflect back on their experiences through STEAM skills linked through Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math. (Science School, Annual Report) This is demonstrated in the use of Makey Makey in Grade 9 as shown in Figure 3.

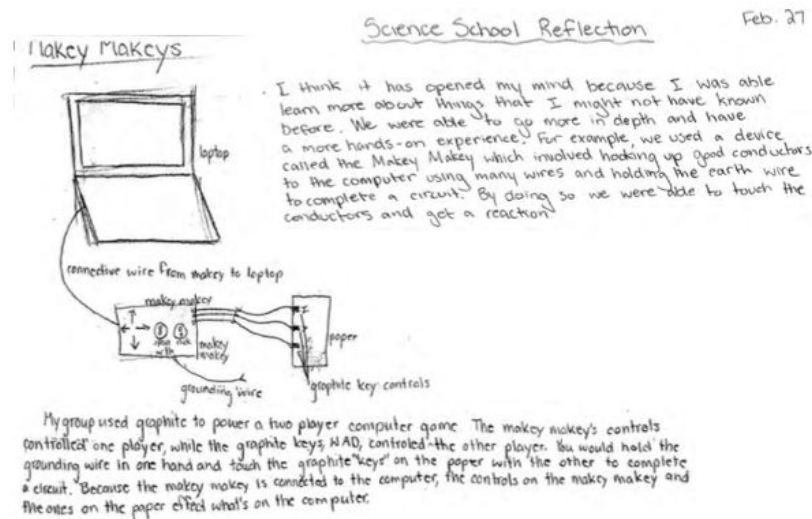


Figure 3: Expanding Skills with experience

Unlike Open Minds, RS uses the IDEALS in a flexible manner in all subject areas. As a result there is an intentional experiential - interdisciplinary approach at a whole school level. For example with the Inter-Community School, in Zurich Switzerland, the IDEALS could be implemented from K - 12. Students are given the opportunities to present their experiences, apply learned realizations in class and express them through art, portfolios, and presentations. As a result there is a greater connection with what is learned in school and beyond which adds value to being a global citizen.

Some challenges that can be seen with Open Minds are:

1. There are 13 schools that work with different organizations as a result there is a lack of flexibility in what a child could chose from. **Solution:** Students should be given autonomy in subject areas that they can chose from within the designated school project which could promote leadership. (Schwartz, 10)

2. There may be a lack of consistency of what students take from the experiences. Looking at the various Annual Reports, not all the programs have processes and practices that would provide an equal opportunity throughout the different programs. **Solution:** Teachers need to provide processing tools which could promote collaboration between schools. (Schwartz, 9)
3. There seems to be a lack of 'student centeredness'. (Collin & Wilson, 39) **Solution:** Provide clear expectations for students before the activity so the learned experiences can go further after the one week. (Schwartz, 5)

Some challenges that can be seen with RS:

1. Not all schools have staff interest in the IDEALS. **Solution:** Provide training sessions to better inform staff.
2. There could be a lack of connecting the curriculum to the IDEALS, since there are different schools and curriculum in place at 160 schools. **Solution:** Look into ways to link classroom activities and a 'pattern of inquiry', this is to ensure that thinking occurs after an experience, but also throughout the experience. (Schwartz, 6)
3. The role of reflection may be overlooked due to the immense amount of ownership provided to student. **Solution:** Scaffold activities that would emphasize the importance of personal relevance and linking it beyond the learning environment so students take pride in sharing their experiences. (Schwartz, 6)

A suggestion where both cases could improve is consistency in what each program has to offer to the student. 'The creation of an effective experiential learning environment for students is initiated by the teacher through clearly defined educational parameters - group working agreements, activity learning goals, a big picture design.' (Schwartz, 5) With both cases there needs to be structure which would facilitate this to happen. With a balance and necessary structures, concrete benchmarks could also be created and utilized to properly assess programs to bring improvements over time. (Learning Organization, 111) As a result,

I feel both programs can transcend even further in the richness of what a student takes away from their experiences.

Word Count: 1000

#### References

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