

Boston Pilot Schools Experiential Education Demonstration Project



Rubric Tool



Center for Collaborative Education
Transforming Schools
For Student Success

BARR FOUNDATION
Using KNOWLEDGE, NETWORKS and FUNDING
to Build a Better Boston for All

Pilot Schools Experiential Education Rubric Tool

Overview

The Pilot Schools' Experiential Education Demonstration is intended to deepen and embed high quality experiential education within each school's academic programs. The work is grounded in the belief that high quality experiential education will significantly enhance student engagement and performance over time.

The Boston Pilot Schools represent an innovative approach to urban public education within the Boston Public Schools (BPS), as evidenced by their promising results in student engagement and achievement. Since 1994, the Boston Pilot Schools have provided models of innovative practices for the Boston Public Schools and beyond. Like charter schools, Pilot Schools have autonomy in the areas of budget, staffing, governance, school calendar, and curriculum and assessment.¹ The theory behind Pilot Schools is that student engagement and achievement increases when schools are small, personalized, mission-driven, and have autonomy over their resources in exchange for increased accountability. There are currently 20 Pilot Schools, spanning grades PreK-12 and serving approximately 11% of the BPS student enrollment.

While enrolling students who are similar demographically to those of the BPS as a whole, and while operating with similar per pupil budgets, Pilot Schools have demonstrated significant measures of success over their history. Most Pilot Schools perform at or above the district average on indicators of student engagement and achievement. Pilot School students tend to have higher attendance, and lower suspensions and transfers, all indications of strong family and student engagement and high "holding power." As well, Pilot School students tend to have higher graduation and college-going rates, and comparable or higher MCAS scores, all indications of high student achievement. Because of the Pilot Schools' uniqueness, these schools are intended to serve as a reform model that could influence other district schools and practices. Pilot Schools offer a controlled opportunity for research and development, while providing a significant lever for change within the district. Pilot Schools have also expressed interest in and need for resources to improve experiential education offerings.²

¹ Center for Collaborative Education. *How Pilot Schools Use Freedom Over Budget, Staffing, and Schedules to Meet Student Needs*. Boston, MA: CCE, October 2001.

² Center for Collaborative Education. *Survey on Experiential Education and Extended Day Programs*. Boston, MA: CCE, Spring 2004.

Experiential Education

Research has shown that students learn in many diverse ways.³ However, traditional education programs have favored students with certain learning styles, emphasizing linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences over musical, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist, and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences.⁴ Experiential education, on the other hand, uses multiple senses and intelligences, and therefore is more effective in reaching a wider diversity of students, including traditionally underserved populations such as students of color, English language learners, and special needs students.⁵

The Association for Experiential Education defines experiential education as the following:

*A philosophy and process in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct, relevant experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values and ways of thinking.*⁶

According to McMaster University's Experiential Education Program, experiential education creates a "purposeful process in which the teacher actively engages students in experience," and is intended to develop good citizens, assist students in achieving critical understanding of their studies, and reduce the power relationship between teacher and students.⁷ Through engaging in experiential education, students change their behavior and prior conceptions, resulting in deeper, more complex understandings of the world around them.

Experiential education involves four steps in a cycle, suggesting the ongoing nature of learning. Regardless of the content of the experience, learners use the following sequence:

- Engagement in concrete experiences
- Observation and reflection of the experiences
- Formation of concepts and generalizations from the experiences
- Application of new understandings⁸

A hallmark of experiential education is that "learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience."⁹ When learners are interacting with

³ Dewey, J. *Experience and Education*. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1938; Gardner, H. *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice*. New York: Basic Books, 1993.

⁴ Gardner, H., Ibid.

⁵ Gardner, H., Ibid; Hansen, Ronald. *The role of experience in learning: giving meaning and authenticity to the learning process in schools*. Journal of Technology Education: 11(2), Spring 2000, pp. 23-32.

⁶ Association for Experiential Education webpage, <http://www.aee2.org/customer/pages.php?pageid=47>, 2004.

⁷ Experiential Education Program, McMaster University, found at <http://socserv.socsci.mcmaster.ca/EE/pages/understandingee.html>, 2004.

⁸ Hansen, Ibid.

their environment, both teachers and students take on roles quite different from those in traditional schools and classrooms. Students become more active in constructing knowledge, and teachers respond to their students rather than teaching curriculum in packaged units. Learning experiences have relevance, and knowledge is increased through experimentation rather than solely through reading or hearing about the experiences of others.¹⁰

The Barr Foundation has adapted the following principles, formulated by the Association of Experiential Education, to use as criteria for the review and selection of demonstration projects in the Pilot Schools' Experiential Education Demonstration Project.

Practices/Activities for the Learner

- Experiential learning opportunities are supported by reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis.
- Experiences are structured to require the learner to take initiative, make decisions, and be accountable for the results.
- Throughout the experiential learning process, the learner is actively engaged in posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative, and constructing meaning.
- Learners are engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially, and/or physically. This involvement produces a perception that the learning task is authentic.
- The results of the learning are personal and form the basis for future experience and learning.
- Relationships are developed and nurtured: learner to self, learner to others, and learner to the world at large.

Practices/Activities for the Educator

- The educator's primary roles include setting suitable experiences, posing problems, setting boundaries, supporting learners, ensuring physical and emotional safety, and facilitating the learning process.
- The educator recognizes and encourages spontaneous opportunities for learning.
- The educator strives to be aware of his/her biases, judgments, and pre-conceptions and how they influence the learner.
- The design of the learning experience includes the possibility to learn from natural consequences, mistakes, and successes.

Practices/Activities for the Learner and Educator Together

- The educator and learner may experience success, failure, adventure, risk-taking, and uncertainty, since the outcomes of experience cannot be totally predicted.
- Opportunities are nurtured for learners and educators to explore and examine their own values.

Design of this Rubric Tool

The rubric is organized in key areas of project implementation: curriculum, pedagogy, culture, and structures. The intent is to create a "common" set of measures that can provide a multifaceted portrait of school progress. As schools deepen their individual

⁹ Kolb, D. *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1984.

¹⁰ Stevens, P.W., Richards, A. *Changing Schools through Experiential Education*. ERIC Digest. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1992.

and collective work as a PSEED Network, a common set of measures facilitates dialogue on practice and processes throughout project implementation. Each focus area is constructed to explore defining key characteristics of experiential education. Multiple perspectives are embedded in the rubrics: teachers, students, school community, and school partners.

Phases of Implementation¹¹

A school implementing experiential education will go through phases of development as it deepens and spreads its work. A school or teacher may be in different phases across different areas, or even in different phases within one area. These phases are:

Most of the Time (4): This is the ideal of this particular practice being embedded in the classroom or school, so that there is the capacity for it to be self-sustaining and continuously improving. Teachers are engaged in this practice most of the time.

Some of the Time (3): Teachers are engaged in the practice some of the time. Many of the structures that facilitate this goal are in place. The school does not yet have the capacity for the practices to be self-sustaining.

Beginning to Occur (2): A few attempts or changes may have been made by teachers, but the level of change is neither in-depth nor school-wide. Initial structures are in place to support practices.

Not at All (1): This phase is characteristic of a teacher who has yet to work in a focused way on the particular practice. Pre-implementations may signify a conscious choice to focus on other areas as the teacher or school develops its initiatives in experiential education.

Don't Know or Not Applicable (0)

How is the Rubric Tool Used?

The Rubric Tool has been designed for use in a variety of ways that will inform staff, project participants, school communities, and school partners about the progress of their experiential education projects. The tool can be used to guide:

1. Reflections for staff, project implementation teams, and school communities;
2. Development of a school portfolio of evidence and artifacts
3. School visits by those outside of the school community, including school partners, colleagues, and community members;
4. The construction and review of public exhibitions; and
5. The collection of documentation of PSEED project process and outcomes.

¹¹ Center for Collaborative Education- Turning Points Benchmarks Guide. Boston, MA: CCE. pp. 3-5.

Reflections

Reflection is a critical anchor in the four step cycle of experiential education:

- Engagement in concrete experiences
- Observation and reflection of the experiences
- Formation of concepts and generalizations from the experiences
- Application of new understandings

The rubrics guide a reflective process for the individual teacher, teams or the entire school community. Some of the most powerful reflection is collaborative, when teachers and other members of the school community look together at teacher and student work, data, or written reflection. There may be multiple occasions for collaborative reflection, for example:

- As teachers (and others) select pieces discussing how individual pieces demonstrate project goals, practices, or results.
- In structured, facilitated conversations, which support teachers (and others) in exploring the evidence at a deeper level.
- During discussions and meetings with the critical friends and external partners.

School Portfolio

The School Portfolio represents an authentic presentation of the school because it contains real evidence from the life of the school. The evidence takes many forms, including school or teacher generated documents (e.g., mission statement, meeting agendas, budgets); statistical data (e.g., attendance figures, grades, test scores), samples of students' and teachers' work (e.g., student portfolios, teachers' assignments, assessment rubrics); observations (teachers' journals, reflections from visitors); and many others. These various types of evidence may be presented in various forms (e.g., print, video, photographs, etc.). Of course, the Portfolio does not include all of the possible evidence from the life of the school, but rather a thoughtful selection of evidence which addresses the each section of the rubric tool.

Another advantage of portfolios over more strictly quantitative data (e.g., test scores, statistical data) is that they provide a richer basis for reflection. Just as a student reviews the contents of her language arts portfolio and thinks about her growth as an active learner, and where she may need to focus her energies, teachers and other members of the Pilot School community review the developing School Portfolio and reflect on the school's performance and growth.

When teachers review the School Portfolio, they write a reflective Cover Letter that comments on the process by which the Portfolio has been developed. For each Focus Area, they provide a reflective piece in which they consider how the evidence they collected demonstrates the school's progress towards its goals and the common goals of the Pilot Schools. They may consider how pieces of evidence demonstrate strengths, highlight "challenge areas," or raise questions for the school community.

The Guiding Questions prompt the reflective pieces, but should not force the school's reflection to imitate questionnaire responses.

School Visits & Public Exhibitions

Schools are encouraged to provide opportunities to visit each other's classrooms and participate in school-wide events including exhibitions and portfolio reviews. In describing Networks Kathleen Cushman frames the purpose and benefits of sharing the work with those beyond the school. She says,

“The most powerful (of these) connections often happen when people gather at regular intervals to look carefully at students’ portfolios and exhibitions, read their essay or lab notebooks, witness their art or drama or music-making, and talk together about what they see. This kind of conversation leads naturally to students experiencing more continuity and coherence in what goes on at school. For teachers, it serves as a springboard from which to reflect on their daily experience, relate it to the experience of others, and have their understandings critiqued by trusted colleagues. Parents become part of the web of shared interest, as they are invited to review and discuss what their children are learning. All involved are constructing powerful new knowledge with every step.” (Reference Networks and Essential Schools: How Trust Advances Learning, Kathleen Cushman, Horace, Volume 13, #1, Sept. 1996)

Schools can use the rubric tool to frame school visits and opportunities for shared practice such as student exhibitions and portfolio reviews. Visits can be tailored to focus on either parts or all of the areas as outlined in the rubrics. Guiding questions developed by the school for such visits focuses essential feedback that can inform the continued work in classrooms and the school community. For example, one school is focused on exploring their current structures that support experiential education. Another school is interested in a broader process of reflection creating a structured opportunity for a group of colleagues to offer feedback on all areas outlined in the rubric. In both instances, the feedback offers the school a critical opportunity for reflection and improving their overall project process, goals, and products.

Collection of Documentation of PSEED Project Process and Outcomes

Each school's work serves as powerful learning about process and outcomes as they embark in implementing experiential education. This work can inform other schools interested in experiential education providing valuable insights about the implementation process. Throughout the work, schools have developed a wide range of documents that are useful in mapping each individual school's work as well as the work of the Network as a whole. These documents include:

- Project proposals
- Process and outcome maps
- Curriculum documents
- Authentic assessment opportunities

- School visit feedback
- School budgets
- School and network workshops, meetings, and institutes.

Schools are encouraged to maintain an ongoing collection of data, documentation, and reflections as a regular part of its practice to be shared within the Network and beyond. These forms of evidence serve other valuable purposes, including:

- Strategic planning
- Recruitment of students
- Informing parents
- Fundraising
- Hiring of staff

Rubric Focus Areas and Key Characteristics

<i>Curriculum</i>	<i>Pedagogy</i>	<i>School Culture</i>	<i>Structures</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Authentic ✓ Content Rich ✓ Engaging ✓ Project-and- Performance Based 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Inquiry-based ✓ Flexible ✓ Active ✓ Reflective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Quality Focused ✓ Connected ✓ Collaborative ✓ Visible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Supportive Leadership ✓ Flexible Schedule ✓ Flexible Structures ✓ Inclusive Student Groupings

Focus Area 1: Curriculum

Sample Evidence

This list provides examples of concrete things you would see if this focus area is being fully implemented. The list is not all inclusive, nor would one expect every activity to be happening in every school. The list is meant to guide evidence collection.

- Samples of student work from different content areas and grade levels
- Notes and videotapes of classroom and instructional approaches
- Course and curriculum descriptions
- Culminating projects and tasks for individuals and groups
- Teacher- and class-generated rubrics
- Reading material that covers a wide range of interests and levels
- Standardized test scores

Guiding Questions

- How is your curriculum authentic?
- How is your curriculum content rich and challenging?
- What are the indicators of student engagement? How do you know the curriculum is engaging to a range of learners?
- What kinds of performance based assessments or authentic learning do students experience?
- How does the curriculum support active reflection by teachers and students?
- How is the four-step cycle of experiential education evident in teaching and learning?

Directions: Please circle the response, in each row, that best describes your school.

		<i>Most of Time</i>	<i>Some of Time</i>	<i>Begin- ning to Occur</i>	<i>Not at All</i>	<i>Don't know or Not Applic- able</i>
		<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Authentic</i>						
1A	Classroom content is relevant to students' experiences.	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>
1B	Content and projects are relevant beyond the classroom and school.	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>
1C	Curriculum development and implementation uses the expertise of practitioners in the content area.	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>

		<i>Most of Time</i>	<i>Some of Time</i>	<i>Beginning to Occur</i>	<i>Not at All</i>	<i>Don't know or Not Applicable</i>
		<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>
1D	Curriculum allows for intra- and inter-disciplinary experiences and inquiries.	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>
1E	Curriculum implementation requires students to conduct field and community work outside the school building.	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>
1F	Students and teachers use primary source materials in their inquiry.	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Content Rich</i>						
1G	Students understand key concepts through their experiences working in and across disciplines (as writers, mathematicians, scientists, etc).	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Engaging</i>						
1H	Curriculum experiences expand student perspectives on diverse cultures.	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>
1I	Curriculum experiences expand student perspectives on diverse learning styles in classrooms and content areas.	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>
1J	Students understand the purpose for their work.	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>
1K	Students develop and modify their theories through discussion.	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Project- and Performance-Based</i>						
1L	The process and outcomes of creating products and performances provide the structure through which students demonstrate understanding and make learning visible.	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>
1M	Teachers and students reflect alone and in groups on what they learned through the process of creating meaningful products.	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>

Focus Area 2: Pedagogy

Sample Evidence

This list provides examples of concrete things you would see if this focus area is being fully implemented. The list is not all inclusive, nor would one expect every activity to be happening in every school. The list is meant to guide evidence collection.

- Teacher portfolios
- Lesson plans
- Teacher assignments and project units
- Multiple forms of assessment
- Student and parent feedback through surveys, discussion, or focus groups

Guiding Questions

- Is instruction inquiry-based?
- How are students grouped for instruction?
- Are there flexibility in and a variety of instructional approaches?
- Is risk-taking encouraged?
- How is student leadership encouraged?
- How is reflection embedded in teaching and learning?
- How is assessment used to determine student achievement?
- How is the four-step cycle of experiential education evident in teaching and learning?

Directions: Please circle the response, in each row, that best describes your school.

		<i>Most of Time</i>	<i>Some of Time</i>	<i>Begin- ning to Occur</i>	<i>Not at All</i>	<i>Don't know or Not Applic- able</i>
		<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>
Inquiry-Based						
2A	Instruction requires students to pose questions, solve problems, and construct meaning.	4	3	2	1	0
Flexible						
2B	Classroom grouping structures vary (individual, small groups, large group) depending on what the experience or product requires.	4	3	2	1	0
2D	Educational experiences include the possibility of learning from mistakes, risk-taking, and unpredictable outcomes.	4	3	2	1	0

		<i>Most of Time</i>	<i>Some of Time</i>	<i>Begin- ning to Occur</i>	<i>Not at All</i>	<i>Don't know or Not Applic- able 0</i>
		4	3	2	1	0
Active						
2E	Curriculum consistently provides opportunities for students to handle, explore, experiment, and work with materials.	4	3	2	1	0
Reflective						
2F	Student and teacher reflections address what they learned as well as what they did.	4	3	2	1	0
2G	A coherent system of assessment contributes to ongoing reflection and evaluation. The system is designed to include multiple forms such as performances, exhibitions, portfolios, conferences, tests, and quizzes.	4	3	2	1	0

Focus Area 3: School Culture

Sample Evidence

This list provides examples of concrete things you would see if this focus area is being fully implemented. The list is not all inclusive, nor would one expect every activity to be happening in every school. The list is meant to guide evidence collection.

- Notes and agendas from teacher collaborative planning time meetings
- Interviews and/or surveys of teachers reflecting on planning and professional development activities
- Agendas and meeting minutes from various groups, such as leadership teams, full faculty, grade level teams, parents, and community members.
- Explicit team missions, goals, and norms
- Peer observation protocols and notes
- Professional development schedule for the school year

Guiding Questions

- How are high expectations and standards communicated through the curriculum and pedagogy?
- Are student and teacher learning in and outside the classroom?
- What is evidence of staff collaboration?
- What is the quality of discourse between and among teachers and students?
- How are parents and community connected to the work of the school?

Directions: Please circle the response, in each row, that best describes your school.

		<i>Most of Time</i>	<i>Some of Time</i>	<i>Begin- ning to Occur</i>	<i>Not at All</i>	<i>Don't know or Not Applic- able 0</i>
		4	3	2	1	0
Quality Focused						
3A	Students engage in and discuss rigorous content through the experiential education learning process.	4	3	2	1	0
3B	Students create displays, presentations, and performances with significant care, preparation, and high standards.	4	3	2	1	0

		<i>Most of time</i>	<i>Some of Time</i>	<i>Beginning to Occur</i>	<i>Not at All</i>	<i>Don't know or Not Applicable</i>
		4	3	2	1	0
Content Rich						
3C	Teachers and other staff and administrators use regular opportunities to expand and deepen their understanding of experiential education during their meeting times.	4	3	2	1	0
Visible						
3D	Displays of student work are accompanied by teacher and student reflections. This is visible throughout classrooms, hallways, and performance assessments.	4	3	2	1	0
3E	Students and teachers are responsible for communicating their learning to the community beyond the classroom.	4	3	2	1	0
3F	Parents and community members are actively a part of the learning and creation of products and performances.	4	3	2	1	0
3G	Community partnerships expand and deepen the experiential education curricula and authentic learning opportunities.	4	3	2	1	0

Focus Area 4: Structures

Sample Evidence

This list provides examples of concrete things you would see if this focus area is being fully implemented. The list is not all inclusive, nor would one expect every activity to be happening in every school. The list is meant to guide evidence collection.

- Governance documents
- Budget summary
- School improvement plan
- School professional development goals
- Description of governance bodies
- Decision making processes
- School partnerships
- School schedule and calendar (teachers and students)

Guiding Questions

- What is the evidence of shared leadership?
- How do schedules and school structures support experiential learning?
- How are classes organized to support quality learning experiences within and across disciplines?
- How does the budget support experiential education and the mission of the school?
- How does leadership ensure good communication within the school community?
- Describe the decision making bodies and processes in the school.

Directions: Please circle the response, in each row, that best describes your school.

		<i>Most of Time</i>	<i>Some of Time</i>	<i>Begin- ning to Occur</i>	<i>Not at All</i>	<i>Don't know or Not Applic- able 0</i>
		<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>
Supportive Leadership						
4A	School leadership promotes experiential education as an essential part of preparing students for high levels of achievement.	4	3	2	1	0
4B	Leadership defines student achievement as inclusive of multiple assessments.	4	3	2	1	0

		<i>Most of Time</i>	<i>Some of Time</i>	<i>Begin- ning to Occur</i>	<i>Not at All</i>	<i>Don't know or Not Applic- able 0</i>
		4	3	2	1	0
4C	The school leadership connects experiential education to school improvement goals.	4	3	2	1	0
4D	The school's teacher evaluation processes encourage the integration of experiential education into their practice.	4	3	2	1	0
4E	Leadership is shared among administrators, staff, and other members of the school community in areas of decision-making and implementation of school goals.	4	3	2	1	0
4F	The school's budget supports experiential education.	4	3	2	1	0
4G	School partnerships are meaningful and support the vision and mission of the school.	4	3	2	1	0
Flexible Schedule						
4H	The schedule includes long blocks of flexible time for instruction and collaboration.	4	3	2	1	0
4I	The school day is structured for regularly scheduled opportunities for teachers to share curriculum, pedagogy, and dilemmas about practice.	4	3	2	1	0
Flexible Structures						
4J	The school calendar builds in time and structures for portfolios, exhibitions, and presentations.	4	3	2	1	0
Inclusive Student Groupings						
4K	Class size and student:staff ratios are low enough to allow for high quality experiential education experiences.	4	3	2	1	0
4L	Learning groups within classrooms are heterogeneous.	4	3	2	1	0