# Framing Undergraduate Perspectives on Experiential Learning Within Soka Education Theory

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## Abstract

This article reports findings on two studies that explored undergraduate perspectives of experiential learning as a pedagogy that can produce impactful outcomes that align with Makiguchi's concept of Soka (value-creating) education. The twin studies examined perspectives of undergraduate faculty and students by investigating how experiential learning is viewed in terms of its impact on students' sense of happiness and satisfaction, acquired knowledge and skills, and potential for positively contributing to societal welfare. The article addresses how experiential learning provides critical opportunities for students to create value for making significant impact on the wellbeing of both the students and the wider society. Ten instructors and twelve students from a small university in Toronto, Canada, answered a series of identical questions in confidential semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed for themes related to Makiguchi's values of beauty, gain, and good. A key finding from the analysis suggests that instructors and students agree on the primary importance that experiential learning holds for the value of personal gain (among other things knowledge and skill acquisition), while the values of beauty and social good were seen to be important, but of lesser significance. It is noted that while certain limitations to the research exist, nevertheless, it is suggested that incorporating value creating principles within undergraduate course learning objectives may provide opportunities for encouraging more transformative reflection and action for learners, not only in the pursuit of their own individual happiness, but also for the broader societal context.

*Keywords:* experiential learning, Soka education, value-creating

Experiential learning, while not a novel pedagogical platform, has recently been gaining increased traction in higher education as an effective approach to help students learn to address social, economic, and environmental challenges at the local, national, and global levels. It is a pedagogical practice whereby students actively engage actively in creating knowledge and critically reflecting on their experiences, allowing them to understand how to transfer their knowledge and skills to future endeavors (University of Guelph Experiential Learning, n.d.).Various scholars have emphasized the need to deliver academic programming for facilitating the transformational praxis from classroom-based knowledge to community-based engagement (Aktas et al., 2017; Chickering & Braskamp, 2009; Hendershot & Sperandio, 2009; May, 2017; Wynveen et al., 2012). Lorenzini (2013) suggests that when students learn about local community and global issues, they are motivated to engage in proactive initiatives to effect social change. Shephard (2008) notes that learning outcomes in the affective domain (values, attitudes, behaviours) are typically attained through experiential learning, citing the promotion of racial understanding and social justice as an example. To cultivate students' socio-global awareness and participation in prosocial action, it is critical for educators to deliver learning platforms that provide opportunities for students to transfer acquired theoretical knowledge into meaningful prosocial actions.

Experiential learning provides students with relevant real-life opportunities for integrating their understandings of global issues with the development of strategies for effective prosocial action. Study abroad is one particular type of experiential learning platform that has become recognized as an effective approach for reflective learning about other cultures, and in so doing, developing transformative cultural awareness and experiences (Earnest et al., 2015; Reade et al., 2013; Strange & Gibson, 2017). Study abroad participation has been shown to afford a multitude of benefits for the learner. It offers potent opportunities for critical self-reflection, analysis, and synthesis (L. Stoner et al., 2014); and enhances students' personal and moral development, intercultural competencies, awareness of global issues, and commitment to social justice (K.R. Stoner et al., 2014; Tiessen & Epprecht, 2012).

## Overview of Present Research

This article reports findings from two related research studies that explored perceptions of the value of experiential learning in undergraduate education, framed within the Theory of Value as formulated by Japanese educator Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (Gebert & Joffee, 2007). Study 1, conducted in 2018, examined instructor perceptions, while Study 2, conducted in 2019, looked at student perceptions. Both studies explored perspectives of undergraduate-level experiential learning courses by investigating how this specific teaching and learning practice is viewed in terms of its impact on students' happiness and sense of satisfaction, acquired knowledge and skill benefits, and potential for making positive contributions to societal welfare. The studies frame both teachers' and students' perspectives of their experiential learning courses in terms of Makiguchi's values of beauty, gain, and good; the underpinnings of Soka (value-creating) education.

This article addresses how experiential learning provides critical opportunities for university and college students to create significant value in their lives that can have both immediate and sustainable impact on the wellbeing of both the students and the wider society. In the following sections the authors provide a review of relevant scholarly literature on experiential learning and Soka education, which will be followed by the research methodology used in the two sister studies, research findings, discussion, and concluding remarks.

## Literature Review

**Experiential Learning Theory**

Universities typically employ a conventional learning approach that has been a staple of higher education (Chmielewski-Raimondo et al., 2016; Nakelet et al., 2017). This traditional pedagogy is largely theory-based where knowledge is deepened at the expense of engagement, and students merely absorb information (Chmielewski-Raimondo et al., 2016; A. Y. Kolb & D. A. Kolb, 2005). In contrast, Experiential Learning Theory emphasizes the continuous reformation of skills and knowledge which leads to self-development (Bonnycastle & Bonnycastle, 2010; Lewis et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2016). A. Y. Kolb and D. A. Kolb (2005) describe experiential learning as an on-going cycle in which students participate in an experience, reflect on that experience, and formulate new ideas which are then put into practice (Henoch et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2017). Although there are numerous definitions of experiential learning, our research employed the description developed by Lachapelle and Whiteside (2017, p. 2),

Experiential learning opportunities are grounded in an intentional learning cycle and clearly defined learning outcomes. They engage students actively in creating knowledge and critically reflecting on their experiences, allowing them to understand how to transfer their knowledge and skills to future endeavours.

Experiential learning allows students to become critical thinkers and problem solvers in various fields and disciplines such as psychology, business, social work, and nursing (Chavan, 2011; Greenfield et al., 2012; Roholt & Fisher, 2013). McGuire et al. (2017) found that nurses who participated in specific political experiential learning activities became motivated to take purposeful advocacy in the healthcare field. De Groot et al., (2015) examined the learning outcomes of kinesiology students who participated in experiential learning courses. The study found that these courses helped students gain real life experience, promoted independence, and shifted perspectives to a place of increased empathy and understanding.

Research has highlighted that teaching and learning does not need to be situated solely in the classroom, as often seen in traditional pedagogy. Lin et al. (2016) found that students in Northern Taiwan had increases in self-actualization, as well as improved communication skills and relationships because of their involvement in experiential learning activities on and off campus. Chen (2012) reports that university students who participated in local community earthquake relief initiatives felt empowered to work together for the sake of cultural identity. Furthermore, both preceding studies found that the experiences encountered by students produced outcomes that formed new goals for positive societal change.

Experiential learning can be utilized beyond geographical borders through study abroad field trips. These excursions bring a level of dynamism where the curriculum is infused with the excitement of traveling to another country (Earnest et al., 2016; Greenfield et al., 2012). Students can interact with an unfamiliar cultural environment and apply their knowledge to the course work (Greenfield et al., 2012). Philips et al. (2017) studied students who travelled to Ghana on study abroad. Their research show that the students' pre-trip preconceptions of the Ghanaian peoples were inaccurate and biased, however, post-trip the students gained a newfound respect for the local culture and developed a better understanding of the population's social issues. Wynveen et al. (2012) came to a similar conclusion in their research on how study abroad promotes a broader worldview for students. They found that study abroad provides the opportunity to incorporate new knowledge into existing values and beliefs – an

experience that fosters global citizenship. Numerous other studies report that study abroad trips serve as a unique platform for reflection, social development and personal growth (Earnest et al., 2016; McPhee & Przedpelska, 2018; Philip et al., 2017).

## Value Creation Theory

Soka (value creating) education is a humanistic-based approach to wellbeing formulated by the Japanese educators Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944) and Josei Toda (1900-1958) in the early part of the 20th century. Daisaku Ikeda (1928-), a leading Buddhist philosopher, educator, and international peacebuilder, has further advanced Soka education over the past 50 years. Makiguchi was convinced that education was the key to securing individual and societal wellbeing, or as he believed, happiness. He felt that happiness was discovered through a transformational process of creating value in one's life through everyday interpersonal interactions. The term soka was born of discussions between Makiguchi and Toda that centered on the concept of value creation (Ikeda, 2009). Ikeda (2010a) states, "Our daily lives are filled with opportunities to develop ourselves and those around us. Each of our interactions with others – dialogue, exchange and participation – is an invaluable chance to create value" (p.117). Hefron (2014) suggests that Soka education might be better understood as a philosophy of life rather than a philosophy of education, as it "describes neither a specific school nor a general school of thought…[but] a way of being in the world [and] a process of becoming" (p.3). Ikeda (2010b) notes that, according to Makiguchi, what ultimately defines value, "is whether something adds to or detracts from, advances or hinders, the human condition" (p. 246).

Makiguchi's integrated system of values, consisting of beauty, gain, and (social) good, form the most essential components of his Theory of Value (Bethel, 1989; Brannen, 1964). According to Makiguchi, beauty is a sensory response that brings temporary fulfillment to the aesthetic awareness of the individual, and indirectly affects the life of the individual. Gain is viewed as a measure of personal outcome that directly maintains and advances the individual's life. In contrast, good represents a level of social relevance that contributes to the wellbeing of society (Bethel, 1989; Brannen, 1964; Gebert & Joffee, 2007; Goulah, 2010). In essence, value is generated and sustained when humans seek to create beauty, personal benefit, and social good, either together or independent of one another. However, Makiguchi theorized that a life based primarily upon the pursuit of beauty, or sensory fulfillment, is unstable, as beauty alone cannot sustain individual and societal wellbeing. Similarly, a life that only focuses on individual gain cannot produce fulfillment on a holistic level. However, when contributing to the welfare of society forms the foundation of one's life, individual wellbeing and attainment of beauty are strengthened, leading to the highest degree of value creation in one's life.

Makiguchi believed that the essential role of education lies in enabling the creation of value for both the individual and society. He wrote, "Human life is a process of creating value, and education should guide us toward that end. Thus, educational practices should serve to promote value creation" (Bethel, 1989, p. 54).

## Methodology

### Research Ethics Approval

Both studies received research ethics approval from the Humber College Research Ethics Board.

**Study 1**

The purpose of this study is to examine undergraduate instructor perspectives on experiential learning through the lens of Soka (value creating) education theory. Working within the framework of Makiguchi's Theory of Value, the concepts of beauty, gain, and good are explored in relation to teachers' perceived value and outcomes of the experiential learning courses that they deliver.

**Research questions.** The main research inquiry addressed in this study is: How do undergraduate instructors perceive the value of experiential learning for their students? In order to frame the instructors' responses within Makiguchi's Theory of Value, three sub-ordinate research questions were posed:

1. How do instructors perceive the impact of experiential learning on their students' ability to experience enjoyment or pleasure through learning? (Related to Beauty)
2. How do instructors perceive the impact of experiential learning on their students' knowledge acquisition, skill building, and personal growth? (Related to Gain)
3. How do instructors perceive the impact of experiential learning on their students' ability to positively impact society? (Related to Good)

**Participants and procedure.** Undergraduate instructors from a university within a large urban area in Ontario, Canada comprised the population sample for this study. Teaching at least one experiential learning course as classified by the University of Guelph (University of Guelph, n.d., Curricular…) was a necessary condition for our population sample. Forty potential participants teaching an experiential learning course in the Fall 2018 semester were identified and contacted by research assistants via email with an invitation to voluntarily participate in the research study. Of the twelve teachers responding to the initial invite for an interview, two individuals subsequently withdrew their involvement, leaving ten interviews that were successfully completed.

**Measures.** Interview questions created by the research team were based on Makiguchi's principles of beauty, gain, and good within his Theory of Value (Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, n.d., Life's Values). All interviews were conducted by the research assistants using a nine-question prepared script within a structured interview format (Appendix A). Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, anonymized, and then imported into MAXQDA (ver. 2018.1) computer-assisted data analysis software for subsequent text segment coding into the four categories of beauty, gain, good, and value.

**Data analysis.** On a purely numerical basis, 77 distinct coded text segments were identified for analysis that related to RQ1 (beauty), 140 distinct coded text segments related to RQ2 (individual gain), and 76 distinct coded text segments related to RQ3 (social good). The discrepancy with the significantly higher number of coded segments found for gain is addressed in the ensuing Findings section.

The thematic network technique outlined by Attride-Stirling (2001) was adapted for use as the principal analytic tool for thematic development of the data set. In this method, thematic analysis is conducted by systematically extracting the text data at three levels of increasing abstraction—Basic themes, Organizing themes, and Global themes. Five steps were followed in undertaking the thematic network analysis, which consisted of coding the material, identifying themes, constructing the thematic networks, describing and exploring the thematic networks, and summarizing the thematic networks (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 391).

**Study 2**

The purpose of this sister study is to examine undergraduate student perspectives on experiential learning through the lens of Soka (value creating) education theory. As with Study 1, Makiguchi's concepts of beauty, gain, and good were explored in relation to the participants' perceived value and outcomes of their experiential learning courses.

**Research questions.** The main research inquiry addressed in this study is: How do undergraduate students perceive the value of their experiential learning? In order to frame the students' responses within Makiguchi's Theory of Value, three sub-ordinate research questions were posed:

1. How do students perceive the impact of their experiential learning on their ability to experience enjoyment or pleasure through learning? (Related to Beauty)
2. How do students perceive the impact of their experiential learning on their knowledge acquisition, skill building, and personal growth? (Related to Gain)
3. How do students perceive the impact of their experiential learning on their ability to positively impact society? (Related to Good)

**Participants and procedure.** Undergraduate students from a university within a large urban area in Ontario, Canada were participants for this study. Taking at least one prior experiential learning course as classified by the University of Guelph (University of Guelph, n.d., Curricular…) was a necessary condition for our population sample. Fourteen senior-level experiential learning classes that occurred in the Fall 2019 semester were selected at random to be visited by the research assistants and presented with details of the study, including information on opportunities for voluntary student involvement. The research team further promoted the study through informational materials that were placed around the university campus and on social media. Twelve students were subsequently interviewed for the study by the research assistants.

**Measures.** Interview questions were adapted from the previous study's interview questions, and as in the first study, all interviews were conducted by the research assistants using a nine-question prepared script using a structured interview format (Appendix B), and were audio recorded, transcribed, anonymized, and then text segment coded for subsequent thematic analysis into the four categories of beauty, gain, good, and value.

**Data analysis.** On a purely numerical basis, 80 distinct coded text segments were identified that related to RQ1 (beauty), 82 distinct coded text segments related to RQ2 (individual gain), and 60 distinct coded text segments related to RQ3 (social good). The discrepancy with the significantly lower number of coded segments found for social good is addressed in the ensuing Findings section. The data analysis process mirrored the process used in Study 1, i.e., Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic network technique (See Study 1 Data Analysis description).

## Findings

Given the comparative affinity of each corresponding sub-ordinate research question in Studies 1 and 2, the findings for each research question will be reported in composite form below. Minor phrasing edits are made to the research questions to reflect the similarity of the corresponding questions from each study.

**Research Question 1: How do instructors and students perceive the impact of experiential learning on the students' ability to experience enjoyment, satisfaction, or pleasure through learning?** Instructors and students were asked to describe opportunities in their courses that offered students a sense of satisfaction or gratification, and how students experienced enjoyment through their course. This part of the interview is related to Makiguchi's concept of beauty.

**Instructor Global Theme 1: Enjoyment, satisfaction and self-confidence are cultivated through peer and community engagement**. This global theme was created from two organizing themes that ostensibly identified experiential learning as a pedagogy that provides students with enjoyment through engaging both with their peers and with the course content, and satisfaction by building self-confidence in overcoming challenges faced through direct application of practical skills.

Instructors commented that students especially experience enjoyment and a sense of gratification from their course when they connect with each other and provide peer support in the classroom environment. They also felt that facing real world challenges in the community (e.g., via field practicums, internships) offered students opportunities to grow and create a sense of happiness and wellbeing. The suggestion that experiential learning is both a satisfying and gratifying educational activity is reflected in this observation from an instructor,

> *There's that layer of the satisfaction and gratification that comes with doing a job well done, getting good feedback, maybe getting experience that they know will help them in their next steps towards their career.*

Other instructors commented that students obtain enjoyment from experiential learning by going out of their comfort zone, by expressing joy that shows they are fully engaged with the course material, and by appreciating that the challenges they face can make them stronger.

**Student Global Theme 1: Interacting with others fosters empathy and a sense of community by enhancing perspective-taking**. This global theme was created from four organizing themes that ostensibly identified experiential learning as a pedagogy that affords students the ability to connect with others through interaction, collaboration and communication, foster a sense of community through individual contributions, broaden and create new perspectives, and gain empathy for others.

Students reflected on the satisfaction, gratification and happiness they experienced when collaborating with others. Whether, for example, through interactive classroom learning, practicum placements, or study abroad, the practice of connecting with others enhances perspective, fosters empathy, and encourages a sense of community. The students' responses below reflect on how they achieve a sense of satisfaction and gratification by interacting with others beyond their everyday environment,

> *Putting myself out of my comfort zone was definitely the most gratifying, getting to see the world and getting to share that experience with people.*

> *Learning about other people's culture and their society makes you have an appreciation for yours, but also be respectful towards others.*

One student reflected on how the positive emotion of happiness can spread from experiential learning when she linked her study abroad trip to a "chain reaction",

> *I think if we bring that [happiness] home with us … and spread it to others…I think that's how happiness spreads, it's contagious.*

**Research Question 2: How do instructors and students perceive the impact of experiential learning on the students' knowledge acquisition, skill building, and personal growth?**
Instructors and students were asked to describe how the students derive individual benefits and personal growth from experiential learning. This part of the interview related to Makiguchi's concept of gain.

**Instructor Global Theme 2: Students develop transferable skills for personal and professional growth**. This global theme emerged from three organizing themes that identified the experiential learning experience as one that affords students opportunities to develop transferable skills for personal and professional development, appreciate one's place in the world and how to contribute to society, and foster student wellbeing and academic achievement.

As noted previously, instructors' responses for this segment (i.e., experiential learning related to gain) outnumbered their responses for the other two segments (i.e., experiential learning related to beauty or good) by nearly 2:1. This is a significant finding in that it might suggest that teachers perceive that the value of experiential learning for attaining skills, knowledge, and personal/professional growth outweighs its usefulness for providing aesthetic value or societal good. This distinction may be indicative of instructors' understanding of how they view the purpose of their course. For example, when asked to explain the value of their course in terms of contributing to their students' happiness, which Makiguchi believed was the chief purpose of education (Ikeda, 2010a), one instructor quite genuinely remarked,

> *That is an interesting one, because we really don't think about their happiness. And I'll be honest, I never thought, "Are my students happy"?*

Nevertheless, the instructors offered various views on how experiential learning helps students to acquire skills, knowledge, and personal growth. The following comments by instructors aptly describe elements of the student growth process applicable to experiential learning,

> *I think they're seeing themselves in a different light, not as a student, but as a student entering a profession versus just doing classroom learning. So, I think that adds a certain measure of growth.*

> *You go out in the field and you act, and then you come back in the class and you reflect on your actions, and then you go back into the field and use those learnings to act differently.*

> *So, it's not just building specific skills, but it's also becoming wiser about yourself and about the world around you.*

There were also considerable comments from instructors related to specific soft skills that experiential learning gave students, such as critical thinking, troubleshooting, creativity,

initiative-taking, appreciation for research, working independently and collaboratively, accepting critical feedback, effective communication, and interpersonal proficiencies.

**Student Global Theme 2: Applying knowledge gained through new meaningful experiences creates lasting personal growth.** This global theme emerged from three organizing themes that identified experiential learning as offering students' opportunities to learn through new and different experiences, create lasting experiences, and acquire and implement knowledge gained by virtue of experiences.

As mentioned previously, the number of student responses related to gain is the highest (82), followed by beauty (80) and good (60). While the difference in the data is very slight between beauty and gain, the discrepancy with the number of responses related to good may suggest that students see the value of experiential learning more in terms of how it contributes to their personal and professional growth and sense of gratification, as opposed to its value for helping them to contribute to societal wellbeing.

Following are students' reflections on how experiential learning not only fosters opportunities for skill and knowledge acquisition, but also gives opportunities for personal growth and fulfillment.

> *I felt after or during placement – I reflect a lot about what I do or what I can improve on in order to grow and learn from it.*
>
> *Yes, my confidence, definitely my confidence…before I would be very passive…but I felt confident in sharing my ideas.*
>
> *Doing more hands-on experiences and …having to put yourself out of what you are used to, definitely benefits you…it's personal growth"*

Students also commented on the specific soft skills that experiential learning affords them, such as skills in leadership, time management, and organization, the ability to work independently as well as collaboratively, and improved communication skills.

**Research Question 3: How do instructors and students perceive the impact of their experiential learning on the students' ability to positively impact society?** Instructors and students were asked to describe how knowledge and skills acquired in experiential learning are applied for the benefit of society. This part of the interview related to Makiguchi's concept of good.

**Instructors Global Theme 3: Local and global communities are benefitted by students' increased prosocial and professional competencies**. This global theme was developed from two organizing themes that identified the experiential learning experience as one that affords students opportunities to gain empathy and inter-cultural understanding, which encourages students to help others, and benefit local and global communities by developing professional competence.

Instructors commented that their experiential learning courses helped students gain empathy for others through developing an understanding of themselves in the world, and furthermore that reflective learning increases students' happiness and inspires them to look for opportunities

to positively benefit others. Following are instructors' comments related to how they perceive experiential learning helping students to make a positive impact on society,

> *Some of them are doing placements that are more directly global, like with newcomers or other kinds of populations that are coming from different parts of the world and so there may be some opportunity to make a positive effect with those clients and then ultimately with other countries.*

> *They are learning about intercultural competence, diversity, equity and inclusion, which I think will make them better workers, but also better collaborators and leaders and managers. I think that could benefit society, whereby they're thinking of their work not only just for personal gain.*

Instructors also commented on how experiential learning helps students prepare for exercising their citizenship, understand their obligation to care for and stand up for the rights of others, and look for opportunities to create positive experiences for themselves and others to create a better society.

**Students Global Theme 3: The sense of fulfillment through positive experiences and accomplishments contributes to the betterment of society**. This global theme was developed from two organizing themes that identified the experiential learning experience as one that affords students opportunities to gain a sense of fulfillment through happiness, enjoyment, gratification, satisfaction, and pride in accomplishment, and understand how their personal happiness can have a positive impact on society.

Students reflected on how experiential learning helped them to develop a broader awareness of issues that impact communities at the local and global level. It is through this process that students gain an appreciation and understanding of others, an experience which may influence their role in society and motivate them to take action to improve it. Furthermore, the positive emotions students experienced through experiential learning leads to a sense of fulfillment and accomplishment, which fuels their motivation and offers them an impetus to contribute positively to society.

Following are student comments related to how experiential learning positively benefits society,

> *The connections* [that experiential learning courses] *make for students and learning is so important because we are the future…in order for this course to help society, people have to go, experience it, and then tell everybody about it.*

> *It contributes to society in a way because you're taking people and you're opening their mind a little bit…we are able to go and see other cultures and we are able to bring those ideas back into our society and that's a big contribution.*

Students also commented on how experiential learning contributes to personal fulfillment and growth, including how it encourages students to "*think together*", "*welcome new ideas*", "*be more empathetic*" and "*more kind*", and how to "*project love and happiness*".

**Additional Theme**

A fourth global theme developed from the thematic analysis was largely related to questions that specifically queried how experiential learning benefitted students and society and contributed to their happiness.

**Instructor Global Theme 4: Experiencing challenges builds a sense of purpose that can contribute to personal and societal happiness**. Instructors' comments reflected an overall agreement that experiential learning indirectly contributes to both students' and societal happiness. Some of the ways they envisioned this occurring were by improving opportunities for employment, building self-confidence and sense of purpose through real-world challenges, and developing citizens who are willing to challenge themselves to grow personally and for the betterment of society.

Instructors emphasized how experiential learning offered students' opportunities to become happier and to make a positive contribution,

*I think that it has the potential to help them see themselves as a more rounded individual and a more contributing individual.*

*Happy people treat other people better. If you have happy people that are learning and growing, that are considering the needs of other people, the environment, feeling good about themselves, creating accomplishments, putting themselves in a position where they feel good about this; that's what builds a great society and a great world.*

> *When you have challenges or things to do that you overcome, and it makes you feel good and accomplished, that definitely contributes to your happiness because it isn't a superficial thing.*

**Students Global Theme 4: Experiential learning leads to the development and application of practical and interpersonal skills**. Students' comments reflected a consensus view that experiential learning leads to the development of practical and interpersonal skills, which can be applied in ways that create personal and societal benefit. Students' interactions in experiential learning can lead to the development and application of interpersonal and practical skills, which fosters learning and growth, and contributes to the broadening of one's perspective. This view is reflected in comments such as,

> *It's not just to get marks and move on, its actually to learn, to actually apply and to see if this is actually what you want to do with the rest of your life.*

> *You can apply what you've learned in class…it also gives you perspective of what it would be like in the real world…you can gain different experiences…it gives you a different perspective on what you can do and opens your eyes to see what's out there.*

## Discussion

In this section we will explore the major themes that evolved from the research, framed within the three essential values that comprises Makiguchi's Theory of Value. The discourse will specifically focus on comparing and contrasting the corresponding perspectives of instructors and students.

**Beauty**

Parallels were drawn from both studies when participants were asked how courses offered satisfaction, gratification or enjoyment. Instructors and students gave very similar reflections, with instructors noting that students are afforded the opportunity to connect with peers through discussion and collaboration, and students commenting on the value of connection ostensibly through interaction and collaboration. This finding may not be surprising given the known benefits of experiential learning; however, it is worth noting because both instructors and students assigned satisfaction and gratification to opportunities for connection and collaboration in experiential learning. Our research suggests that experiential learning creates a learning environment that moves beyond traditional teaching and learning as it provides students with interactive opportunities that bring a sense of enjoyment to their learning.

Instructors and students also reflected on the community interaction aspect of experiential learning, albeit with different meanings. Instructors reflected more on the value of community engagement, as well as remarking on the happiness, satisfaction and gratification that is experienced when facing challenges in the community. Facing challenges not only provides a more authentic learning experience but it can also lead to increased confidence when dealing with adversity, an experience one may not get with traditional pedagogy. Furthermore, instructors reflected on the benefits of learning in the community because students can apply newly developed skills and become actively engaged in their learning. From the instructor's perspective, it is the act of community engagement that allows students to experience the beauty of learning.

Students reflected more on the sense of community identity, with one student remarking that "*banding together*" with unfamiliar people brought feelings of satisfaction, while another student reflected on feelings of gratification by seeing the world and of sharing experiences with others. The benefits of learning in through community engagement has been noted in prior research, for example, Seed (2008) asserts that socialization within a cohort increases motivation to learn, improves skill development, and fosters reflection and the opportunity to learn from peers. Our study suggests that in addition to establishing a sense of community and providing opportunities for skill development, experiential learning also evokes feelings of happiness for the learner (with respect to satisfaction and gratification).

**Gain**

As noted in the findings section, instructors may see personal gain as a more significant value in experiential learning than beauty or good, given that the number of responses for this category outnumbered the others. This is supported by the themes drawn from the data, which suggest that experiential learning mainly helps students appreciate their role in a broader social context, develop skills, and achieve academic success. In particular, the theme "Develop transferable skills for personal and professional growth" seems to overshadow concerns for student happiness, as reflected by the instructor who remarked, "*I'll be honest, I never thought, 'are my students happy'?*". This highlights an important contrast from value-creating education. Makiguchi believed that the fundamental purpose of education was for students to experience a "realization of happiness" and losing sight of this is one of the problems with modern education (Ikeda, 2010, p. xi). This is not to suggest that instructors do not consider the happiness of their students, however, it may give merit to exploring pedagogy through the lens of value-creating theory because it encourages educators and students to look at teaching and learning in a way they haven't before, that is not fundamentally for the purpose of achieving personal gain.

Students offered considerable reflections on the positive emotions experienced through experiential learning courses. Themes drawn from the data identified the fulfillment gained from positive emotions (e.g., happiness, enjoyment and pride). and an understanding that personal happiness can have a positive impact on society. This perception aligns with the third Makiguchian value of social good.

**Good**

Students remarked on the power of connection in terms of empowering others by sharing experiences, which as one student noted, creates a "*chain reaction*" for change. Although students genuinely emphasized their motivations to contribute to society, their specific reflections, such as, fulfillment and pride seem to suggest that they place a higher degree of value on the personal benefits received, as opposed to the good they provide for others. This seems to accord with the instructors' focus on personal gain as a primary value in experiential learning.

Instructors, on the other hand, assigned greater value than students for the benefits to society from experiential learning because experiential learning broadens the perspective of the learner by developing an intercultural understanding and an awareness of social issues. Despite this difference in focus, it is evident that students and instructors agree that experiential learning creates opportunities for students to learn about and appreciate the world around them.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to study how instructors and students perceive the value of their experiential learning courses framed within Makiguchi's Theory of Value. In exploring the aims of experiential learning in terms of its benefits to students and society, we have noted some interesting findings, which should be couched within a particular limitation of this research, namely its relatively small sample size. Had a larger sample of instructors and students been used, it might have added more depth to participant perspectives and greater diversity in the experiences shared.

Nevertheless, the research suggests that instructors placed a higher degree of value for experiential learning on the acquisition of knowledge and skill (gain), and perceived satisfaction in learning (beauty) and societal benefit (good) to a lesser degree of importance, but fairly equally with each other. Comparatively, students assigned experiential learning's value for satisfaction in learning and the acquisition of knowledge and skill on an equal footing, and to a lesser degree ascribed value to the impact their learning might have on society. While noting some differences between instructors and students between the respective weightings assigned to the value of experiential learning, the research supports an alignment between the perceived value of experiential learning and Makiguchi's principal values of Soka education. There was agreement that the value of personal gain is of primary importance in experiential learning, while the values of beauty and social good were important, but of lesser significance.

According to Ikeda (2010, p. 20) value creation encourages self-reflection, which then motivates students to think and act with a broader sense of purpose in their lives. Experiential learning is also intended to motivate the learner toward reflexivity in a way that enhances continued self-development. Incorporating value creating principles within undergraduate course learning objectives may provide opportunities for the application of enhanced teaching and learning practices. Regardless of the educational platform, this could take the form of

encouraging more transformative reflection and action for learners, not only in the pursuit of their own individual happiness, but also for the broader societal context.

## Acknowledgements

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