

Developing Human Flourishing Through Experiential Learning – The Award Canada Way

Review of *OECD Education for Human Flourishing (2025)* and alignment with the Award Canada paper on global competencies, *Reversing the Declines of Modern Youth: The Award Canada Way*, and identifying what experiential links and approaches we should consider for enhanced alignment.

The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award – Canada: Award Canada Research 2025

Executive Summary

This paper explores how the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award – Canada aligns with the OECD's 2025 Education for Human Flourishing framework, offering a scalable, evidence-based model for developing global competencies in youth. In response to growing concerns about declining resilience, civic engagement, and well-being among young people, the Award Canada model integrates experiential learning into formal education pathways such as trades-based, Specialist High Skills Major, apprenticeships, and dual credit programs. Drawing on Kurt Hahn's foundational principles and contemporary research from organizations including the OECD, ILO, and McKinsey, the paper demonstrates that the Award's structured, voluntary activities foster purpose, agency, adaptability, and ethical reasoning – outcomes that traditional instruction alone cannot achieve. The analysis maps the Award's experiential approach to the OECD's five core competencies for flourishing in an AI-enabled world: acting in the world, adaptive problem-solving, ethical competence, understanding the world, and appreciating the world. By embedding teamwork, reflection, and real-world challenges into youth development, the Award Canada Way creates an ecosystem of learning that extends beyond the classroom to communities and families. The paper concludes that the Award provides a practical, national-scale mechanism for implementing the OECD's vision, bridging gaps between schooling, trades, and civic life, and equipping young Canadians to thrive in a rapidly changing society. This research positions the Award as a leading model for transforming non-formal learning into measurable educational outcomes that support individual flourishing and resilient communities.

INTRODUCTION

Award Canada Research has previously discussed the intersecting challenges that modern youth face – declining resilience, civic engagement, and well-being – intensified by digital saturation and social fragmentation. Global research from OECD, UNICEF, and others underscores the urgency of rethinking education beyond traditional human-capital models. Frameworks such as the OECDs, *Education for Human Flourishing* call for broadening capabilities – cognitive, creative, and caring – while fostering purpose and agency. This paper revisits Kurt Hahn's Six Declines through contemporary evidence and positions the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award – Canada as a scalable, experiential learning model. By embedding the Award within pathways like Specialist High Skills Major and apprenticeships, Canada can integrate global competencies – critical thinking, collaboration, and adaptability – into formal education, bridging gaps between schooling, trades, and civic life to build resilient, future-ready citizens.

FRAMEWORK ALIGNMENT WITH THE AWARD CANADA WAY

“...the nature of education that will help people become successful is changing as well. Education is no longer just about teaching students something, but about helping them develop a reliable compass and the tools to navigate with confidence through an increasingly complex, volatile and uncertain world. Success in education today is about building curiosity – opening minds, it is about compassion – opening

hearts, and it is about courage, mobilizing our cognitive, social and emotional resources to take action. Senior policymakers and thought leaders from the education systems that perform best on the metrics used to measure educational success today, based on PISA, have worked with the OECD to develop a framework for the education of the future, under the umbrella of Education for human flourishing. This framework is designed to shape the metrics for measuring educational success in tomorrow's world. It encourages a broader range of capabilities, spanning the academic, the caring and the creative. It nurtures the designers of fair and sustainable models for the future.” Andreas Schleicher – OECD Director for Education and Skills

The original Award Canada paper, based off the original teachings of Kurt Hahn, has been updated to reflect a modern cocurricular approach to the Declines of Modern Youth aligned with the CMEC Global Competencies, positions the Award as a *structured, experiential* method for developing:

- Progressive development, student agency
- Self-regulation & perseverance / grit
- Problem-solving & goal setting
- Caring, community & civic engagement
- Intercultural/global understanding
- Creativity, reflection & purpose
- Active healthy living and mental resilience

The OECD's *Education for Human Flourishing (2025)* conceptual framework builds from the OECD *Education 2030*

Learning Compass, and a specific reference to high-performing (PISA scores) education systems in: British Columbia (Canada), Estonia, Finland, Singapore, the United Kingdom, Germany and Australia.

Where earlier global competencies models (CMEC, OECD Learning Compass 2030, McKinsey, RBC) provided broad definitions of skills, the 2025 OECD framework goes further it identifies **five specific competencies** required for flourishing in an AI-enabled, uncertain world:

1. **Acting in the world**
 2. **Adaptive problem-solving**
 3. **Ethical competence**
 4. **Understanding the world**
 5. **Appreciating the world**
- It asserts that these competencies **emerge primarily through experiential or active learning**, not traditional instruction, and certainly not in isolation.
 - It positions **flourishing** as the integration of **meaning, agency, relationships, and accomplishment** – all outcomes intrinsic to the Award Canada’s model.
 - It reintroduces the concept of **active learning** and proposes an approach that consists of two key pedagogical features – **teacher guided learning and experiential learning**.

These seemingly correlate almost perfectly to the **Award’s alignment with the global competencies (Chart 1)** and strongly supports the emphasis of the **Award Canada Way** framework – which is focused on experiential, active learning.

KEY EXPERIENTIAL LINKS FOR FURTHER ALIGNMENT

The OECD makes strong arguments – seemingly much stronger than in earlier Learning Compass documents – that **competencies emerge as properties of the whole learning ecosystem**, not solely the school environment or discrete curriculum units.

OECD “Acting in the World”: Award Canada “Purpose Through Experiences”

OECD insight: Acting in the world is the *central* competency, where youth “find purpose, identify intent and undertake activities”. It is developed through activities such as service, creativity, performance, sport, and exploration – precisely the domains the Award embeds in its four sections.

Award Canada Way – Implication:

The Award operationalizes OECD’s “Acting in the world” competency at scale through structured voluntary experiences, enabling purpose formation that schools cannot deliver through classroom instruction alone.

- Position *every section of the Award* (Service, Physical Recreation, Skills, Adventurous Journey, Gold Project) as **‘laboratories for purposeful formation’**.
- Link to the Award’s positioning and **“Discovering youth potential through the power of experiences”** brand direction.
- The voluntary, interest-driven nature of Award activities makes them powerful mechanisms for **purpose formation**, a core outcome of human flourishing.
- The Award’s reflection processes transform action into identity, aligning directly with the OECD’s call for **‘meaning-making’** as a foundational educational outcome.
- Add a model explaining how **repeated action leads to reflection** which leads to identity formation, thus creating **purpose pathways**.

OECD: Adaptive Problem Solving – Award Canada “Learning by Navigating Real Challenges”

OECD insight: The OECD identifies adaptive problem-solving as essential for learning in an unpredictable world. It is developed through tasks where outcomes are uncertain, feedback is emergent, and learners must regulate their strategies and emotions:

- Navigating uncertainty
- Iteratively testing strategies
- Regulating one’s learning, thoughts and processes (metacognition)
- Applying skills in novel contexts

How the Award aligns

- The **Adventurous Journey** is a direct experiential analogue to the OECD’s model of adaptive problem-solving: youth plan, prepare, collaborate, navigate surprise, respond to feedback, and reflect – especially at progressive levels of Silver and Gold Levels.
- **Skills** and **Service** components require youth to adapt over time, working through frustration, feedback, and new contexts.
- **Long-term progression** in Skills, Service, and Physical Recreation builds flexible expertise, resilience, and metacognitive self-regulation – core components of adaptive capability.
- The clarity of direct linkages to **CMEC global competencies** on critical thinking & problem solving is further emphasized by the OECD paper and gives deeper conceptual justification.

OECD Human Flourishing Competency	How the Competency Is Defined (OECD 2025)	Award Section(s) That Develop This Competency	Experiential Mechanisms Activated by the Award
1. Acting in the World	Developing purpose, forming intent, taking meaningful action; making one's mark through chosen activities.	All sections (Service, Skills, Physical Recreation, Adventurous Journey, Gold Project)	Goal-setting, sustained commitment, voluntary engagement, progression, purpose formation, identity-building through action and reflection.
2. Adaptive Problem-Solving	Navigating uncertainty; planning, evaluating, revising strategies; metacognition; learning through complexity.	Adventurous Journey, Skills, Gold Project	Dealing with unpredictable conditions, teamwork, risk management, iterative planning, learning from failure, self-regulation, decision-making in real contexts.
3. Ethical Competence	Balancing diverse viewpoints; intellectual humility; moral reasoning; orientation toward the common good.	Primarily Service , but applicable to all sections	Community engagement, encountering diverse needs, relational ethics, empathy-building, responsibility, considering consequences of actions, sustained civic commitment.
4. Understanding the World	Interpreting and synthesizing different worldviews; reconciling cultural perspectives; situating oneself in a global context.	Service, Skills (cultural, social, civic), Adventurous Journey	Intercultural interactions, exposure to diverse communities, teamwork across differences, real-world context-building, worldview formation through lived experience.
5. Appreciating the World	Developing aesthetic perception; experiencing awe, beauty, nature, and the sublime; deepening meaning and well-being.	Adventurous Journey, Skills (arts, design, creativity)	Immersion in nature, creativity and the arts, sensory and aesthetic experiences, mindfulness, contemplative reflection, moments of awe that support meaning-making and well-being.

Chart 1: Alignment of OECD Human Flourishing Competencies with Award Canada Sections

The Award is a uniquely comprehensive experiential platform for developing the competencies the OECD identifies as essential for human flourishing. While traditional education systems struggle to deliver purpose, adaptive capability, ethical reasoning, meaning, and aesthetic awareness through classroom instruction, the Award embeds these outcomes in real-world, voluntary, youth-led experiences that naturally cultivate agency, resilience, empathy, and identity.

Award Canada Way – Implication:

The OECD's emphasis on interrupting routine expertise to avoid 'functional fixedness', provides a clear rationale for varied and progressively challenging and complex Award activities. The Award brings to life the OECD call to move from knowledge reproduction to learning through uncertainty and exploration.

people – precisely the conditions the OECD identifies as necessary for ethical development.

- The Award's reflection cycle encourages youth to examine motivations, power, consequences, and responsibility.

OECD: Ethical Competence – Award Canada "Service and Responsibility to Others"

OECD insight: The OECD describes ethical competence as balancing diverse perspectives, reasoning with humility, orienting one's actions toward the common good, and making moral choices with real consequences.

Award Canada Way – Implication:

The Award provides one of the few national-scale infrastructures for experiential ethical development. Award Canada may benefit from a reflective prompt framework linking service activities to ethical dilemmas, stakeholder analysis, empathy building, especially at silver & gold Levels, enhancing the connection between the Award's "learning through service" & OECD's argument that ethical competence cannot be developed through instruction alone.

How the Award aligns

- The **Service** section situates youth in authentic, relational, community-based contexts where ethical reasoning becomes lived, not hypothetical.
- Participants must consider the needs of others, work across difference, and make decisions that affect real

OECD: Understanding the World: Intercultural and Intergenerational Worldview Formation – Award Canada "Global citizenship through lived diversity"

OECD insight: The OECD argues that young people must navigate and reconcile multiple worldviews – Indigenous, pre-

modern, modern, and post-modern – to make sense of an increasingly complex global society:

How the Award aligns

- The Award naturally exposes participants to diverse communities, cultures, places, and social issues.
- When done well, the Award provides cross-cultural, intergenerational, and community-based encounters that expose youth to diverse worldviews – integrating the OECD Learning Compass 2030’s “Attitudes and Values”.
- The Award supports young people as they form a coherent worldview through lived encounters, not abstract instruction. This should be enhanced at silver and gold Award levels.
- Experiences in service, teamwork, cultural skills, and AI environments cultivate perspective-taking, empathy, and intercultural understanding.

Award Canada Way – Implication:

The Award provides the experiential conditions that allow worldviews to be tested, expanded, and integrated.

The addition of an “Award Canada Worldview Dialogue Model” that maps how youth move from exposure leading to discomfort growing empathy and ultimately synthesis may be further helpful.

OECD: Appreciating the World – Award Canada “Awe, Nature, Beauty, and Creativity”

OECD insight: The OECD uniquely includes *Appreciating the World* – aesthetic perception, awe, wonder, the sublime – as a core competency tied to mental health, meaning, and identity. Flourishing includes:

- Awe & Enchantment
- Sublime experiences
- Aesthetic perception

How the Award aligns

- At their best, **Adventurous Journeys** are literally structured experiences in awe, the sublime, and nature – exactly what OECD calls essential for flourishing. This is especially so progressively through silver and gold levels and should be encouraged to maximize the opportunity for outdoor and nature exploration wherever practical.
- **Skills** (arts, music, design, sport, volunteering or service) offer aesthetic engagement and can be included in AJs and Sections of the Award in a structured manner using the Award Canada Way 7 elements.
- Reflection encourages youth to interpret the significance of beauty and nature in relation to their identity and well-being.

Award Canada Way – Implication:

Few educational frameworks intentionally cultivate awe and aesthetic capacity; the Award does so by design.

Clear statements that the Award is one of the few scalable educational mechanisms that routinely produces supported (mentored) aesthetic experiences, linked directly to well-being and identity development could benefit market outreach and scaling.

PRACTICAL CHANGES TO OUR POSITIONING FOR MINISTRIES, POLICY AND DECISION MAKERS

OECD highlights several pedagogical elements that map directly onto Award Canada’s experiential model, that could / should be incorporated explicitly for greater alignment.

1. Constructive Friction & Novel Challenge

The Award already does this through both progression (Bronze to Silver to Gold), and with variety in Section, but by naming it will ensure educators and decision-makers make the alignment.

“A designed sequence of varied, constructive and progressive challenges that disrupt routine expertise and promote adaptive mindsets.”

2. Learning through Community and Ecosystems

OECD stresses:

- Ecosystems of learning
- Relational environments
- Community anchoring
- Non-formal learning as essential

This validates the Award Canada strategy for integrating the Award with school boards, trades pathways, and community partners. To further engage policy and decision makers, we could/should include a diagram that maps **School to Award Centre to Community to Family to Digital Ecosystem** as interconnected learning spaces for flourishing.

3. Teacher-guided + Experiential Learning as “Twin Pedagogies” for Active Learning

OECD explicitly shows: **Teacher-guided learning AND Experiential learning** as the dual foundations of active learning.

To further engage policy and decision makers, we could/should emphasise that: “The Award uniquely supplies the experiential half of the pedagogical model OECD considers essential, while

integrating as both a cocurricular and mentorship model, provides the teacher-guided other half of the model.”

4. Reflection as a Core ‘Meaning-Making’ Mechanism

The Award Canada Way heavily emphasizes reflection; OECD reinforces that competencies such as appreciating and understanding the world arise through *interrogating experiences, emotions, and meaning*.

Award Canada could/should integrate a structured reflection cycle, tied to the five OECD competencies, and embedded in digital Award platforms.

CONCLUSION

The OECD’s 2025 framework confirms that competencies for human flourishing:

- cannot be taught solely through instruction
- emerge through action, reflection, and relationships
- require real-world, self-directed, meaningful experiences
- are part of an ecosystem of learning

The foundational architecture of the Award – voluntary commitment, diverse activity pathways, progression, challenge, and structured reflection – matches these principles exactly. The Award therefore represents a ready-made experiential ecosystem that enables schools and systems to implement the OECD competencies in ways that traditional pedagogy alone cannot.

In short: The Award Canada model is a practical, national-scale expression of the OECD’s Education for Human Flourishing framework – equipping young people to discover purpose, develop agency, strengthen relationships, build ethical and adaptive capacity, and experience awe, creativity, and accomplishment.

The OECD’s Education for Human Flourishing framework confirms that the Award is not merely aligned with global competencies – it is one of the most scalable, evidence-based experiential mechanisms for producing them.

KEY REFERENCES

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