



EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Minakshi Biswal, Ph. D

Lecturer in Education, Vasanta College for Women, Rajghat, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.

Abstract

The society demands child and activity centered methods. This paper throws light on one of the learner centered methods i.e. experiential learning.

Key Words: *Kolb's Cycle, Learning, Experiential, Conceptualization,*



Scholarly Research Journal's is licensed Based on a work at www.srjis.com

As per the recent trends quality is the trade-mark of every product. When one talks of education, it is a world- wide thought to provide quality education as this is the foundation stone of qualitative society. Education means the all round development of a child. Here blossoming of heart, head and hand is the true all round development. The prevailing education system emphasizes on the cognitive development leaving aside the affective and psychomotor faculties. This leads a lopsided development of a child and in turn of society. These are due to the traditional teacher centered methods of teaching. Thus the present condition demands a change in teaching methods i.e. a paradigm shift from teacher centered methods to child centered methods. One of the child centered methods is **experiential learning**.

Experiential learning is a child centered and activity cantered methodology where focus is placed on the process of learning and not the product of learning. It creates an environment where learners can reflect and apply their experience to real world situations.

Definitions of Experiential Learning

There are various definitions of Experiential Learning. Here are several definitions with references:

- "Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand." —Confucius, around 450 BC
- Experiential education is a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values.
- The experiential process learning engages children in the activity, encouraging them to think more, explore, question, make decisions, and apply what they have learned. 4-H Cooperative Curriculum System (4-H CCS)
- [Experiential] Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. From Kolb, David A. (1984)
- The experiential learning model contains five steps but can be summarized in three main stages: Do, Reflect and Apply.

The basis of all experiential learning is that experience matters. Many educators believe that without an experience, there can be no true learning or real understanding of a concept or situation. However, experience alone does not necessarily lead to or mean that learning will take place. To accomplish this, there needs to be a sequence of three discrete components: 1) A "concrete experience" (**Enfield, 2001, Kolb, 1984**), where the learner is involved in an exploration, actually doing or performing an activity of some kind; 2) a contemplation phase, which is usually referred to in the literature as a reflection stage (**Enfield, 2001; Kolb, 1984; Pfeiffer & Jones, 1981**), whereby the learner shares reactions and observations publicly and processes the experience by discussing and analyzing; and 3) the "application" or "conceptualization" phase that helps the learner deepen and broaden their understanding of the

concept or situation by cementing their experience through generalizations and applications (Carlson & Maxa, 1998).

Characteristics of Experiential learning:

The following characteristics distinguish experiential learning:

- Experiential learning is student-centered as opposed to teacher-centered education.
- Experiential learning is active as opposed to passive.
- Experiential learning encourages students to create knowledge rather than acquire knowledge.
- Experiential learning often involves student choice, and allows the students to play a larger role in class activities.
- Experiential learning is often high context, meaning it is designed to be as relevant as possible to the “real world” outside the classroom.
- Experiential learning presents problems for students to solve rather than presenting lists of facts and concepts for students to memorize.
- Experiential learning does not have to replace more traditional instruction, but it can greatly enhance it.
- Experiential learning can and should always be tied to course and program objectives.

Components of Experiential learning

Learner is central

As this is a learner-centered approach, so, the learner should be ready, willing and able to involve personally to improve his/her understanding, critique and evaluate the messages in his/her context as well as to apply the learning appropriately. A teacher/facilitator must look into this aspect first.

Facilitation must be light and subtle

If there is interest and intrinsic motivation then one can learn on his/her own by reflecting on personal experiences, developing personal insights and understandings through involvement in intellectual, emotional and physical activity. here a teacher/facilitator is not a prerequisite. Facilitator should provide a conducive atmosphere to children. As it is well known that an effective facilitation adds value whereas inappropriate facilitation hinders the learning. Thus facilitation should be light and subtle.

Find/create experiential learning opportunities

A facilitator/teacher should help in each phase of the experiential cycle to ensure that any conceptual thinking is progressed to meaningful conclusions and opportunities for improvement identified.

Reactions to experiences vary so don't pre-judge

Reactions of each individual to a single situation are different. This difference in reactions depends on various factors such as attitude, knowledge, intelligence and personality etc.. The facilitator and the participants should allow all reactions/responses without any prejudices.

Build confidence before addressing attitudes and behaviour

When each reaction is given importance the child gets recognition which leads to the development in self confidence. As the self confidence increases a child feels like improving positive attitude and changing behaviour.

The activity must be real and engaging - not based on artificial impact

A learning activity is a means to an end, not an end in itself. The purpose of an experiential learning activity is to create an opportunity for valuable and memorable personal learning. The ideal activity engages, stimulates and challenges with individuals becoming absorbed in the task as themselves. It does not involve role play in a conventional artificial sense. All activities must be designed, managed and facilitated carefully so that the activity has impact.

Ensure activities allow adequate and meaningful reviews

Few distraction leads to an effective learning in a learning situation. Of course long activities gives scope for more opportunities but at the same time it supposes lots of distraction. Short duration activities allows many learning experiences as children could observe it from various

angles. Thus organizing several short activities of 15-30 minutes is better than one hour/ two hour activities.

Carefully reviews of activities are crucial

Learning reviews should be planned intelligently so that it involves the learner in personal thought, challenge and discussion before coming to some form of conclusion. It is often useful if a period of individual reflection, guided by open-ended or tick-box questionnaires, is followed by a facilitated discussion. If it is to be of real benefit, the review must be an honest critique of what happened and the contributions of each individual. Real issues should not be swept under the carpet, but equally criticism must be constructive.

Accentuate the positives

Magnify the positives so that the negatives diminishes. A child gets motivated when anything positive is told about him/her and vice-versa. so, the facilitator should see to it that negative remarks should not be entertained.

Use stimulating questions in reviews, especially for groups discussions

Stimulating questions

Did you notice...?

Why did that happen?

Does that happen in life?

Why does that happen?

How can you use that?

should be posed to develop their own understanding and draw their own conclusions. The role of the facilitator is to enable others to learn by drawing out the issues and developing the learning that is relevant to the individuals. The review discussion should help children to think analytically and logically. It should pave a way for further reading and research.

Resist temptation to give answers - ask questions only

The ownership of learning should be given to individual child. The situation is created and designed for him/her. Thus, during discussion the individual should be given chance to express his/her reactions not the facilitator. Suppose children are not able to see one particular aspect of a

situation, the facilitator should pose question on that aspect instead telling the reaction directly. Once the reaction is told by the teacher/ facilitator the whole purpose is lost. So, teacher should resist the temptation to answers.

Have faith in people's ability to learn for themselves

Believe in the learners: they can and will make experiential learning opportunities work for them. To be an effective facilitator of experiential learning you have to believe, really believe, in others. You have to believe that they have the potential to make progress and be committed to the fact that your role is to provide opportunities for others to learn and progress.

It's about them not you

Forget your ego. Your success is individuals capitalising on their personal learning. As an effective facilitator you have to be satisfied with the knowledge that you offer and develop opportunities for others to learn, many of which will go unused or undervalued. You have to accept that you are not offering 'tangible and technical' contributions and therefore will not be able to look back and say 'I taught this person x or y'. If you're lucky however, every now and again in the years to come you will hear of some far-reaching consequences that will go way beyond what you might have hoped or imagined.

Getting started

The best way is to start designing a learning situation and try to watch the experiences. Slowly one gets confidence by practicing it.

Phases of Experiential Learning:

Experiential learning can be viewed as a cycle consisting of five phases, all of which are necessary:

- experiencing (an activity occurs);
- sharing or publishing (reactions and observations are shared);
- analyzing or processing (patterns and dynamics are determined);
- inferring or generalizing (principles are derived); and,
- applying (plans are made to use learning in new situations).

An activity can be called experiential when it has following elements:

- **EXPLORATION:** "Do it"

Perform or do an activity with little to no help from the facilitator/teacher. Examples might include: making products or models; role-playing; giving a presentation; problem-solving; playing a game.

- **SHARING:** "What Happened"

Publicly share the results, reactions and observations. Get the participants to talk about their experience. Share reactions and observations. Discuss feelings generated by the experience. Let the group (or individual) talk freely and acknowledge the ideas they generate.

- **PROCESSING:** "What's Important?"

Discussing, analyzing, reflecting, looking at the experience. Discuss how the experience was carried out. Discuss how themes, problems, and issues are brought out by the experience. Discuss how specific problems or issues were addressed. Discuss personal experiences of members. Encourage the group to look for recurring themes.

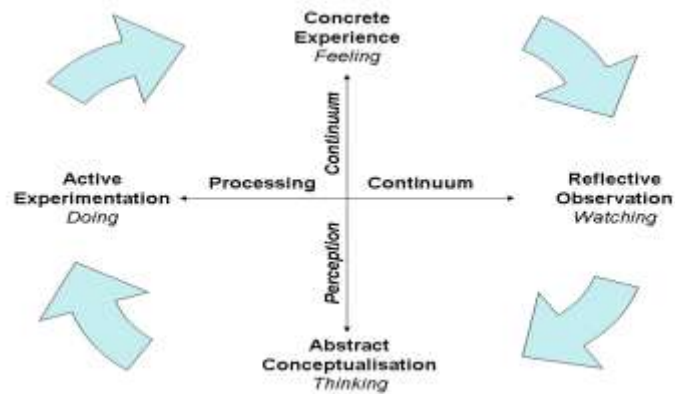
- **GENERALIZING:** "So What?"

Connect the experience with real world examples. Find general trends or common truths in the experience. Identify "real life" principles that surfaced. List key terms that capture the learning.

- **APPLICATION:** "Now What?"

Apply what was learned to a similar or different situation, learn from past experiences, practice. Discuss how new learning can be applied to other situations. Discuss how issues raised can be useful in the future. Discuss how more effective behaviors can develop from the new learnings. Help each individual feel a sense of ownership for what was learned.

Kolb's Cycle of Experiential learning



Few Examples:

- **Learning Mensuration:**

- Abstract conceptualization - Listening to explanations on what it is.
- Concrete experience - Going step-by-step through a formula.
- Active experimentation - Practicing.
- Reflective observation - Recording your thoughts about formula in a learning log.

- **Learning to recite a poem:**

- Reflective observation - Thinking about reciting and watching another person recite a poem.
- Abstract conceptualization - Understanding the rhyme and pauses
- Concrete experience - listening once from an expert.
- Active experimentation - Started reciting.

- **Learning to teach:**

- Concrete experience - observing experts during teaching.
- Abstract conceptualization - Thinking about various classroom situations
- Active experimentation - teaching in a classroom.
- Reflective observation - How to improve .

Kolb views the learning process as a context of people moving between the modes of concrete experience (CE) and abstract conceptualization (AC), and reflective observation (RO) and active experimentation (AE). Thus, the effectiveness of learning relies on the ability to balance these modes, which Kolb sees as opposite activities that best promote learning. In addition, Kolb (1999) claims that concrete experience and abstract conceptualization reflect right-brain and left-brain thinking respectively.

Benefits of Experiential Learning

These are the few merits of experiential learning. It

- develops critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- improves effective communication skills
- inculcates values and ethical standards
- develops the ability to use modern technology
- creates the ability to become self-directed learners
- provides an awareness of and concern about the ethical implications of institutional policies and individual practices
- gives an expanded awareness of their rights and responsibilities as citizens of a world community
- provides a scope to develop the ability to understand, communicate with, respect and live harmoniously in a diverse society
- ignites an understanding of themselves--their abilities, interests and personalities
- develops an awareness of the diverse forces that shape their world and themselves in order to keep pace with the changing society

From this discussion it is clear that learner centered approach should be adopted to keep the learners learning happily.

Reference

- Baker, A.C., Jensen, P.J. and Kolb, D.A. (2002) *Conversational learning: an experiential approach to knowledge creation*, Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Beard, C. and Wilson, J.P. (eds) (2002) *The power of experiential learning: a handbook for trainers and educators*, Kogan Page, London.
- Itin, C.M. (1999) Reasserting the philosophy of experiential education as a vehicle for change in the 21st century, *Journal of Experiential Education*, 22(2), pp. 91-98.
- Kolb, D. (1984) *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs.
- Kolb, D. A., Boyatzis, R. E., & Mainemelis, C. (2000). Experiential Learning Theory: Previous Research and New Directions. In Perspectives on cognitive, learning, and thinking styles. Sternberg & Zhang (Eds.). NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Malinen, A. (2000) *Towards the Essence of Adult Experiential Learning: A Reading of the Theories of Knowles, Kolb, Mezirow, Revans and Schon*, University of Jyväskylä, Finland.
- Miettinen, R. (2000) The concept of experiential learning and John Dewey's theory of reflective thought and action, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 19(1), pp. 54-72.
- Moon, J.A. (2004) *Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning Theory and Practice*, RoutledgeFalmer.
- Silberman, M.L. (ed) (2007) *The Handbook of Experiential Learning*, Temple University.
- Truluck, J. E., & Courtenay, B. C. (1999). Learning style preferences among older adults. *Educational Gerontology*, 25(3), 221-236.
- Wessels, M. (2006) *Experiential Learning*, Juta and Co. Ltd.
- Whitaker, P. (1995) *Managing to Learn: Aspects of Reflecting and Experiential Learning in Schools*, Cassell, London.