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B2 EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Experiential education is a philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities.¹

Tell me and I will forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me and I will understand.

~Chinese Proverb

By experiential education we mean learning by doing or experiencing. The goal is to make the memory of the lesson more salient and the resulting knowledge connected to reality.

An experiential approach involves going into the field or to a museum where the mind is engaged in a more authentic way, rather than discussing, note taking or answering questions about a topic in the classroom. Hands on experiments that illustrate concepts are the best examples of this, but anything that uses locations, multimedia, museums, lab work and field work can be considered experiential in this context.

This approach can also be constructivist as articulated by Jean Piaget. That is, learning by discovering something for yourself. This can be particularly engaging and memorable.

The principles² of experiential education practice are:

- Experiential learning occurs when carefully chosen experiences are supported by reflection, critical analysis and synthesis.
- Experiences are structured to require the learner³ to take initiative, make decisions and be accountable for 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.

¹ <http://www.aee.org/about/whatIsEE>

² The priority or order in which each professional places these principles may vary.

³ There is no single term that encompasses all the roles of the participant within experiential education. Therefore, the term "learner" is meant to include student, client, trainee, participant, etc.



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- Learners are engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially, soulfully 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.
- The educator⁴ and learner may experience success, failure, adventure, risk-taking and uncertainty, because the outcomes of experience cannot totally be predicted.
- Opportunities are nurtured for learners and educators to explore and examine their own values.
- The educator's primary roles include setting suitable experiences, posing problems, setting boundaries, supporting learners, insuring physical and emotional safety, and facilitating the learning process.
- The educator recognizes and encourages spontaneous opportunities for learning.
- Educators strive to be aware of their biases, judgments and pre-conceptions, and how these influence the learner.
- The design of the learning experience includes the possibility to learn from natural consequences, mistakes and successes.

⁴ There is no single term that encompasses all the roles of the professional within experiential education. Therefore, the term "educator" is meant to include therapist, facilitator, teacher, trainer, practitioner, counselor, etc.