

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

CONCEPT, NATURE, IMPORTANCE AND SCOPE

At the heart of all learning, is the way we process our experiences, especially our critical reflection on our experiences. Experiential learning is a well known model in education, training, facilitation and organizational development. Experiential learning engages students in critical thinking, problem solving and decision making opportunities for debriefing and consolidation of ideas and skills through feedback, reflection and the application of the ideas and skills to new situations. It is effectively used in schools, higher education, thereby, corporate training and other areas for educational learning, personal development and skill-building.

CONCEPT OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

The general concept of learning through experience is ancient. Around 350 BCE, Aristotle said, "For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them." But as an articulated educational approach, experiential learning is of much more recent vintage. Beginning in the 1970s, D.A. Kolb helped to develop the modern theory of experiential learning drawing heavily on the works of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin and Jean Piaget.

Experiential learning means learning through experience and reflection. We learn from experience whatever a person trying to master, his success will be down to experiential learning. It is so effective because it helps to establish lasting behavior change. Through experiential learning, rather than simply understanding a new subject or gaining a skill, we develop new habits and behaviours.

Researches show that 70% of what we know comes from experience and trying new things. Yet the real learning happens when we reflect on those experiences. Kolb's research showed mastering expertise in a continuous process of experience, reflection, conceptualization and experimentation. These elements make up the experiential learning cycle which shows the relationship between each phase.

Hence the concept of experiential learning is "learning through reflection on doing." This concept is based on the theories of learning put forward by John Dewey, Kurt Hahn, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget among others. It was made popular by D.A. Kolb afterwards.

The concept of experiential learning can be further classified by explaining the meaning and definitions of experiential learning process.

Meaning of Experiential Learning

Research has shown that all ages of learners tend to learn much more effectively if they are actually involved in the learning process. In recent years, there has been a progressive move away from traditional, teacher-centred expository instruction towards student-centred experimental learning of one form or another.

Experiential learning is the process of learning through experience, and is more specifically defined as, "learning through reflection on doing."

Hands-on learning can be a form of experiential learning, but can be a form of experiential learning, but does not necessarily involve students reflecting on their product. Experiential learning is accompanied by reflection and application.

Experiential learning is distinct from rote or didactic learning, in which the learner plays a comparatively passive role. It is related to, but not synonymous with other forms of active learning, such as action learning, co-operative learning, service learning, adventure learning and situated learning. It also differs from experiential education as experiential education is a broader philosophy of education, experiential learning considers the individual learning process. Also, as compared to experiential education, experiential learning is concerned with more concrete issues related to the learner and the context.

Characteristics of Experiential Learning

1. Experience combines direct or concrete experiences with focused reflection.
2. It builds on past knowledge and experiences.
3. It encourages collaboration and exchange of ideas and perspectives.
4. It requires active involvement of learners in meaning construction.
5. It can be course, focused in class, community focused or work focused.
6. Reflection is the key to learning from experience, because it consciously focuses our attention on what we have learnt and thus consolidates it.

7. Integrating experiential learning into content courses builds skills, confidence and expectations for students to participate in successful internships and work experience.
8. It gives students the opportunity to develop attitudes, such as resilience, tenacity, curiosity and self-direction.
9. Experiential learning opportunities offer students assignments and activities based on real-life situations or primary research that engage them in reflective problem-solving with multiple potential avenues of inquiry.
10. Experiential learning is happening across education institutions, from humanities to the science, professional fields to the arts, from the classrooms to labs, studies to museums.

Definitions of Experiential Learning

Various terms have been used to label the process of learning from experience

In 1975, Hoover and White Head, gave the following definition of experiential learning "Experiential learning exists when a personally responsibility participant cognitively, affectively and behaviourally processes knowledge and/or attitudes in a learning intuition characterized by a high level of active involvement."

Kolb (1984) - "Experiential learning is described as the process where by knowledge is created through a transformation of experience."

Association of Experiential Education defined experiential learning as follows

"Experiential learning is n philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with students in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develops skills, and clarify values."

U.C. Davis (2011) "The stages of reflection and application are what make experiential learning different and more powerful than the models commonly referred to as 'learn-by-doing' or 'hand on-learning. The focus of EL is placed on the process of learning and not on the product of learning."

Hence, experiential learning is learning through action, earning by doing, learning through experience and learning through discovery and exploration. A first immerses the learners in an experience and then encourages reflection about the experience to develop new skills, new attitudes or new ways of thinking.

NATURE OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Experiential learning is a process through which student develop knowledge, skills and values from direct experiences. It includes varieties of activities like internships, service learning, research and other creative and professional work experiences. Following are its main characteristics that explore its nature:

- 1. Reflection on Doing:** Experiential based learning is the process of learning through experience, and is more specifically defined as, "learning through reflection on doing."
- 2. Pedagogical Process:** Experiential learning is also described as a pedagogical process by which educators engage students through a cycle of direct experience, reflection, analysis and experimentation.
- 3. Different from Rote or Didactic Learning:** It is distinct from rote or didactic learning, in which the learner plays a comparatively passive role. Experiential learning invites the students to be actively engaged in their learning, and therefore, can be personalised where appropriate.
- 4. A Way of Doing:** Experiential learning is a way of doing it is not something that one does. That is to say, the act of 'doing' does not, in and of itself, create learning.
- 5. Review/Reflection:** This process also known as debrief, review or reflection, is an opportunity for students to think about what has been learnt.
- 6. Reflection an Essential Element:** Without some form of process of reflection there is no experiential learning. Societally, the concept of experiential learning is often confused or conflated with "hands –on-learning or learning by doing While both are legitimate forms of teaching, they are not same as experiential learning.

The key difference in the lack of reflection. Indeed, it c be argued that there is no such thing as learning by doing- is only learnt through a process of reflecting on what has be done. It is a way of doing rather than the net of doing.

7 .Development of Skills: The 'experiential methodology is ideally suited to the development of key 21 Century skills such as the "4xC," of collaboration, critical thinking, communication and creativity, because these skill can be practiced through a series of carefully sequence experiences.

8. Different from Experiential Education : Experiential education is a broader philosophy of education while experiential learning considers the individual learning process. As such, compared to experiential education experiential learning is concerned with more concrete issues related to the learner and the learning context.

9. Learner Centered: Experiential learning is a learner centered. Internal processes are the driving forces of meaning making and change. Meaning making is a relational process between the individual, his consciousness and change.

10. An Approach to Learning: Experiential learning engages students in critical thinking, problem solving and decision making in contexts that are personally relevant to them. This approach to learning also involves making opportunities for debriefing and consolidation of ideas and skills through feedback, reflection and the application of the ideas and skills to new situations.

The experiential learning may be conceptualized as a methodology of education which has a learning impact on the whole person, inkling feeling (affect), and behaviour in addition to cognitive simulation. Its underlying assumptions are: Learning is a dynamic, action process, learner learns best by participation, and the fully functioning or self-actualizing learner engages in experiences at a qualitatively higher level: Individuals reconstruct themselves through their experiences.

TYPES OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Broadly Experiential learning can be divided into two major categories - Field based experiences and Classroom based learning.

According to Lewis & Williams (1994), field based learning is the oldest and most established form of experiential learning, having been integrated into higher education in the 1930's Field based learning include internship, practicums, cooperative education, and service learning.

Classroom based experiential learning can take a multiple of forms, including Role-playing, games, case studies, simulations, presentations and various types of group work.

IMPORTANCE OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Experiential learning is important due to the following reasons:

1. Experiential learning fosters development of self and organisation.
2. It brings about change in behaviour and better understanding of attitude of people.
3. It brings about perfection in the performance of job.
4. It gains in knowledge and skill, breadth and depth of understanding which ultimately results in increased self- confidence and esteem.
5. **Makes Learning relatable to Students:** Students build on what they already know and are provided with opportunities to make connection between new concepts and existing ones.
6. **Links Theory to Practice:** With its help students get the chance to engage in the experience and practice what they have learned. They apply the theoretical concepts in practice and make generalizations.
7. **Assists in Memory Retention:** It makes strong relationships between feelings and thinking processes. Students have the capacity to learn successfully when the information associated with values and feelings.
8. **Leads to development of skills for life long learning:** Be assisting in the acquisition of essential skills encouraging students to reflect, conceptualize and plan for next steps.
8. **Increases the Effectiveness of Learning:** Students engage in critical thinking, acquire problem solving skills an engage in decision making.
10. **Introduces Children to Conducive Environment :**Experiential learning is important to introduce children environments that boost their creativity and offer them the opportunity to explore and understand at their own pace supplementing the more traditional learning from the educational system.

Most experiential learning activities are communal in nature, with students working in groups. Through these team projects, students learn to work more effectively together developing a plan of action and utilizing the unique qualities of each team member. In turn, the students learn real life leadership skills, as well as how to apply critical thinking and adapt to changing circumstances. This shows the real importance of experiential learning.

SCOPE OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Learning that is considered 'experiential' contains all the following elements:

- (i) Reflection, critical analysis and synthesis.
- (ii) Opportunities for students to take initiative, make decisions and be accountable for the results,
- (iii) It provides opportunities for students to engage intellectually, creatively, emotionally, socially or physically.

This sets the scope of experiential learning in the field of education.

1.A Broad Umbrella Term: There are a number of different approaches or terms within the broad heading “ learning by doing ” such as co-operative learning ,adventure learning ,experiential learning .The term experiential learning as a broad umbrella term ,covers this wide variety of approaches to learning by doing.

2 .A Wide Range of Design Models: There are many ways in which experiential learning can be designed and delivered, with particular respect to the use of technology and ways that help to develop the knowledge and skills needed in a digital age.

The design models which aim to embed learning within real world contexts are following:

i) Laboratory, workshop or studio work.

ii) Apprenticeship

iii) Problem based learning

iv) Case based learning

(v) Inquiry based learning.

(vi) Project based learning

(vii) Cooperative (Work or community based) learning

3. Different Kinds of Programmes: Experiential education, most generally occurs in different kinds of programmes that have as their goals, the construction of knowledge, skills and dispositions from direct experiences. Service learning, adventure education, outdoor and environmental education, and workplace internships are just a few examples.

4. Business Field: The applied nature of business education is more appropriate discipline for the use of experiential learning pedagogies than one with a stronger theoretical orientation.

Experiential learning approaches are used by corporate trainers. The business schools actively encourage students to promote activities which involve student participation so that their speaking, discussion, interpersonal and goal-setting abilities are developed.

5. Experiential Learning - The Future of Learning Experiential learning is the future of learning. It is different from traditional learning. In it, students come to learn from experiences in educational, workplace and practice settings are integrate the contributions of those experiences in developing and understanding, procedures and dispositions required f effective professional practice, including criticality.

Learning from experience is about learning from life .It puts practice at the heart of learning which is an paradigm shift. It is to replace the chalk and talk pedagogy the past with inquiry, problem-based and project-based learning sometimes using the tools of what we call a maker space - a open, studio-like creative workshop.

It means that future learning will be experiment base learning called experimental learning.

In this way, scope of experiential learning is very broad and bright for the 21st Century. Everything from increased creativity to authentic problem solving opportunities occurs throughout this learning process. It prepares students for life- long learning and success in their careers.

