

## Using Principles of Experiential Learning to Promote Effective Learning among English Language Learners

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### Introduction

Experiential Learning has been applied to many different subjects and disciplines and in many different forms. From the traditional show-and tell exercises in the classroom to cooperative learning (Coop) and service learning in the community to the current strategy of "WTPS" (Write, Think, Pair, Share), teachers have long been using one form or another of Experiential Learning. It is a concept that is just as effective in the online environment, as well. The area of Experiential Learning has consistently been recognized in the research as a valid method of teaching and learning, in both face-to-face and online classrooms. Kolb (1984) wrote: "another reason the theory is called experiential is its intellectual origins in the experiential works of Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget. Taken together, Dewey's philosophical pragmatism, Lewin's social psychology, and Piaget's cognitive-developmental genetic epistemology form a unique perspective on learning and development" (Kolb, 1984, in Kolb, Boyatsis, & Mainemelis, 2001).

### Review of Literature

While implementation - the "development, management, and systematic evaluation of experiential learning" (Pangelinan et al, 2018) - varies across institutional programs, they are guided by the generally accepted principles and goals of Experiential Learning. In a faculty seminar, "Integrating Experiential Education into the Curriculum and Co-Curriculum," on August 16, 2019, the presenter, Albert C. Cabral (Associate Professor and Director, Graduate Management Programs, Nazareth College of Rochester) presented the National Society for Experiential Education's (NSEE) Eight Principles of Good Practice: intention, preparedness and planning, authenticity, orientation and training, reflection, monitoring and continuous improvement, assessment and evaluation and acknowledgement. Dr. Cabral engaged the participants in exercises to explore the use of experiential learning in the institution's curriculum. Five goals of Experiential Education were discussed:

1. Acquire, apply, integrate, and evaluate a body of knowledge or the methodology of an academic discipline
2. To develop competencies, self-knowledge and skills
3. To understand different cultures and environments
4. To acquire communication skills, interpersonal skills, coping with ambiguity, teamwork, goal setting, time management, and citizenship skills
5. To develop and use ethical perspectives in a complex situation.

(Cabral, 2019)

"High-impact educational practices" (UTM Seminar, August 16, 2020) were presented: first-year seminars and experiences; common intellectual experiences; learning communities; writing-intensive courses; collaborative assignments and projects; undergraduate research; diversity/global learning; service learning, community-based learning; internships; and capstone courses and projects.

As described by Roberts (2018), new attention was given to experiential learning in response to "a particularly salient time in the history of higher education," referring to the 2018 global recession, continuing inequality in income, and changes due to shifting demographics and the effect of the Internet. We note a real coincidence with present times (in 2020): the Corona virus (COVID-19) and associated upheavals in society, both global and at home. What might experiential learning strategies in education provide to learners to assist in making sense of the great uncertainties that (not just) students are facing? In 'making sense,' one can infer that true learning is what experiential learning is all about - by hands-on learning and reflection, a learner develops the understanding of a concept that enables deeper learning.

When noting the elements of experiential learning that impact student learning, "experiential applications such as study abroad, service learning, project-based learning, and internships...[are activities that] have significant impact on students' overall success in school" (Kuh, 2008). Two explanatory charts developed by Kuh and O'Donnell (2013) through the Association of American Colleges and Universities' (AAC&U) Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP), describe the relationships between selected high-impact activities (learning communities, service learning, study abroad, student-faculty research, and senior culminating experiences) and deep learning and personal gains (Table 1),

As well as between the activities and clusters of educational practices (level of academic exchange, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, and supportive campus environment, Table 2).

Roberts (2018) describes both institutional and pedagogical "responses" (Roberts, 2018): institutionally, higher education is seeking to prove that students are being prepared for "the world of work... and providing... a demonstrable return on investment for that expensive degree" (Roberts, 2018); pedagogically, the challenge is balancing traditional ways of teaching - seminars, lectures, passive learning - and more experiential approaches - active learning - "collaborative research, project work, study away, internships and ...applied work" (Roberts, 2018). This article looks at the pedagogical implications of experiential learning.

Tanaka, Dam, Lobayashi, Hashimoto & Ikeda (2016), in discussing metacognition as "learning to learn," applied reflection in an assignment, one aspect of experiential learning, to "refine and acquire metacognitive skills... [through] an experiential learning cycle" (Tanaka et al., 2016). They defined experiential learning as "the process of knowledge building by accumulating experience." Their learning cycle included: "concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation" (Tanaka et al., 2016). Their project was to design an educational program which featured a Teaching Assistant (TA) as the facilitator to implement the experiential learning cycle. In their conclusions, the authors emphasized the importance of Self-Regulated Learning ("learning in which the learner is actively involved in goal setting, strategy utilization, and regulation by self-monitoring their own learning" (Tanaka et al., 2016).

Experiential learning is applicable across the disciplines. Knutson (2003) discussed the importance of reflection in experiential learning and second language learning, and explored the "transformative process from experience to learning" (Knutson, 2003). Kolb (1984) had addressed the process: " In order to learn, one must go through a series of steps after an initial experience: There must be a reflection on the experience followed by an understanding of what the new learning means to the individual and a conceptualization of how it can be used in the future" (Kolb, 1984). It is this "active and reflective learning, building on previous learning experiences and requiring the personal involvement of the learner" (Knutson, 2003), that is significant for second language learners "in terms of motivation, investment, and cultural understanding" (Knutson, 2003).

In a brief overview of the use of experiential learning in the medical field, Kerner (2018) described five advantages of experiential learning: (1) Ability to immediately apply knowledge; (2) Access to real-time coaching and feedback; (3) Promotion of teamwork and communication skills; (4) Development of reflective practice habits; (5) Accomplishments are obvious. In discussing these qualities of experiential learning, Kerner pointed out that the learner is able to "experiment and adapt... to achieve the best outcomes"; [all learners will benefit from] "feedback and coaching from experts and fellow team members"; [learning and practice in teams encourages effective communication]; experiential learning helps accelerate the journey from novice to expert; [and] "the feedback loop created by problem solving, feedback and practicing again [enables learners to] improve and know they have improved" (Kerner, 2018).

Pangelinan, Norcross, MacDonald, Rudisill, Wadsworth, and McDonald (2018) reviewed two experiential learning programs in kinesiology, referring to the NSEE Principles of Best Practices as a means of addressing "potential limitations and develop[ing] meaningful experiential-learning opportunities... in the ...development, management, and evaluation of experiential-learning" programs (Pangelinan et al., 2018). In their discussion, suggestions included "additional courses early on... to increase [students']...readiness and training for later experiential-learning opportunities...; training for faculty and graduate students ...[to] better align the ...opportunities with the NSEE best practices...." (Pangelinan et al., 2018). In addition, needs assessments "during orientation or advising sessions, as well as an evaluation of student feedback/evaluations from previous students, can help isolate issues specific to the student population in [individual]...programs" (Panginan, et al., 2018). As described by Roberts (2018), new attention was given to experiential learning in response to "a particularly salient time in the history of higher education," referring to the 2018 global recession, continuing inequality in income, and changes due to shifting demographics and the effect of the Internet. We note a real coincidence with present times (in 2020): the Coronavirus (COVID-19) and associated upheavals in society, both global and at home. What might experiential learning strategies in education provide to

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Theories of experiential learning describe "a process whereby the learner interacts with the world and integrates new learning into old constructs" .... Experiential education, as ... studies have shown, leads to deeper, more nuanced understanding of subject matter (Eyler, 2009). In the virtual classroom, Experiential Learning has been used in such learning models as problem-based learning, case-based learning, project-based learning, and inquiry-based learning, as well as cooperative (work- or community-based) learning and apprenticeship. In his discussion of these various models of learning in relation to experiential learning, Bates (2014) provided definitions:

- Problem-based learning - "This approach is increasingly used in subject domains where the knowledge base is rapidly expanding and where it is impossible for students to master all the knowledge in the domain within a limited period of study. Working in groups, students identify what they already know, what they need to know, and how and where to access new information that may lead to resolution of the problem. The role of the instructor (usually called a tutor in classic PBL) is critical in facilitating and guiding the learning process" (Bates, 2014).
- Case-based learning - "Case-based learning can be particularly valuable for dealing with complex, interdisciplinary topics or issues which have no obvious 'right or wrong' solutions, or where learners need to evaluate and decide on competing, alternative explanations. Case-based learning can also work well in both blended and fully online environments" (Bates, 2014).
- "Project-based learning is similar to case-based learning, but tends to be longer and broader in scope, and with even more student autonomy/responsibility in the sense of choosing sub-topics, organising their work, and deciding on what methods to use to conduct the project. Projects are usually based around real world problems, which give students a sense of responsibility and ownership in their learning activities" (Bates, 2014).
- "Inquiry-based learning (IBL) is similar to project-based learning, but the role of the teacher/instructor is somewhat different. In project-based learning, the instructor decides the 'driving question' and plays a more active role in guiding the students through the process. In inquiry-based learning, the learner explores a theme and chooses a topic for research, develops a plan of research and comes to conclusions, although an instructor is usually available to provide help and guidance when needed" (Bates, 2014).

For all of these learning environments, the element of reflection is the definitive aspect that leads to deeper learning. Together with critical analyses and synthesis, reflection leads to student engagement through initiative, relationship-building, personal accountability, and opportunities for both "students and instructors to explore their own values" (Bates, 2014).

An important aspect of virtual teaching/learning is the strong guidance by the instructor to provide consistency and direction to the virtual students. Delivering experiential teaching/learning in the virtual environment develops "the

knowledge and skills needed in a digital age, but as always, it needs to be done well, following best practices associated with the design models" (Bates, 2014).

### **Stages of Experiential Learning and English (ESL) Second Language Learners**

In the United States alone, 22% of students have no spoken English at home (Batalova, J., and Alperin, E., 2018) and while the numbers are continually rising, the educational quality of reaching these students is not. It is critical to learn about the stages of second language acquisition in order to raise the educational quality. Experiential Learning and English as a Second Language can both be applicable and effective when certain principles are followed. "The main aim of teaching is to create autonomous learners, who are able to take responsibility for their learning and are capable of individualizing their experiences to obtain maximum benefit to be competent users of the target language" (Boggu&Sundarsingh, 2016). A discussion of Experiential Learning and English as a Second Language follows.

Experiential learning works well within the ESL classroom when students work cooperatively with one another on a particular task and, in particular, when the task incorporates an adaptation of the four phases of Kolb's Learning Cycle. The tasks allow for challenge and communication between group members that is meaningful or relevant to the participants and that provides students with opportunities to participate in their own language-learning. A deeper dive into the four phases of experiential learning will provide a rationale for incorporating into ESL classrooms.

Experiential Learning Stages (students are actively participating in the learning and reflection process) are represented below:

**Exposure:** Introduction of topic; building enthusiasm, use of realia

**Participation:** learner participation through communication, peer guidance, role-playing, timeline, TPR, teaching by doing

**TPR – Total Physical Response:** a language teaching method build around

- Coordination of speech and action
- Physical (motor) activity
- Students' connecting action to language
- Focus on objectives
- Teach to students' understanding
- Leading to better retention – visual, kinesthetic, audio

**Internalization:** reflection is facilitated by the teacher; think about how experienced the participation; adaptability – multiple ways to teach, confirm understanding; differentiation.

**Dissemination:** after reflection, student associates learning with the real-world, leading to application in future.

Experiential Learning Stages are directly applicable to the stages of second language acquisition used by teachers of ESL. The phases are: pre-production, early production, speech, emergence, intermediate fluid, intermediate fluency and advanced fluency as seen in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1. Sample Teacher Prompts for Each Stage of Second Language Acquisition

STAGE	CHARACTERISTICS	APPROXIMATE TIME FRAME	TEACHER PROMPTS
Preproduction	The student: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Has minimal comprehension</li><li>• Does not verbalize</li><li>• Nods “Yes” and “No”</li><li>• Draws and points</li></ul>	0-6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Show me...</li><li>• Circle the...</li><li>• Where is...?</li><li>• Who has...?</li></ul>
Early Production	The student: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Has limited comprehension</li><li>• Produces one- or two-word responses</li><li>• Uses key words and familiar phrases</li><li>• Uses present-tense verbs</li></ul>	6 months – 1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Yes/no questions</li><li>• Either/or questions</li><li>• Who...?</li><li>• What...?</li><li>• How many...?</li></ul>
Speech Emergence	The student: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Has good comprehension</li><li>• Can produce simple sentences</li><li>• Makes grammar and pronunciation errs</li><li>• Frequently misunderstands jokes</li></ul>	1 -3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Why...?</li><li>• How...?</li><li>• Explain...</li><li>• Questions requiring phrase or short-sentence answers</li></ul>
Intermediate Fluency	The student: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Has excellent comprehension</li><li>• Makes a few grammatical errors</li></ul>	3-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What would happen if...?</li><li>• Why do you think...?</li><li>• Questions requiring more than a sentence response</li></ul>
Advanced Fluency	The student has a near-native level of speech	5-7 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Decide if...</li><li>• Retell...</li></ul>

[Krashen, S. D., & Terrell, D. (1983). *The natural approach: Language acquisition in the classroom*. Hayward, CA: AlemanyPress;<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/108052/chapters/The-Stages-of-Second-Language-Acquisition.aspx>\

In the Experiential learning phase of exposure, the ESL process has the teacher introducing the topic and building enthusiasm using realia, making content more visual. Teachers can also create vocabulary charts on large post-it paper or on anchor charts which students keep at their desks and are displayed consistently. In the experiential learning phase of participation, the ESL teacher garners learner participation through communication, peer-guidance, role-playing, timeline, Total Physical Response (TPR) and teaching by doing. Students are actively involved in the learning process. Building on previous experiences is a key idea in this cooperatively engaged classroom where students reflect on their experiences leading to motivation and preparation.

In the next phase of internalization, reflection is facilitated by the teacher. Through demonstration of adaptability, the teacher helps students reflect on their participation. The teacher incorporates varied teaching methods, differentiates and helps confirm understanding among students. In the dissemination phase, a transfer of knowledge occurs as the students apply learning to the real world. Kolb (1984) stated that in order to learn, one must go through a series of steps after the initial experience. There must be a reflection on the experience followed by an understanding of what the new learning means to the individual and a conceptualization of how it can be used in the future.

The role of the teacher during all stages is a non-traditional role in that the teacher is a facilitator, a helper or guide. The learner's role in the experiential learning cycle is not just as a passive learner but an active learner who directly participates in the learning process. The role of the educator is of great significance as well because that role is to enable the learner to integrate the experiences of interacting with other learners, providing the link to the curriculum; thus, making it relevant and purposeful.

One way in which the teacher helps the learner integrate experiences is through the use of prompts. Using prompts to support students' learning, the teacher begins with the very basic and extends to higher order thinking prompts. The teacher utilizes lower, intermediate and higher order questions which enable the effective teaching and learning of the curriculum. The prompts as seen in the last column in Figure 2.1 offer some examples for teachers to use in the classroom to help students reflect. These prompts coincide ideally with Bloom's Taxonomy which can be a gradual progression to higher-order thinking and thus encourage more critical thinking and reflection on learning.

Teacher strategies to promote learning may include visuals which help students process information. Visuals help students better engage with class materials and develop higher-order thinking skills. In addition, utilizing realia or the use of authentic objects from real life will greatly increase conceptualization of English Language Learners. Other strategies include utilizing more group work as opposed to individual activities, scaffolding tasks/concepts with native language, sentence frames, culturally unique vocabulary and multiple modalities. It is also critical to use good wait time for students to think and be able to process information and experiences properly. The use of such strategies not only promotes higher order thinking skills but also helps ESL strive for productive language.

In conclusion, both Experiential Learning and ESL approaches elicit institutional and pedagogical response. Both address real-world skills, leading to success in the classroom which is needed as the numbers of English Learners steadily rise in schools. Reflection is crucial to both approaches. Reflection allows students to process not only their thought processes but also their experiences which may lead to greater comprehension. "In the field of second language acquisition, the experiential approach encourages learners to develop target language skills" (Knutson, 2003). More research is needed in and out of the classroom to develop strategic opportunities to address the growing numbers of English Learners. Teachers who successfully integrate the stages of Experiential Learning, teacher prompts, and specific strategies will enhance not only ESL but all learners.

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