

## EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OF TODAY - A REMINDER OF GREAT ANCIENT EDUCATION SYSTEM OF INDIA

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*"TELL ME AND I WILL FORGET, SHOW ME AND I MAY REMEMBER. INVOLVE ME, AND I WILL UNDERSTAND"*

### CONFUCIUS

Experiential learning is a process through which students develop knowledge, skills, and values from direct experiences outside a traditional academic setting. It's an ability to immediately apply knowledge. It's an opportunity for learners to apply what they've been taught to solve real-world challenges. It's the application of theory and academic content to real-world experiences, either within the classroom, within the community, or within the workplace. Experiential learning requires the student to not only engage in the experience activity, but also requires them to reflect upon their learning and how their skills learned through their academic studies can be applied beyond the classroom. Well-planned, supervised, and assessed experiential learning programs can stimulate academic inquiry by promoting interdisciplinary learning, civic engagement, career development, cultural awareness, leadership, and other professional skills. It promotes the teamwork and communication skills.

It may be concluded that Experiential Learning is altogether the reflection, critical analysis and synthesis of:

- Opportunities for students to take initiative, make decisions, and be accountable for the results
- Opportunities for students to engage intellectually, creatively, emotionally, socially or physically
- A designed learning experience that includes the possibility to learn from consequences, mistakes, and successes

Experiential learning in the classroom engages students in interactive activities that allow them to gain experience and provide them with opportunities to reflect, analyze and reconstruct concepts and new information. As student engagement increases through these processes, learning accelerates and retention improves.

The approach of Experiential Learning is completely different in comparison to Traditional learning as below:

Traditional Learning	Experiential learning
Teacher centred	Student centred
Learning outcomes are based to a fixed rubric or scoring system	Learning outcomes are flexible and open
Aims to explain knowledge, skills etc. by transferring information	Aims to develop knowledge and skills through experience
Fixed structure, high degree of facilitation	Flexible structure, minimal facilitation

Prof. Scott Wurdinger wrote in his book “The Teaching of Experiential Learning”,

“Students are most excited about learning when they are an active part of the process – be it through scenarios including discussion, group work, or hands-on participation.

If you use the activities correctly, you’ll be able to see that excitement firsthand.

After all, the demonstrated success of experiential learning suggests that it’s not always what your students are taught, but how they’re taught that can make all the difference”.

In the classroom situation, there are a few creative activities which will help to facilitate Experiential Learning like:

- a) **Role-play:** It may be used as a training method for students to upgrade their knowledge and understanding as well as acquire skills that are essential in their performance as professionals. It acknowledges that social context plays an important role in learning and it may be used to address and solve various problems. Students may organise Mock Parliament, role-play as social activist for a noble cause in society. Students can role play as stakeholders pursuing certain goals in a community board meeting, which can help them to apply skills in a new situation.
- b) **Arts- based learning:** It encourages expression through art, like poetry writing, literature, drama, dance, music, painting, visual art, film etc. It may be integrated with all scholastic subjects in the regular classroom program. Students can either participate by creating “art” or by engaging with the artwork of other artists. Both of these may be engaging and transformative experiences for the students and the teacher should decide how the students will get involved with art depending on the learning objective.

Arts- based learning has the capacity to engage students personally, emotionally and even spiritually. It can help students develop confidence, self-esteem and build effective communication & interpersonal skills. Art is viewed as means through which imagination, creativity and innovation find expression.

“Research in arts-based learning indicates that it promotes creative thinking and problem solving skills, as well as fosters innovative leadership competencies”. – Brenner, 2010

- c) **Reflective Portfolio:** It is an essential component of Experiential Learning which can be used as a fundamental method to monitor student’s progress over a period of time.

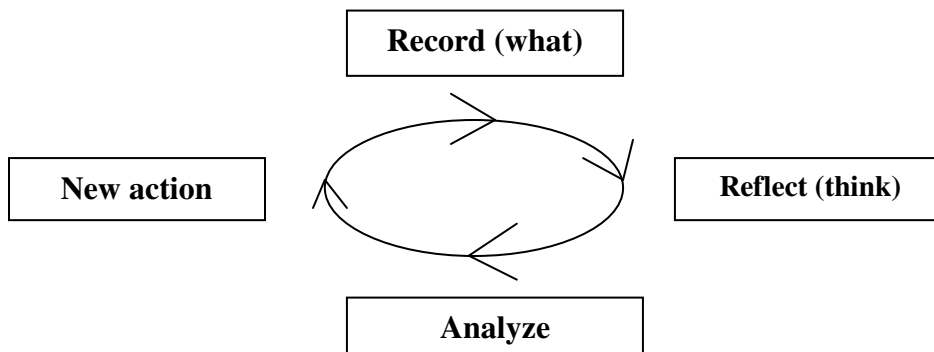
“We do not see things as they are; we see them as we are.” -Anais Nin

Reflective writing is another essential component of active learning, which focuses on the process of learning itself.

- Substantive writing, like essays or term papers, which focus on the topic of discussion or the subject of the course and present an organized argument on learner’s perspective on that topic allowing for a deeper understanding on the concepts and ideas
- Reflective writing explores the learning process and attempts to unravel the importance of the learning experience and allows for monitoring the progress of meaning making processes, analyzing the personal value of the experience and considers options for future learning potential. The value of reflective writing lays on the construct of acquiring personal awareness on the process of creating meaning and self-consciousness in regards to learning.

**THE REFLECTION CYCLE**

Reflective portfolios can be used as fundamental methods to monitor students’ progress over a period of time. John Dewey (1910) argues that reflective engagement can be very powerful for learning, since it is an “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it , and the further conclusions to which it tends”. Students who engage in reflective writing consciously inquire about the origins, the conditions and the context of the issue at hand. Therefore, in every reflective engagement, students may be in a state of “perplexity, hesitation, doubt”, which then leads them to directly investigate and unravel the facts and factors of the challenge they encounter. There are four stages through which progress can be captured. The image below illustrates these stages:



**Record:** Some of the prompts and questions that can be used to help students reflect at this stage are:

- Describe the incident, concept, issue, course, context

- What happened? Who was involved and in what ways?

Reflect:

- What are your thoughts in regard to the way you reacted, addressed or thought about the incident?
- How did you feel?
- What are the pros and cons of the situation?
- What was learned from the situation?

Analyze:

- How would you explain the reasons behind the situation?
- How could you integrate theory to explain concepts and ideas?
- How can you provide evidence of your learning awareness and progress of thinking?

Action:

- How do the situation and the conclusions you generated inform your future decisions, actions, thinking processes?
- What is your action plan on how to address such incidents?

**d) CASE STUDIES :** Case method learning is often successful because:

- Adult learners find it more appealing when what they learn applies immediately to practical situations and when they are provided with the chance to activate their prior knowledge in order to address an issue
- It promotes critical thinking and increases learner's confidence in addressing an issue successfully
- It encourages the learner to assume an active role in constructing knowledge and understanding.
- The learners are challenged to set priorities in locating and managing information, they use scientific inquiry methods and explore higher level concepts and how these are applied into practice.
- Case studies encourage collaborative learning, which is a widely supported method in knowledge formation

Various instructional objectives that could be addressed through the use of case studies:

- To pre-assess the students' knowledge and understanding
- To provide opportunities for students to explore issues from multiple perspectives
- To help students learn through modelling and simulation process
- To provide opportunities for students to explore historical events
- To engage students in the data interpretation process
- As an introduction to experimental design
- To help students get prepared for a field trip

Sample questions that may help students to analyze cases are:

- What is the issue that this case investigates? What is the problem to be addressed?
- What are some of the questions you may have in relation to the issue?
- What are some of the strategies to be used to solve the issue?
- What information is necessary for you to acquire? What are some of the resources and materials that you need?
- How will you solve the issue?
- How will you evaluate the solution that you propose?

**Grading and Evaluation:** The following criteria may help to make the assessment of experiential learning.

Evaluation Criteria	1	2	3	4
<b>Meaningful connections between academic concepts and the experience</b>	Identification of links between experiential activity and ideas raised in academic readings and how these may agree and/or are related to individual's interests.	Comparison between experiential activity and academic concepts that indicate understanding of similarities and differences and the points of view of others.	Effective use of experiential education to understand concepts and theories in the area of study.	Meaningful synthesis of connections between concepts and application, which allows for a deeper understanding of the area of study and for a construction of a broader perspective.
<b>Reflection and self-evaluation</b>	Ability to provide a description of own performances on tasks with a focus on general successes and failures.	Ability to articulate own strengths and weaknesses in performing tasks and to use self-awareness to address challenges in other contexts.	Ability to engage on self-evaluation in regards to the learning progress and to identify and address ethical concerns and challenges in diverse contexts.	Ability to engage in reflective, creative and self-evaluative work that demonstrates learning growth and development by building to prior experiences and effectively applying skills across various and diverse contexts and situations.
	Ability to present knowledge and information in an appropriate form.	Ability to present knowledge, skills, and information in formats that illustrate the connection between content and method in a basic way.	Ability to communicate knowledge, skills and informative in various formats effective for a targeted audience and to make	Profound ability to communicate knowledge, skills and information in an integrative way that contributes to the enhancement of meaning (for the

<b>Integrative communication of knowledge and skills</b>			explicit connections between what is communicated (content) and methods of communications.	audience) and demonstrates how language, meaning-making processes, thought and expression are interdependent.
<b>Application of knowledge, skills, theories and methodologies to new experiential context</b>	Ability to use knowledge, skills, theoretical concepts and methodology at the situation at hand.	Ability to use knowledge, skills, theoretical concepts and methodologies in order to contribute to the understanding of problematic situations.	Ability to make adaptations and apply knowledge, skills, theoretical concepts and methodologies to new experiences and to solve problems.	Ability to make adaptations and apply knowledge, skills, theories and methodologies to new experience and to solve problematic situations with originality and novelty.

A few activities are suggested to involve students for Experiential learning to remain focused, learn differently and learn faster like Cross-age peer tutoring, Fishbowl, Field trip, Student generated test questions, Make a mnemonic etc.

**1. Cross age peer tutoring:** It is an approach to peer learning where one student instructs another on material in which the first student is proficient and the second student is a novice.

Time required – 20 mnts, Number of students –2(in pair)

**Activity:**

1. Decide which role your student will take: tutor or tutee.
2. Connect with the teacher of a class in a higher or lower grade who is open to the activity. In general, a range of two to three grades higher or lower will work well. Select a student from each class and pair them together.
3. Choose a topic or lesson plan for the students to discuss. While you are welcome to pick any lesson for the activity, subjects that have been shown to be suitable for cross-age peer tutoring include: number sense and numeration, identification of sight words, vocabulary, and general reading skills.
4. Explain to both students that the activity is an open conversation, and questions from both participants are encouraged. Facilitate this by asking the students to come up with three things the tutee learned during the activity.
5. After the allotted time, follow up with the students to discuss their questions and gain an idea of how the process went.

## Benefits

It may give students a range of advantages, including increased literacy scores, improved comfort and openness, and enhanced critical thinking skills.

Encouraging a student to delve into a given selection of educational content to explain it to a colleague can help both participants:

- **Question each other's views** and reach their own consensus
- **Develop skills** in the planning and organization of learning activities
- **Give and receive feedback** to evaluate their own learning
- **Put into practice the knowledge and skills** they have been developing through more traditional teaching methods

Importantly, the benefits of this type of activity go both ways: cross-age peer tutoring has been shown to offer academic benefits to both tutors and tutees.

**2. Fish Bowl** : It involves medium-sized groups of students sitting at the front of the classroom and openly discussing an assigned topic so the entire classroom can hear.

Time – 20-30 mnts    Students- 6-8

## Activity

1. Have six to eight students (Group A) volunteer to be “inside” the fishbowl, while the remainder of the class (Group B) forms a circle or outer ring (with or without their desks) “outside” of the fishbowl to observe the activity.
2. Assign Group A an open-ended topic or question to discuss with the goal of reaching a consensus on the topic's three most important issues.
3. Once the consensus has been reached or once time has run out, have Group A and Group B switch roles – with Group B performing an open-air discussion and Group A watching in the “outside” ring. This second stage can involve an identical format or a modified version featuring a new approach, topic, or discussion.
4. At the end of the exercise, have both groups offer feedback on each group's discussion to one another – individually, in a group-to-group format, or in pairs.

## Benefits

When performed effectively, this activity fosters and opens a spirit of **investigation, risk-taking, experimentation, curiosity, problem-solving** and **creativity** — all elements seen as fundamental to the process of experiential learning

Crucially, this activity also encourages students to take responsibility for the discussion and, by extension, of their own learning.

The fishbowl activity is particularly dependent on your students' comfort with taking risks and being open to failure.

**3. Field trips:** It is an effective platform for experiential learning activities because they let students bridge educational experiences to actual settings.

Time – 30 mnts      Students – whole class

Be mindful that a field trip where students are simply talked to by a guide or teacher often doesn't qualify as true experiential learning.

A field trip that correctly activates experiential learning requires some preparation and interaction from the teacher. Consider the example below. Activity

1. After completing a science unit on animal habitats, ensure that your students are familiar with what components of survival are necessary for different types of animals.
2. Visit a local zoo! Have your students apply their learning by encouraging a collective commentary on each animal exhibit and how it displays important components of survival like habitat and animal adaptations.

### Benefits

Instead of simply internalizing material in a textbook, this example shows how a field trip helps students:

- Apply what they've learned firsthand
- Create new connections and reinforce the lessons they've learned by putting them into practice in a fun, engaging context

**4. Student-generated test questions:** It gives participants the opportunity to ask the questions instead of just answering them.

Time – 20 mnts      Students – In pairs

### Activity

1. After finishing a lesson plan, ask students to prepare between three and five test questions of their own related to the lesson material.
2. Next, explain that your students must also create the related *answers* to the questions they come up with.
3. After the allotted time, split your students into pairs and have them test each other with the questions they have written.
4. If time permits, get students to share their results with the class.



## Benefits

By repositioning students' approach to a lesson by provoking a series of questions *and* a set of answers, this activity builds participants' understanding by involving them in a process of inquiry and reflection – the heart and soul of experiential learning.

And it's not just about the students. This exercise is an excellent example of how experiential learning activities can help teachers achieve added insight into what students consider to be the most significant or memorable content in a lesson.

The questions and answers students come up with will give teachers a gauge of:

- What students see as the **key concepts** within a lesson
- What students consider to be **reasonable and valuable test questions**
- Whether students have **inaccurate expectations for an upcoming test**

**5. Make a Mnemonic** : A **mnemonic** is a device like a rhyme or acronym that helps students to associate concepts to help them remembering something. The mnemonic is a flexible and effective educational technique, facilitating learning in virtually any educational topic, from language skills to mental maths practices.

Time: 20 mnts      Students: 4 in groups

## Activity

1. Establish how a mnemonic works by giving your students one or two popular examples such as the two outlined below.
2. Select a topic related to your course material or allow students to pick a topic themselves.
3. Break your students into groups and give them writing materials, allowing the allotted time to work together and make their own mnemonic.
4. Get each group to present their mnemonic in front of the class.
5. Challenge your students to memorize their own mnemonic and perform it off by heart.

Example: Taxonomy order in biology: Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species

**Mnemonic:** Kids Prefer Cheese Over Fried Green Spinach

**Colors of the rainbow :** violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange, red

**Mnemonic:** VIBGYOR

## Benefits

The design of this activity gives students the chance to **tie personally relevant topics and images to educational content**, in turn creating an internal reflection on their learning and bringing greater meaning to the lesson — a key part of experiential learning.

For the successful execution of Experiential Learning the below mentioned limitations may appear :

- **Limited class time** to spend on the experiential activities or at the various stages of them. It is important that we provide enough time for students to engage in the activity but also in all other stages of the Experiential Learning Cycle, such as the Reflection, Conceptualization, and Experimentation.
- **Limited access to resources.** Access to certain resources (photocopies, access to computer and Internet) may be deemed necessary for students to experience all that experiential learning activities have to offer.
- **Constraints by the demands of the curriculum.** Teachers should prepare and carefully plan the experiential activity, and how they will address the corresponding learning outcomes.
- **Guidelines that are over restricting** to students' exercise of free will power in terms of how they will engage in the experiential activities. Students should feel comfortable to use their judgement and apply their knowledge from past experiences to address the issues explored through the experiential activity.
- **Inadequate group work skills.** Engaging successfully in experiential activities requires that student have developed good group work skills and are able to contribute and function effectively within the group. Instructors should provide appropriate guidelines on the roles and expectations of group members and encourage them to monitor and reflect on the progress of their project or engagement.
- **Not clear allocation on the credit/mark for the experiential activity.** Engagement in experiential activities may require a lot of time and effort from both the instructor and the students. Students need to feel that the time and work devoted on the engagement is acknowledged and specific, and that measurable learning objectives are identified. It is important that there are clear evaluation criteria and expectations communicated to students through Rubrics or scoring scheme.
- **Not enough opportunities for reflection.** Experience alone may not lead to meaningful learning if students do not reflect on the experience. Reflection is an essential component of learning and the students should be provided with opportunities to reflect, evaluate the experience, make links to prior experiences and knowledge, share perspectives with others, and make links to theoretical concepts and course content.