

WHAT IS Experiential Education?

Experiential education is a hands-on form of learning that begins with a concrete experience. After solving a problem, learners reflect on the process and are able to apply lessons more broadly to their lives.

ADVENTURE AND CHALLENGE

Adventure and challenge are at the heart of experiential learning as they push the learner, student or client out of their comfort zone and into the learning zone, where the greatest educational gains can occur. These activities are **carefully crafted by instructors** to provide the appropriate level of challenge for a group or individual.

OBSERVATION AND REFLECTION

The learning doesn't stop when the task is complete. Afterwards, learners participate in guided activities and discussions in order to help process their experience. **Thoughtful reflection is a crucial step** in distilling their experience into concrete learning outcomes.

ABSTRACT THINKING

Through observation and reflection, they begin to form abstract ideas and theories based on their hands-on experiences. This is an important element of true learning, as now they are ready to apply these lessons to broader 'real-life' experiences—not just classroom examples.

APPLICATION TO LIFE

With the development of abstract thinking comes the ability to theorize about concepts and apply ideas to other areas. This includes a deeper understanding of interpersonal skills like collaboration, leadership and creative problem-solving—all of which will positively influence their future performance in all aspects of life.

PRINCIPLES OF EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION¹

- ✓ Experiential learning occurs when carefully chosen experiences are supported by reflection, critical analysis and synthesis.
- ✓ Experiences are structured to require the learner to take initiative, make decisions and be accountable for results.
- ✓ Throughout the experiential learning process, the learner² is actively engaged in posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative, and constructing meaning.
- ✓ 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 educator³ 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.

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

2. 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.

3. 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.

—Gass, M.A., Gillis, H.L., Russell, K.C. (2012). Adventure therapy: Theory, Research, and Practice. New York, NY: Routledge.