SIES School of Learning and Leadership Development (SIESSLLD)

TRAINING NOTE (002/2024-25)

On

Experiential Learning As A Pedagogic Tool

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SIES School of Learning and Leadership Development (SIESSLLD),
SIES Education Complex, Plot 1E, Sector-5, Nerul

Navi Mumbai-400 706

Backdrop:

Education has, over a period, evolved significantly to encompass a varied range of pedagogical approaches that help foster deeper understanding and personal growth. Experiential learning, as a pedagogic approach, represents a definitive shift from traditional, passive learning approach to a dynamic, student-cantered methodology. Defined as a process in which students engage and involve in "direct experiences" of different situations / activities to develop knowledge, skills, and values, experiential learning as a pedagogy enables the learners to "learn from practice". This is akin to active learning as compared to traditional passive learning in a classroom situation.

Genesis of Experiential Learning:

The roots of experiential learning trace back to classical educational theories. The most important among them is "Constructivist Theory" that prescribes that leaners construct / develop their own knowledge through experiences, interactions, and reflection. John Dewey (1859-1952), a pivotal figure in educational reform, argued that learning should be an active, hands-on process rather than passive reception. Dewey's belief that education should connect directly with real-world experiences is one of the foundation corners of experiential education. Some of the other leading thinkers in this area include Jean Piaget (1896-1980), Kurt Lewin (1890-1947), and Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934).

However, it was David Kolb, an educational theorist, who synthesized these ideas into a comprehensive model in the 1980s. Kolb's model describes learning as a cyclical process comprising four stages: "Concrete Experience", "Reflective Observation", "Abstract Conceptualization", and "Active Experimentation". This cycle allows learners to immerse themselves in an experience, reflect on it, develop concepts based on observations, and apply this knowledge to future situations. This iterative cycle remains central to experiential learning as a pedagogical approach.

Applications of Experiential Learning:

Applications in School Education

In primary and secondary education, experiential learning can be used to deepen students' understanding of core subjects and develop essential skills like critical thinking and problem-solving. There can be several approaches that include:

- **Project-Based Learning (PBL):** Students engage in projects that require research, collaboration, enquiry and creativity. For example, a science teacher might have students design and build a small-scale model of an eco-friendly house, applying concepts from physics, biology, and environmental science. A social science teacher may ask students to study various value systems by interacting with people and build a value model. And there can be many such cases.

- **Field Trips and Outdoor Education:** Taking students out of the classroom allows them to apply academic knowledge in real-world settings, such as historical sites, nature reserves, art galleries, village settings or places of worship. This exposure fosters curiosity and context-driven understanding.

- **Service Learning:** Students can engage in community service activities extended to classroom studies. For example, students learning about nutrition might volunteer at a food bank to understand food security issues firsthand. Students studying about social disparity may visit an orphanage and draw lessons therefrom.

Applications in Higher Education

Experiential learning in higher education often involves more complex, discipline-specific experiences designed to prepare students for the world of employment and real life challenges. Some of the methods include:

- **Internships and On the Job Training:** By immersing themselves in professional environments, students gain hands-on experience in their field of study / specialization, developing both technical and soft skills.

- **Simulations:** Many programs, particularly in business management, law, medicine, technology, use simulations to replicate real-world scenarios. For example, medical students practice diagnosis and treatment through patient simulations, enhancing their clinical skills. Business management students learn applications of disciplines like finance, marketing, HR, etc. through real business problems.

- **Case Studies:** These provide real life situations. Students can appreciate the context and learn to take alternative positions and decisions. These help the problem-solving acumen of students.

- **Global Immersion Programs:** These trips abroad help students broaden their perspectives, fostering cross-cultural competence and adaptability. Language, anthropology, and international business programs often incorporate study abroad as a core experiential component.

- **Laboratory Research and Fieldwork:** In fields such as environmental science, archaeology, and engineering, students gain practical skills and knowledge through field-based or lab-based research.

Key Considerations for Teachers:

There are several challenges to successfully implement experimental learning as standardization is difficult and assessment becomes a challenge. To effectively implement experiential learning, faculty should take the following points into account:

1. **Purposeful Integration:** Teachers should ensure that experiential activities align with specific learning objectives, integrating experiences that support academic standards while encouraging personal growth. This alignment is crucial as otherwise many such exercises lose their academic rigour. May be more than oneteachers should be involved in such endeavours. Students must be explained thoroughly the objectives of such an exercise in advance before commencement of the activity.

2. **Facilitate Reflection:** Reflection is crucial in experiential learning. Teachers should encourage students to discuss and reflect on their experiences, connecting them to academic concepts and real-world applications.

3. **Create an Inclusive Environment:** Teachers should consider students' diverse backgrounds, learning preferences, and abilities when designing experiential learning activities. Providing multiple avenues for participation can help ensure all students benefit.

4. **Manage Logistics Carefully:** Planning and managing resources, time, and risk is essential. Managing logistics and meticulous

planning is essential. It is always preferable to involve students in such exercises.

5. **Adapt Assessment Strategies:** Since experiential learning does not always lend itself to traditional testing, teachers may need to use alternative assessment methods, such as presentations, or self-assessment or peer evaluation. A well-drafted rubric is essential.

6. **Feedback:** It is always necessary to take feedback at the end of each experiential exercise so that problems, if any, can be identified and improvements made in next such case.

Conclusion:

Undoubtedly, experiential learning is a powerful tool from a leaner's perspective as they learn by themselves having undergone the experience themselves. However, to make the learning meaningful, and useful in subsequent life problems, students need a deeper understanding on reflection after each exercise. Here comes the role of a teacher who facilitates and enhances the learning by students. Therefore, teachers must be trained in the techniques of running and evaluating the efficacy of each such experiential learning. Each experiential learning is unique and so are the students undergoing the same. Because of the diversity and resultant complexity, the challenge becomes more difficult. Teachers should, therefore, themselves undergo such practices / exercises to understand the nuances of experiential learning.