

EXPERIENCE AT THE CLASSES OF ENGLISH

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The article underlines the importance of experiential learning in teaching English. It traces a connection between experiential learning and the requirements of the labor market. Being a research-based, hand-on learning process, the focus on experience pushes students beyond the traditional classroom. The authors present challenge-based model as one strategy to be used at the classes of English to expose students to authentic learning opportunities.

Keywords: English, experiential learning, challenge-based model, authentic opportunities

Introduction

There are many definitions of the term “experiential learning”. The common meaning of the term is to get a particular experience from learning. Keeton and Tate (1978) are sure that the experiential learning is a process where the learner does not only “read about, hear about, talk about, or write about these realities” (Keeton, 1978, p. 68). The learner gets the experience from doing something, from getting engaged in performing something. Eisenstein adds that the learning from experience is dependent on learning goals that “direct attention toward information that results in learning that transfers across situations” (Eisenstein, 2006, p. 257).

The goals stand at the basis of lessons. James March believes that experiential lessons are “lessons extracted from the ordinary course of life and work,” with academic knowledge “generated by systematic observation and analysis by expert and transmitted by authorities” (March, 2010, p. 9). These lessons are “rife with unjustified conclusions, superstitious associations, misleading correlations, tautological generalizations, and systematic biases” (March, 2010, p. 107). Namely, they determine the creation of problem solvers and creators as opposed to consumers.

Rogers (1973) mentions two types of learning such as cognitive (meaningless) and experiential (significant) that the educators should strive for in the teaching process. The experiential learning addresses the needs of the learner. The linguist believes that experiential learning is equivalent to personal change and growth. Additionally, experiential learning is a naturalistic learning process contrasted to lectures.

Since the beginning of the 20th century educators have been attempting to implement, adapt, reinvent and improvise teaching methods that might link theory with real life experiences. In other words, the teachers aim at nurturing an educated individual who can become competitive in a democratic society. This demand calls for dedicated pedagogical methods that would enhance the educational experience of students in and out of the classroom. Teaching is to encourage autonomy and autonomous learners, who are able to take responsibility of their learning and are capable of individualizing their experiences to become

competent users of the target language. In this respect, experiential learning is seen as “a wonderful way to teach a new generation of youth in the democratic society”. It is believed that experiential learning in modern education is “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Dewey, 1925, p. 43). Dewey underlined that “experiential learning is culturally mediated”, having at the basis an experience “overlaid and saturated with the products of the reflection of past generations and by-gone ages. It is filled with interpretations, classifications, due to sophisticated thought, which have become incorporated into what seems to be fresh naïve empirical material.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is an opportunity for learners to apply what they have been taught to solve real-world challenges. Learners test their understanding by underlying principles, processes and procedures and can experiment and adapt their practice to achieve best outcomes. There are many advantages of experiential learning usage:

- Access to real-time coaching and feedback

Achieving expertise requires practice and focused coaching based on what is observed during practice. Every experiential learning activity includes a debriefing session where learners receive feedback and coaching from experts and fellow team members.

- Promotion of teamwork and communication skills.

Reading a book or listening to a lecture does not provide with a lot of empirical experience. The experiential learning may be possible only when there are more than two people doing something.

- Development of reflective practice habits.

The learners can self-monitor the effectiveness of their plan, anticipate outcomes and develop contingency plans while getting more and more experience. Experiential learning helps accelerate the journey from novice to expert.

- Accomplishments are obvious.

Learners can improve their skills in a very short period of time, because of the feedback loop created by problem solving.

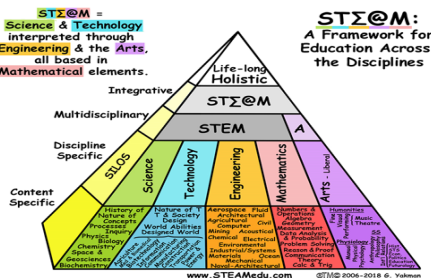
It is believed that experiential learning designs depend partly on one’s epistemological position. Constructivists strongly support

experiential learning models, whereas those with a strong objectivist position are usually highly skeptical of the effectiveness of this approach. Nevertheless, problem-based learning, in particular, has proved to be very popular in many institutions teaching science or medicine, and project-based learning is used across many subject domains and levels of education. There is an evidence that experiential learning, when properly designed, is highly engaging for students and leads to better long-term memory. Certainly, experiential learning approaches require considerable re-structuring of teaching and a great deal of detailed planning if the curriculum is to be fully covered. It usually means extensive re-training of faculty, and careful orientation and preparation of students.

Challenge-based model and its description

There are many models of experiential learning. The model to be used at the classes of English that allows language skills and 21st century skills training is challenge-based one. This approach was borrowed from science. It is a collaborative framework that has at the basis a hands-on activity that aims at discovering and solving problems, gaining in-depth subject area knowledge, developing 21st-century skills, and sharing thoughts with the world.

Challenge-based model, as an experiential model used to teach languages, started to be used in ELT as a part of STEAM policy (Steam pyramid). Deron Cameron believes that STEAM is “a paradigm shift from traditional education philosophy, based on standardized test scores, to a modern ideal which focuses on valuing the learning process as much as the results” (<https://steamedu.com/>). The STEAM paradigm was thrown light on in 2006 by Georgette Yakman. It represents the research-backed theoretical model on how to correlate the subject areas to one another, and to social development worlds.



Picture 1. STEAM pyramid

The purpose of this was to create a matrix by which researchers, professionals, and educators could share information to keep

education as up to date as possible. The pyramid shows the integration of disciplines; it explains the interdisciplinary approach that leads to the development of life-long skills.

Challenge-based model is a complex one. There was published in 2011 a guide for those who would like to implement it at their classes. The framework cited makes the process clearer (Challenge based learning 2011).

It can be observed that there are five stages that cover engage-investigate-act policy:

- Stage 1. It is formed of a big idea, essential question and challenge. This stage is the motivating stage and is teacher-centered, as the teacher has to invent the challenge, the big idea and the essential question.
- Stage 2. This is the guiding activities stage. The students identify and engage in guiding activities, including simulations, research, games, calculations, expert interviews, surveys, and other activities that help them acquire the knowledge needed to answer the guiding questions and develop an innovative, insightful, and realistic solution. Any of the guiding resources might be used.
- Stage 3. This is the identifying a solution stage. Having thoroughly researched the guiding questions, the students have a solid foundation to begin identifying a variety of possible solutions. They should select one solution through prototyping, experimentation, or other means. One of the best ways out is to use prototyping.
- Stage 4. This is the implementation and evaluation stage. After identifying the solutions, the students implement them, measure outcomes, reflect on what worked and what didn't, and determine whether they made progress in addressing the challenge. When implementation is complete, students share their work with the rest of the world. In their research plan, the students decide what they measure and how often, so they can be consistent throughout the implementation phase. This stage offers the possibility for improvement. At the moment the prototype does not work, the students have the right to introduce changes and improve it.
- Stage 5. This is the documentation stage. The Guide mentions that the best way to document the results is to make the video, where a

construction, using as many words as possible from the colored picture. The formula is *I am thankful for...*

The challenge is introduced only when the language skills have been trained. As the topic is Thanksgiving, the big question and the challenge should be connected to it.

Stage 4. A challenge is introduced. The students have to design a turkey escape pod zipline.

Big Question?

How is it possible to design an escape pod zipline to save the turkey not to be cooked for Thanksgiving?

Documentation: Each team member will complete the items below and, then, will share with other colleagues.

Our model looks like:

The materials we have used are:

The pupils do not have the right to use additional materials than those specified in the materials box.

Materials	Tools
Cardboard (2 pieces)	Scissors
Balloons (1 piece)	masking tape
Modeling clay (1 piece)	
Sticks (2 pieces)	
Straws (2 pieces)	
Pencils (2 pieces)	
Pegs (2 pieces)	
Cups (2 pieces)	
Rubber bands (4 pieces)	

When the 3D representation of the means of transportation is ready, the testing procedure starts.

Testing: The students test the means of transportation. They may improve it if necessary. A competition might be organized to test the designed means of transportation against 2 principles (safety, velocity).

The next step in challenge implementation is the presentation. The students are to present the means of transportation. Some directions are provided:

Our team has used the following materials ... Our choice is determined by ... Our type of travelling is ... The advantages are ... The testing process has proven ...

The last step is assessment. The students have to assess the colleagues' prototypes, using the directions.

We have got the designed zipline of group number _____. At the lesson, we saw that the designed zipline was submitted on time. We are giving this group _____ points for being punctual.

The group has made a _____ design, and for creativity we are giving this group _____ points.

We can see that the members of the group are real engineers and for this criterion we are giving _____ points.

The group has used the following materials _____, these are the only provided materials, and we are giving them _____ points. Moreover, the students presented their zipline using the provided vocabulary directions. We are giving _____ points.

The device was submitted on time	/5
The group demonstrated their understanding of the design	/20
The device is unique and creatively made	/10
The group used the directions provided (the lesson vocabulary)	/15
The device was created using only the provided materials (name them)	/10
Total	/60

Conclusion

Experience is important and it stands at the basis of any achievement. In such a way, the lessons derived from experiential learning stimulate the process of drawing conclusions, making associations, and systematic satisfaction. The main aim of teaching is to create autonomous satisfied learners, who are able to take responsibility of their knowledge and individualize their experiences to obtain maximum benefit. In this respect, experiential learning is regarded as a wonderful way to teach a new generation of youth in the reframed society. The lessons that follow these concepts provide learners with knowledge through the transformation of experience and expose them to real life in the tiny school environment.

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