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The basis of all experiential learning is that experience matters. Many educators believe that without an experience, there can be no true learning or real understanding of a concept or situation. However, experience alone does not necessarily lead to or mean that learning will take place. To accomplish this, there needs to be a sequence of three discrete components:

- 1) A "concrete experience" (**Enfield, 2001, Kolb, 1984**), where the learner is involved in an exploration, actually doing or performing an activity of some kind;
- 2) A contemplation phase, which is usually referred to in the literature as a reflection stage (**Enfield, 2001; Kolb, 1984; Pfeiffer & Jones, 1981**), whereby the learner shares reactions and observations publicly and processes the experience by discussing and analyzing; and
- 3) The "application" or "conceptualization" phase that helps the learner deepen and broaden their understanding of the concept or situation by cementing their experience through generalizations and applications (**Carlson & Maxa, 1998**).

Characteristics of Experiential learning:

Experiential learning is student-centered as opposed to teacher-centered education.

- Experiential learning is active as opposed to passive.
- Experiential learning encourages students to create knowledge rather than acquire knowledge.
- Experiential learning often involves student choice, and allows the students to play a larger role in class activities.
- Experiential learning is often high context, meaning it is designed to be as relevant as possible to the "real world" outside the classroom.
- Experiential learning presents problems for students to solve rather than presenting lists of facts and concepts for students to memorize.
- Experiential learning does not have to replace more traditional instruction, but it can greatly enhance it.
- Experiential learning can and should always be tied to course and program objectives.

Principles of Experiential learning

The Learner is central

As this is a learner-centered approach, so, the learners should be ready, willing and able to involve themselves personally to improve their own understanding, critique and evaluate the messages in their context as well as to apply the learning appropriately.

Activities must be real and engaging

A learning activity is a means to an end, not an end in itself. The purpose of an experiential learning activity is to create an opportunity for valuable and memorable personal learning. The ideal activity engages, stimulates and challenges, with individuals becoming absorbed in the task *as themselves*. It does not involve role play in a conventional artificial sense. All activities must be designed, managed and facilitated carefully so that the activity has impact.

Facilitation must be light and subtle

If there is interest and intrinsic motivation then learners can learn on their own by reflecting on personal experiences, developing personal insights and understandings through involvement in intellectual, emotional and physical activity.

The facilitator should resist temptation to give answers – and ask questions only. The ownership of learning should be given to individual learning. During discussion the learner should be given a chance to express his/her reactions in order to develop learning that is relevant to him or her. The facilitator should pose questions that help learners to think analytically and logically, develop their own understanding, draw their own conclusions, and pave the way for further reading and research. Possible questions include:

Did you notice...?

Why did that happen?

How can you use that?

What does that mean?

Reactions of each individual to a single situation will be different. This difference in reactions depends on various factors such as attitude, knowledge, intelligence and personality etc. The facilitator and the participants should allow for a variety of reactions/responses.

The facilitator has faith in people's ability to learn for themselves

To be an effective facilitator of experiential learning you have to believe, really believe, in others. You have to believe that they have the potential to make progress and be committed to the fact that your role is to provide opportunities for others to learn and progress. ***It's about them not you.*** Forget your ego. As an effective facilitator you have

to be satisfied with the knowledge that you offer and develop opportunities for others to learn, many of which will go unused or undervalued. You have to accept that you are not offering 'tangible and technical' contributions and therefore will not be able to look back and say 'I taught this person x or y'. If you're lucky however, every now and again in the years to come you will hear of some far-reaching consequences that will go way beyond what you might have hoped or imagined.

Careful reflections on activities are crucial

Learning reviews should be planned so that they involve the learner in personal thought, challenge and discussion before coming to some form of conclusion. Periods of individual reflection, guided by open-ended questions or check-box questionnaires, and followed by a facilitated discussion are useful. If it is to be of real benefit, the review must be an honest critique of what happened and the contributions of each individual. Real issues should not be swept under the carpet, but equally, criticism must be constructive. Ensure that each activity allows adequate time for meaningful review.

Phases of Experiential Learning:

Experiential learning can be viewed as a cycle consisting of five phases, all of which are necessary:

- experiencing (an activity occurs);
- sharing or publishing (reactions and observations are shared);
- analyzing or processing (patterns and dynamics are determined);
- inferring or generalizing (principles are derived); and,
- applying (plans are made to use learning in new situations).