Guide for Youth Educators for the Development of Experiential Education Curriculums and Experiential Learning Processes

This guide takes experiential educators into a three-course action of Designing, Facilitating, and Assessing to create an experiential education curriculum that integrates the key principles of experiential learning by guiding a process through the experiential cycle and incorporating diverse tools and methods responding to diverse needs and learning styles, enabling life-long learning in line with the eight key competencies.

Author: Samar Zughool, Povod Institute for Culture and Development of International Relations in Culture, January, 2024, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

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Introduction:

Experiential education and experiential learning are concepts that are related but not identical. Experiential education is a broader educational philosophy that immerses learners in authentic, hands-on, and collaborative learning experiences that are linked to real-world problems and contexts. Experiential learning is a learning theory that describes how experience is transformed into knowledge through four stages: experience, reflection, conceptualization, and evaluation. Experiential education is the pedagogical approach that guides the development of experiential learning activities, whereas experiential learning is the individual learning process that occurs as a result of these activities (Gass, Gillis, Russel, 2012). Hence, experiential education, in other words, is the "why" and "how" of experiential learning, whereas experiential learning is the "what" and "so what." Experiential education should be seriously considered in formal educational settings such as youth houses, schools, or youth colleges due to its numerous benefits for both youth educators and youth. Through life-long learning, the experiential education approach allows educators and learners to learn and grow as individuals. It benefits education by allowing people to use all of their senses. Active learning improves comprehension as well as memorization. By having educators and learners reflect on, analyse, and evaluate their own experiences, this educational process promotes critical thinking (Gross & Rutland, 2017). Therefore, this form of deliberative education enhances people's problem-solving abilities and allows them to apply theoretical concepts to real-world scenarios. Further, this type of learning prepares young people for real-world problems by allowing them to practise communication, collaboration, and flexibility in realistic settings and it gives youngsters the confidence and competence they need to succeed in the real world. For youth educators, experiential education creates a space for life-long learning in which learners are central to the process, allowing educators to update their expertise based on the needs of the learners and their surroundings. For example, a mathematics instructor may identify a need to learn about digital tools for education in order to meet the needs of young learners who have been raised during a rapid technological revolution. Thus, this guide provides practical steps to guide youth educators through the process of developing experiential educational curriculums

and guiding them and the learners throughout the experiential learning process for life-long learning. The steps are established based on a three-course action of **D**esigning, **F**acilitating, and **A**ssessing to create an experiential education curriculum that integrates the key principles of experiential learning by guiding a process through the experiential cycle and incorporating diverse tools and methods responding to diverse needs and learning styles, enabling life-long learning in line with the eight key competencies.

I. Designing Experiential Education Curriculums

✓ Conducting needs assessment for life-long learning for learners and educators

Engaging past experiences of learners is a key component of experiential learning. Experiential learning theory was influenced by the work of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, and others, who viewed experience as the source of learning and development (Kolb & Kolb, 2012). This guide emphasises the experiential learning cycle by Kolb, where one of the main proponents of learning is a cyclical process that involves four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Learners move through these stages by resolving the dual dialectics of action/reflection and experience/abstraction. Therefore, engaging past experiences of learners helps them to connect their previous knowledge and skills to new situations, to reflect on their assumptions and beliefs, and to construct new meanings and understandings. In this case, needs assessment is essential for youth educators who want to create an experiential educational curriculum. However, this process of recalling past experiences of learners should also lead to the lifelong learning process of the educator, where the educator makes a plan to build certain competencies or gain new knowledge to meet the needs of their learning group. Therefore, putting the learner at the heart of the learning process provides valuable opportunities for the educator to learn too.

✓ Identifying learning objectives based on the needs assessment and in line with the development of the eight key competencies.

Learning objectives are statements that describe what learners should be able to do, know, or demonstrate after completing a learning activity. They are important for guiding the design, delivery, and assessment of experiential learning (Shaw et al., 2020). Educators as well should set

their own learning objectives that aim to fulfil the rapid changing needs and advancement in a specific field of education or in the world of general.

To identify learning objectives in an experiential education curriculum, follow these steps:

- Revisit the needs assessment to determine the gaps between the learners' current and desired state of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, as well as the needs in their surroundings and, if you are a youth worker, in the youth house. To collect data about needs, you can use a variety of methods, such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, observations, or document analysis.

- Examine the eight essential competencies for lifelong learning and personal development. Communication in one's first language; communication in another language; mathematical competence and basic scientific and technological competences; digital competence; learning to learn; social and civic competences; a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; and cultural awareness and expression are all examples of these. These competencies can be used as a framework to align learning objectives with larger educational goals.

- Create specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound learning objectives. Use action verbs like analyse, create, demonstrate, evaluate, or perform to describe observable and measurable behaviours. Avoid using ambiguous verbs like comprehend, learn, or appreciate. Specify the conditions, criteria, and level of performance expected from the learners for each learning objective.

- Review and revise your learning objectives to make sure they are clear, concise, and consistent. Examine whether they correspond to the needs assessment data, the eight key competencies, and the experiential learning cycle. Seek feedback from learners, as they are the most important stakeholders in the process of improving your learning objectives.

✓ Selecting activities and experiences

The materials and learning activities should take into account **the various learning styles** of the experiential learning cycle and be tailored to meet the demands and specifications of the real world which can be ensured by **incorporating reflection and debriefing** as part of each learning activity and learning experience (Mcleod, 2023). There are different models and

frameworks that propose different numbers and types of learning styles. Moreover, people's characters and styles are fluid they change within contexts and times (Osher et al., 2018) and thus it is more feasible to ensure learning activities that are inclusive and diverse as much as possible rather than making specific learning activities for each specific learning style.

However, the following general guidelines are useful to design inclusive, engaging, and effective learning activities for all learners, regardless of their learning preferences:

- To present information and concepts, use a variety of materials, methods, and media, such as text, images, audio, video, animations, and so on. This can aid learners with various sensory modalities in accessing and processing the content.

- Incorporate interactive and collaborative elements such as quizzes, polls, games, discussions, peer feedback, and so on into your learning activities. This can assist learners with varying social and cognitive preferences in participating in and engaging in the learning process.

- Allow learners to customise their learning experience by selecting topics, formats, difficulty levels, pace, and so on. This can assist learners of various interests and motivations in taking ownership and responsibility for their learning.

- Throughout the learning process, provide learners with clear and consistent instructions, expectations, feedback, and structures that rely on self-directed learning. This can assist learners with varying levels of prior knowledge, skills, and confidence in achieving learning objectives and overcoming challenges.

- Encourage learners to reflect on their learning experiences, strategies, and outcomes, as well as to apply what they've learned in new contexts and situations. This can help learners with various metacognitive and transfer abilities gain a better understanding and perform better.

✓ Planning for safety and risk management

Planning for safety is an important part of any educational curriculum. The activities to plan for safety and risk management must be designed and implemented before the start of the learning

process as well as during it and after it (Ward, 2011). In this section it is important to differentiate between monitoring and evaluation. **An experiential education curriculum should incorporate a check-in mechanism on feelings and motivation which are important elements of emotional intelligence**. Depending on the learning activity, context, and goals, experiential education curriculum safety and risk management planning involves different steps. However, general steps and strategies include:

- Include learners as learning process owners and team up learners to facilitate a class team-building process and identify needs, challenges, and contributions, as well as a code of conduct for safe yet brave spaces.
- Establishing your experiential learning curriculum 's policies and procedures, including faculty, staff, learner, and community partner roles and responsibilities, ethical and legal issues, emergency and contingency plans, evaluation, and feedback mechanisms, etc.
- A site assessment can identify physical, social, cultural, and psychological hazards and risks in the learning environment that could affect participants' safety and well-being.
- Setting expectations with learners and stakeholders about learning objectives, outcomes, standards, and safety rules, guidelines, and protocols during experiential learning.
- Overseeing learners and other participants' progress, performance, and behaviour, providing feedback and guidance, intervening when needed, and facilitating reflection and debriefing
- Training participants on their experiential learning roles and tasks, hazard identification and control, risk management, communication, collaboration, decision-making, and problem-solving.

II. Facilitating Experiential Education Curriculums
  ✓ Establishing a positive and inclusive learning environment

Here experiential educators should enhance a space for critical learning yet to maintain a continues check-in on the initial learning objective for each learner and for the group of learners. A flexible and open mind attitude is essential to maintained a space where learners can make mistakes and learn from them but also can revise and modify their intended learning objectives. An inclusive environment maintains the diversity of approaches in response to the diverse personalities.

Below are some of the hints and steps that you can take as a youth educator:

- Keep track of the code of conduct you co-establish with learners during team-building for safe and brave spaces. This can prevent low-level disruption and foster respect.
- Show enthusiasm and high expectations for the learning process and group. Learners respond better when they feel their educator believes in them and is not focusing on their weaknesses, according to research.
- Encourage peer support inside and outside the classroom. This means encouraging learners to respect and trust each other, making empathy and caring 'fashionable,' and promoting positive and pro-social attitudes by helping each other.
- Include everyone and encourage success in learning. Create a personalised learning environment and talk about learning that focuses on what learners can do and want to do next. Provide a space for learners with different personalities, such as smaller groups for learners who need more privacy.
- Support each leaner in your group based on their needs. This helps dyslexic and ADHD learners access the curriculum and feel included.
- Promote diversity and fairness in your classroom, and teach learners to respect all cultures. Use non-stereotypical examples, encourage alternative perspectives, and let learners share their lives and interests.

✓ Real-world application of the learning process

This can be ensured by providing clear instructions and expectations in line with the eight key competencies as a general reference to the specific learning objective in the curriculum.

✓ Guiding the learning process through **reflection and debriefing**.

As an experiential educator, you can use the following tips to guide each stage of reflection and debriefing for each learner and for the group (Contributor, 2022):

- Journals, portfolios, essays, presentations, or creative projects can all be used to help learners think about their experiences during reflection. You can also use questions to elicit responses, such as:
  - What did you do, and how did you feel throughout the event?
  - What did you take away from your experience?

- What is the relationship between the experience and the course concepts and theories?
- How will you put what you've learned into practice in your future goals and actions?
- Debriefing techniques such as group circles, fishbowls, role plays, and simulations can be used to facilitate discussion and feedback. You can also use questions to help guide the debriefing process, such as:
  - What were the most difficult and rewarding aspects of the experience?
  - During the experience, what did you notice and hear from others?
  - What impact did the experience have on your attitudes, beliefs, or values?
  - What are the implications and policy recommendations for the future?

III. Assessing Experiential Education Curriculums

✓ Developing assessment tools and methods

What kind of assessment should be used should depend on the learning goals, the experience itself, and what works best for each learner, the educator, and the learning group. Some of examples are:

- Through reflective journals or portfolios, learners record their learning objectives and process while critically analysing their own advantages, disadvantages, and room for growth. Learners' self-awareness, metacognition, and personal development can be evaluated using this method.
- Written assignments such as essays, reports, or presentations require learners to synthesise, communicate, and connect their experiences to pertinent theories and concepts. This approach can evaluate the learner's research, writing, and presentation abilities.
- Group or self-evaluation: learners evaluate their own performance as well as that of their peers, offering helpful criticism. This approach can give the learner an opportunity to evaluate their interpersonal, cooperative, and self-control abilities.

✓ Evaluating learning outcomes

To assess learning outcomes in relation to the development of eight key competencies, you can:

- Define your course or curriculum 's specific learning outcomes and align them with the relevant key competencies. For example, if your course is designed to help learners improve their communication skills, you can align it with the key competence of communication in the mother tongue and/or foreign languages.
- Select appropriate assessment methods and tools for measuring key competencies' knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Case studies, reflective journals, essays, self-evaluation, and group evaluation, for example, can be used to assess various aspects of the key competencies.
- Create and implement assessment activities, and provide learners with clear criteria and feedback. Rubrics, checklists, and portfolios, for example, can be used to document and communicate learners' performance and progress in key competencies.

- Analyse and interpret the assessment data, then apply what you've learned to improve your teaching and learning practices. You can, for example, use the assessment results to identify your learners' strengths and weaknesses and adjust your course content, methods, or strategies accordingly.

✓ Creating learning outputs

Learning outcomes, according to the European Commission, are statements of what a learner knows, understands, and is able to do after completing a learning process, and are defined in terms of knowledge, skills, and competences (Dias, 2020). In contrast, learning outputs are the tangible products or outcomes of the learning process, such as reports, presentations, portfolios, or certificates (Zipper, 2017).

- To ensure that concrete learning outputs are defined and distinct from learning outcomes in experiential education, follow these steps:
- Determine the learning outcomes learners want to achieve through experiential education and align them with the key competencies for lifelong learning.
- Select appropriate assessment methods and tools for measuring learning outcomes and providing feedback to learners.
- Design and implement experiential education activities, as well as specify the learning outputs that learners must produce and submit as evidence of their learning.
- To determine the learners' progress and achievement, evaluate the learning outputs using clear criteria and standards, and compare them to the learning outcomes.
- Use the assessment data and feedback to improve your teaching and learning practices and to help learners grow.

✓ Clarifying accreditation system

It is essential to realise the different between a certificate as an output and a certificate as an accreditation. A certificate of attendance can be useful for a professional career however it does not bring accreditation based on a criterion that a young person may need for their career and professional career.

✓   Incorporating feedback for curriculum improvement

It is important to ensure the flexibility and the development of the curriculum based on the learners' feedback not only after the implementation of the curriculum but also during the implementation of the curriculum. As a youth educator being flexible and open to improve the program based on the learners' feedback is a must to ensure moving the life-long learning aspect of experiential learning from theory to practice. For example, a youth educator may receive feedback from learners that a particular lesson in the curriculum is not engaging or relevant to their lives. In response to this feedback, the educator can modify the lesson to include more interactive activities or real-world examples that better resonate with the students. This adjustment allows the curriculum to better meet the needs and interests of the learners, enhancing their overall learning experience. However, there may be instances where learner feedback is not effectively utilised. For instance, if a teacher consistently receives feedback from students that the pace of the lessons is too fast and overwhelming but fails to make any adjustments, the students may continue to struggle and disengage from the learning process. In this scenario, the failure to address the feedback hinders the application of experiential learning principles and inhibits students' ability to fully benefit from their educational experience. There are several types of feedback, including formative, summative, peer, self, and educator feedback. Each type serves a specific purpose, offers distinct advantages, and presents unique challenges. Feedback's effectiveness is determined by a variety of factors, including its timing, specificity, realism, consistency, and frequency, as well as how it is delivered and received.

To incorporate feedback for experiential education curriculum improvement, educators must develop and implement feedback strategies that are consistent with learning objectives, assessment criteria, and learners needs (Cao, 2010). The educators should also monitor and evaluate the impact of feedback on learners and their practices as facilitators and learners themselves, while being flexible to make changes whenever needed.

Resources

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