

5 - Experiential Learning in Environmental Education

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Summary

Various activities that allow students to have a real experience, meaning they are in direct contact with the environment (natural or built) or with objects from that environment. The approach always ends with reflection on the experience.

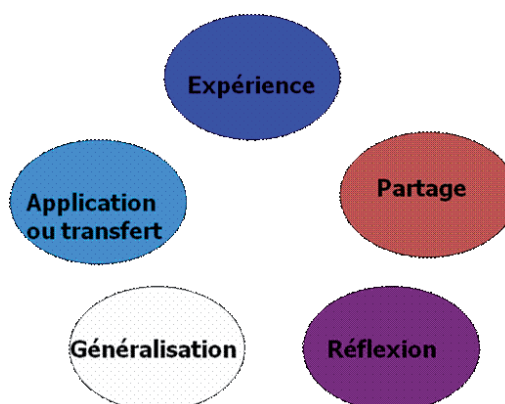
EE Objectives

- Awareness (awareness of one's beliefs and attitudes)
- Knowledge
- Attitude
- Skills
- Participation (only if students are asked to carry out a concrete action, individually or in a group, to help the environment)



Description

Experiential learning is a process in which students shape their understanding, expertise and interpersonal skills through affective and cognitive experiences with their biophysical or social environment. The experiential learning steps are as follows:



The essential elements of the experiential approach are the students' affective, intellectual, and physical involvement; reflection following the experience; the students' use of many senses; and direct contact with the reality studied. The general advantages of experiential learning are increased self-esteem and moral reasoning, a sense of accountability, an emphasis on social skills, a more positive attitude towards peers and adults, a desire to be socially involved, the feeling of having increased knowledge, improved problem-solving skills, and increased satisfaction. Experiential learning as part of EE restores the relationship with natural and built environments and with community members. It allows students to develop awareness of what is happening in their surrounding environment. It fosters a sense of belonging and a desire to act. It develops not only knowledge, but also skills (problem-solving, making sustainable choices, interpreting the environment's health) and attitudes (cooperation, taste for quality of life). Experiential learning in nature inspires, soothes, and offers new and unfamiliar stimuli.

Examples of EE experiential learning activities

- Going on a nature adventure to discover and appreciate a particular natural element.
- Walking through one's neighborhood and using indicators to assess the sustainability of the community.
- Working to solve a problem related to the discharge of pollutants into a watershed.
- Being alone for 15 minutes in a place of one's choice.
- Choosing and testing out a new environmental behaviour and sharing the experience with others.
- Carrying out a group action to help a marsh.
- Doing environmental services for community seniors: teaching them about pesticide-free gardening, educating them about more sustainable lifestyles, etc

Places conducive to experiential learning

- Relevant places in an urban environment (in a canoe on a city river, a moment of solitary thinking in a churchpark, etc.)
- Impressive places in the natural environment (particular flora, tide ebb and flow, special cavern, high mountain summit, etc.)

How to plan an EE experiential learning intervention

- At the start of the experience, inform students of an adventure, a goal, a challenge.
- Plan a series of activities that includes social, intellectual, and physical elements.
- Anticipate the experience of emotions: compassion, enjoyment, excitement, wonder, connection, a desire to share feelings, etc.
- Include activities that call for sensory contact (use of several senses) with the environment.
- Plan to use skills such as map drawing, investigating, etc.
- Include obstacles (real or imagined) that the participants must overcome.
- Set aside a time for sharing thoughts on the experience.
- Set aside a time for reflection on the learning goal (the state of the environment, the activity, the sustainable construction project); on oneself in relation to the learning goal; and on what has been learned



Useful references

- Ouellet, E., Pruneau, D., Langis, J., Freiman, V. and King, J. (2007). Mouille et Grouille. Guide pédagogique d'éducation à la résolution de problèmes environnementaux. Montréal: Biosphère de Montréal.
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- Pruneau, D., Doyon, A., Langis, J., Vasseur, L., Ouellet, E., Gélinas, V., LeBlanc, K., Martin, G. and Cormier, M. (2004). Vers des communautés climatosages. Guide pédagogique d'éducation au changement climatique (Maternelle à 8e année). Moncton, N.B.: Université de Moncton, Groupe de recherche Littoral et vie.
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