

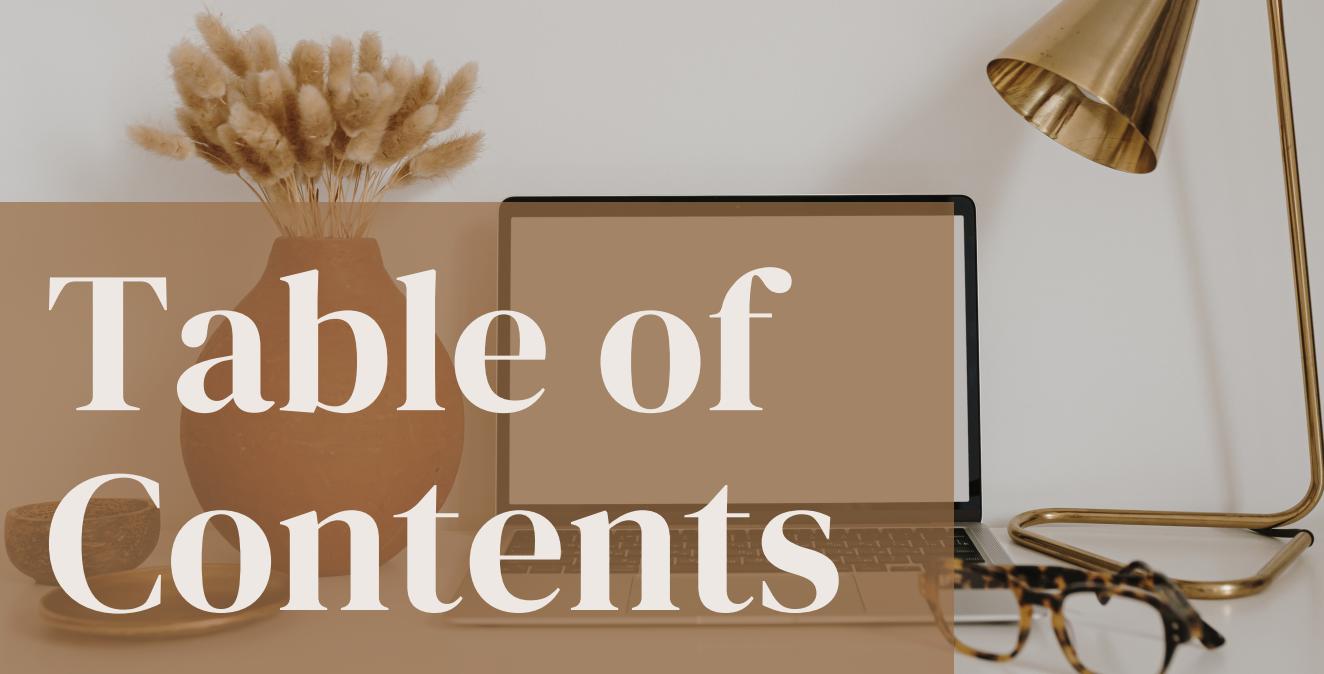


STORY ABOUT

Life *Learnings*

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Introduction

Life is a remarkable journey, filled with experiences, challenges, and moments of profound insight. Along this journey, we engage in a process of continuous learning and personal growth, acquiring wisdom and lessons that shape our perspectives, choices, and actions. Life learning refers to the transformative knowledge and understanding gained from our diverse experiences, offering us the opportunity to navigate our lives with purpose, resilience, and a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

Life learning encompasses a broad range of experiences and sources of knowledge. It extends beyond formal education and embraces the lessons we gain from everyday encounters, relationships, successes, failures, and moments of introspection. It is a lifelong process that transcends age, culture, and circumstances, as each person's unique path contributes to their personal growth and wisdom.

One of the fundamental aspects of life learning is self-reflection. Taking the time to introspect and examine our thoughts, emotions, and actions allows us to gain self-awareness and insight. Through reflection, we can recognize patterns, strengths, and areas for improvement, enabling us to make informed choices and better understand our values, beliefs, and aspirations. Self-reflection serves as a powerful tool for personal growth and empowers us to live authentically and purposefully.

Life learning also stems from embracing challenges and setbacks as opportunities for growth. Adversity provides fertile ground for resilience, strength, and self-discovery. Each obstacle we encounter offers valuable lessons in perseverance, adaptability, and problem-solving, enabling us to develop the skills necessary to overcome future hurdles. Through these experiences, we learn to embrace uncertainty, step outside our comfort zones, and realize our potential.

Furthermore, life learning is deeply intertwined with our relationships and interactions with others. The connections we forge, both intimate and casual, present opportunities for growth, empathy, and understanding. Each encounter teaches us about compassion, cooperation, conflict resolution, and the intricacies of human nature. We learn to appreciate diverse perspectives, communicate effectively, and navigate the complexities of interpersonal dynamics.

Introduction

Life learning also involves embracing change and embracing the ebb and flow of life's transitions. Change serves as a catalyst for growth, pushing us to adapt, evolve, and embrace new possibilities.

By acknowledging the impermanence of life and embracing the transformative power of change, we cultivate resilience, open-mindedness, and a sense of curiosity that fuels our ongoing learning journey.



In conclusion, life learning is a transformative process that encompasses the knowledge and wisdom gained from our experiences, relationships, challenges, and self-reflection. It is a lifelong journey of personal growth and self-discovery, offering us valuable insights, resilience, and a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world. Embracing life's lessons allows us to navigate our path with purpose, authenticity, and an ongoing commitment to personal evolution.

Experiential Learning

“Experiential learning is a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with students in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values” (Association for Experiential Education, para. 2).

Experiential learning is also referred to as learning through action, learning by doing, learning through experience, and learning through discovery and exploration, all which are clearly defined by these well-known maxims:

- I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand. ~ Confucius, 450 BC.
- Tell me and I forget, Teach me and I remember, Involve me and I will learn. ~ Benjamin Franklin, 1750
- There is an intimate and necessary relation between the process of actual experience and education. ~ John Dewey, 1938

In their book, *Teaching for Experiential Learning*, Wurdinger and Carlson (2010) found that most college faculty teach by lecturing because few of them learned how to teach otherwise. Although good lecturing should be part of an educator’s teaching repertoire, faculty should also actively involve their students “in the learning process through discussion, group work, hands-on participation, and applying information outside the classroom” (p. 2). This process defines experiential learning where students are involved in learning content in which they have a personal interest, need, or want.

Learning through experience is not a new concept for the college classroom. Notable educational psychologists such as John Dewey (1859-1952), Carl Rogers (1902-1987), and David Kolb (b. 1939) have provided the groundwork of learning theories that focus on “learning through experience or “learning by doing.” Dewey popularized the concept of Experiential Education which focuses on problem solving and critical thinking rather than memorization and rote learning.



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Experiential Learning

Rogers considered experiential learning “significant” as compared to what he called “meaningless” cognitive learning. Kolb also noted that concrete learning experiences are critical to meaningful learning and is well known for his Learning Style Inventory (LSI) which is widely used in many disciplines today to help identify preferred ways of learning. A key element of experiential learning, therefore, is the student, and that learning takes place (the knowledge gained) as a result of being personally involved in this pedagogical approach.



Principles of Experiential Learning

Unlike traditional classroom situations where students may compete with one another or remain uninvolved or unmotivated and where the instruction is highly structured, students in experiential learning situations cooperate and learn from one another in a more semi-structured approach. Instruction is designed to engage students in direct experiences which are tied to real world problems and situations in which the instructor facilitates rather than directs student progress. “The focus of EL is placed on the process of learning and not the product of learning” (UC Davis, 2011, para 6). Proponents of experiential learning assert that students will be more motivated to learn when they have a personal stake in the subject rather than being assigned to review a topic or read a textbook chapter. What is essential in EL, however, “that the phases of experiencing (doing), reflection and applying are present. In addition, “the stages of reflection and application are what make experiential learning different and more powerful than the models commonly referred to as ‘learn-by-doing’ or ‘hands-on-learning’” (UC Davis, 2011, para 12 citing Proudfman).

The following is a list of experiential learning principles as noted from the (Association for Experiential Education, 2011, para 4):

- Experiential learning occurs when carefully chosen experiences are supported by reflection, critical analysis and synthesis.
- Experiences are structured to require the student to take initiative, make decisions and be accountable for results.
- Throughout the experiential learning process, the student is actively engaged in posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative and constructing meaning.
- Students are engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially, soulfully and/or physically. This involvement produces a perception that the learning task is authentic.
- The results of the learning are personal and form the basis for future experience and learning.
- Relationships are developed and nurtured: student to self, student to others and student to the world at large.
- The instructor and student may experience success, failure, adventure, risk-taking and uncertainty, because the outcomes of the experience cannot totally be predicted.
- Opportunities are nurtured for students and instructors to explore and examine their own values.

Principles of Experiential Learning

- The instructor's primary roles include setting suitable experiences, posing problems, setting boundaries, supporting students, insuring physical and emotional safety, and facilitating the learning process.
 - The instructor recognizes and encourages spontaneous opportunities for learning.
 - Instructors strive to be aware of their biases, judgments and pre-conceptions, and how these influence the student.
 - The design of the learning experience includes the possibility to learn from natural consequences, mistakes and successes.
- 

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Experiential Learning Process

Experiential learning involves a number of steps that offer student a hands-on, collaborative and reflective learning experience which helps them to “fully learn new skills and knowledge” (Haynes, 2007). Although learning content is important, learning from the process is at the heart of experiential learning. During each step of the experience, students will engage with the content, the instructor, each other as well as self-reflect and apply what they have learned in another situation.

The following describes the steps that comprise experiential learning as noted by (Haynes, 2007, para. 6 and UC Davis, 2011).

Experiencing/Exploring

“Doing”

Students will perform or do a hands-on minds-on experience with little or no help from the instructor. Examples might include: Making products or models, role-playing, giving a presentation, problem-solving, playing a game. A key facet of experiential learning is what the student learns from the experience rather than the quantity or quality of the experience.

Although learning content is important, learning from the process is at the heart of experiential learning.

Sharing/Reflecting “What Happened?”

Students will share the results, reactions and observations with their peers. Students will also get other peers to talk about their own experience, share their reactions and observations and discuss feelings generated by the experience. The sharing equates to reflecting on what they discovered and relating it to past experiences which can be used for future use.

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Processing/Analyzing “What’s Important?”

Students will discuss, analyze and reflect upon the experience. Describing and analyzing their experiences allow students to relate them to future learning experiences. Students will also discuss how the experience was carried out, how themes, problems and issues emerged as a result of the experience. Students will discuss how specific problems or issues were addressed and to identify recurring themes.

Generalizing “So What?”

Students will connect the experience with real world examples, find trends or common truths in the experience, and identify “real life” principles that emerged.

Experiential Learning Process

Application “Now What?”

Students will apply what they learned in the experience (and what they learned from past experiences and practice) to a similar or different situation. Also, students will discuss how the newly learned process can be applied to other situations. Students will discuss how issues raised can be useful in future situations and how more effective behaviors can develop from what they learned. The instructor should help each student feel a sense of ownership for what was learned.

In experiential learning, the instructor guides rather than directs the learning process where students are naturally interested in learning.

Experiential learning is an educational approach that emphasizes learning through direct experience and active engagement. It goes beyond traditional classroom instruction by providing students with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in practical contexts, engage in hands-on activities, and reflect on their experiences. This approach addresses several key needs in education and personal development:

- 1. Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice:** Experiential learning helps bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application. It provides students with opportunities to translate abstract concepts and principles into practical skills and abilities. By actively engaging in real-life scenarios, students gain a deeper understanding of how theoretical knowledge can be applied to solve problems, make informed decisions, and achieve desired outcomes.
- 2. Enhancing Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills:** Experiential learning fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills by presenting students with authentic, complex challenges. Through hands-on experiences, students are encouraged to analyze situations, evaluate options, make decisions, and adapt their approaches based on real-time feedback. This process develops their ability to think critically, consider multiple perspectives, and generate innovative solutions.

Experiential Learning Process

3. **Promoting Active Engagement and Motivation:** Experiential learning promotes active engagement and motivation by providing meaningful and relevant learning experiences. Students are actively involved in the learning process, which can enhance their interest, curiosity, and intrinsic motivation. By connecting learning to real-life situations and personal interests, experiential learning encourages students to take ownership of their learning journey and become active participants in their education.
4. **Developing Transferable Skills:** Experiential learning focuses on developing transferable skills that are applicable across various domains and contexts. These skills include effective communication, collaboration, teamwork, adaptability, leadership, and problem-solving. By engaging in experiential learning activities, students have the opportunity to cultivate these skills, which are highly sought after in the professional world and essential for lifelong learning.
5. **Fostering Emotional Intelligence and Self-Awareness:** Experiential learning encourages self-reflection and fosters emotional intelligence. Through hands-on experiences, students have the chance to gain insights into their own strengths, weaknesses, values, and beliefs. This self-awareness helps them develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their emotions, as well as empathy and understanding towards others. Such emotional intelligence is crucial for personal growth, interpersonal relationships, and effective leadership.
6. **Cultivating Real-World Readiness:** Experiential learning prepares students for real-world challenges and enhances their readiness for future endeavors. By engaging in practical experiences, students develop skills, knowledge, and competencies that are directly applicable in professional settings and everyday life. They gain confidence, adaptability, and a sense of efficacy, empowering them to navigate the complexities of the real world and succeed in various domains.

In summary, experiential learning addresses the need for practical application, active engagement, and real-world readiness in education. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, enhancing critical thinking skills, promoting active engagement, fostering transferable skills, developing emotional intelligence, and cultivating real-life readiness, experiential learning provides a rich and meaningful educational experience that prepares students for success in both academic and personal pursuits.

Integrating Experiential in Teaching

As previously noted, a primary role for instructors is to identify a situation which challenges students through problem-solving, cooperation, collaboration, self-discovery and self-reflection. At the same time, decide what the students should learn or gain from the learning experience. Below are some primary points to consider when integrating experiential learning in your own teaching.

Plan

Once the EL experience has been decided upon, plan the experience by tying it to the course learning objectives and determine what students will need to successfully complete the exercise (resources such as readings and worksheets, research, rubrics, supplies and directions to off-campus locations, etc.). Also, determine the logistics: how much time will be allotted for the students to complete the experience (a complete class session, one week or more)? Will students need to work outside of class? How will the experience end? What forms of assessment will you employ? Will you use ongoing assessments such as observations and journals (called formative assessment), end of experience assessments such as written reports and projects, self and/or peer assessments, or a combination of all three?

Prepare

After the planning has been completed, prepare materials, rubrics, and assessment tools and ensure that everything is ready before the experience begins.

Facilitate

As with most instructional strategies, the instructor should commence the experience. Once begun, you should refrain from providing students with all of the content and information and complete answers to their questions. Instead, guide students through the process of finding and determining solutions for themselves.

Evaluate

Success of an experiential learning activity can be determined during discussions, reflections and a debriefing session. Debriefing, as a culminating experience, can help to reinforce and extend the learning process. In addition, make use of the assessment strategies previously planned.

Four stages of Experiential learning Cycle

In the development of experiential learning interventions, programs, and activities, it is important to have a guiding framework to ensure their effectiveness and maximize the learning outcomes. One widely recognized and utilized framework is the **Experiential Learning Cycle, developed by David Kolb**. This model outlines a cyclical process that incorporates key elements of experiential learning. The four stages of the Experiential Learning Cycle are:

- 1. Concrete Experience:** This stage involves providing participants with hands-on, real-world experiences that are directly relevant to the learning objectives. It could include activities such as simulations, field trips, role-playing, or problem-solving exercises. The concrete experience serves as a foundation for the subsequent stages of the learning cycle.
- 2. Reflective Observation:** After the concrete experience, participants engage in reflective observation to carefully review and analyze their experiences. This stage encourages individuals to reflect on what happened during the experience, what they observed, and the emotions and thoughts that arose. Facilitated discussions, journaling, or guided reflection exercises can support this stage, allowing participants to gain deeper insights and make connections between the experience and their existing knowledge.
- 3. Abstract Conceptualization:** In this stage, participants abstract and conceptualize their observations and reflections by connecting them to theoretical frameworks, concepts, or models. This involves analyzing the experience, identifying patterns, and extracting general principles or concepts. Participants may engage in discussions, lectures, readings, or interactive exercises to help them make sense of their experiences and relate them to broader theories or ideas.
- 4. Active Experimentation:** The final stage of the Experiential Learning Cycle focuses on applying the insights gained from reflection and abstract conceptualization into practical action. Participants engage in activities that allow them to test new approaches, experiment with different strategies, and apply their learning to real or simulated situations. This stage emphasizes active engagement, problem-solving, and learning through trial and error.

Four stages of Experiential learning Cycle

The Experiential Learning Cycle is a flexible framework that can be adapted to various contexts and learning objectives. It encourages participants to actively engage in their own learning process, promotes critical thinking, and facilitates the integration of theory and practice. By designing interventions, programs, and activities that incorporate these four stages, facilitators can create meaningful and transformative learning experiences for participants.

It is important to note that while the Experiential Learning Cycle provides a valuable framework, the specific design of experiential learning interventions should be tailored to the specific goals, target audience, and learning context. The framework should be supplemented with appropriate instructional strategies, assessments, and facilitation techniques to ensure the desired learning outcomes are achieved.

Four - Life Learning Model

The future-ready learner's agenda needs to focus on the meaning of purposeful learning as encapsulated in Life-long, Life-deep, Life-wide and Life-wise Learning ("Four-Life Learning"). These four forms are anchored by social emotional regulation and the well-being of the individual learner as shown in image below.



1. **Life-long Learning** is about the learning that occurs across one's lifespan, from infancy to adulthood. It is about what is retained, why such knowledge, skills and dispositions are usefully kept, and the metacognitive processes that enable this.
2. **Life-deep Learning** is about deep understanding of disciplinary content and also about adaptive expertise, which is about achieving both efficiency and innovation. Adaptive expertise is a key future-ready competency that learners must have to be able to balance between efficiency in doing tasks fluently and innovativeness in doing tasks creatively.
3. **Life-wise Learning** is something we feel is deeply important to our future society, one which focuses the learners not only on values, morals, character, but on historical empathy.
4. **Life-wide Learning** is about learning in multiple contexts. Learning occurs not just within the boundaries of the school, but outside of school, in informal learning environments.

Experiential Learning Opportunities in Higher Education

There are numerous experiential learning opportunities in higher education that can be found in most disciplines. The following is a list of these experiences as noted by (George Mason University, 2011; Loretto, 2011; Northern Illinois University OTC, 2011).

Apprenticeship Experiences provide students an opportunity to try out a job usually with an experienced professional in the field to act as a mentor. Apprenticeships are a type of on the job training which may lead to certification. Many skilled laborers learn their trade by doing an apprenticeship.

Clinical Experiences are hands-on experiences of a pre-determined duration directly tied to an area of study such as nursing students participating in a hospital-based experience or child development and teacher education students participating in day care and classroom settings.

Cooperative Education Experiences are more extensive than internships and will usually span two or more semesters of work. Co-ops are paid professional work experiences and are tied very closely to the student's academic work. During the co-op experience students will receive ongoing advising and the co-op will be structured to meet the student's academic and/or career goals. Co-op experience usually is included on a student's transcript in addition to being awarded designated credit hours for its completion.

Fellowship Experiences provide tuition or aid to support the training of students for a period of time, usually between 6 months to one year. They are usually made by educational institutions, corporations, or foundations to assist individuals pursuing a course of study or research. Post-graduate fellowships assist students at the graduate level while post-doctorate fellowships provide monies for those who have already achieved their doctorate degree.

Field Work Experiences allow students to explore and apply content learned in the classroom in a specified field experience away from the classroom. Field work experiences bridge educational experiences with an outside community which can range from neighborhoods and schools to anthropological dig sites and laboratory settings.

Experiential Learning Opportunities in Higher Education

Internship Experiences are job-related and provide students and job changers with an opportunity to test the waters in a career field and also gain some valuable work experience. Internships can be for credit, not for credit, paid or unpaid.

Practicum Experiences are often a required component of a course of study and place students in a supervised and often paid situation. Students develop competencies and apply previously studied theory and content such as school library media students working in a high school library or marketing majors working in a marketing research firm. Practicum experiences also allow students to design and develop a project in which they apply knowledge and develop skills such as a doctoral student preparing the components of an online course.

Service Learning Experiences are distinguished by being mutually beneficial for both student and community. Service learning is growing rapidly and is considered a part of experiential education by its very nature of learning, performing a job within the community, and serious reflection by the student. Service learning involves solving some of society's issues; such as, homelessness, poverty, lack of quality education, pollution, etc. One of the goals of service learning is to help students become aware of these issues and develop good citizenship in learning how to help solve some of these problems.

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Experiential Learning Opportunities in Higher Education

Student Teaching Experiences provides student candidates with an opportunity to put into practice the knowledge and skills he or she has been developing in the preparation program. Student teaching typically involves an on-site experience in a partner school and opportunities for formal and informal candidate reflection on their teaching experience.

The on-site teaching portion of this experience can range from ten to sixteen weeks, depending on the program.

Study Abroad Experiences offer students a unique opportunity to learn in another culture, within the security of a host family and a host institution carefully chosen to allow the transfer of credit to a student's degree program. Students studying a foreign language will perfect the accent and greatly expand their vocabulary--a skill retained for life. Making new friends, and travel and decision making, are also key parts of the study abroad experience.

Volunteer Experiences allow students to serve in a community primarily because they choose to do so. Many serve through a non-profit organization – sometimes referred to as formal volunteering, but a significant number also serve less formally, either individually or as part of a group. Because these informal volunteers are much harder to identify, they may not be included in research and statistics on volunteering.

Experiential Learning Opportunities at Northern Illinois University

The Office of Student Engagement and Experiential Learning (OSEEL) provides “opportunities for undergraduates to engage in hands-on learning. Through OSEEL's undergraduate research, service learning, themed learning communities, and other high impact practices, NIU students will develop critical thinking, use creativity, and employ multiple communication strategies while applying their skills to real-world problems. As an outgrowth of the Curricular Innovations strategic plan, OSEEL works collaboratively across university divisions and colleges to create sustainable, relevant, student-centered, research-based programming which utilizes experiential learning, both in and out of the classroom to promote and sustain student academic success. Each of OSEEL's programs align directly with the eight student learning outcomes of the Baccalaureate Review as NIU seeks to enhance the cognitive, social, and academic skills of its students to prepare them to be life-long students and responsible citizens in our ever-changing, global society” (OSEEL, 2011, para. 1).

Since 2000, the Experiential Learning Center (ELC) in the College of Business has been connecting “teams of NIU students with organizations to tackle real-world business issues. From software evaluation to emerging market analysis projects, students serve as consultants addressing non-mission critical, cross functional business issues. Throughout the 16-week semester, Business ELC teams are guided by a faculty coach and assisted by an organizational sponsor. To each unique project, teams apply the Business ELC project methodology, as well as the knowledge, skills and theories learned in the classroom” (ELC 2001).