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Research Brief

Experiential Education

Question: What does research say about Experiential Education?

Summary of Findings:

Learning through experience is the process of acquiring knowledge directly; the learner applies theories and concepts in a real world situation and learns from the outcome. Experiential education is essentially an educational philosophy first developed in the late nineteenth century and has since been articulated in a variety of fields including cooperative education, internships, outdoor education, organizational development and training, and service- learning.

The essence of Experiential Education was captured by the philosopher John Dewey, who argued that "Events are present and operative anyway; what concerns us is their meaning." Experience happens; it is unavoidable. The problem for teachers and students is how to make meaning out of our experience. In its purest forms, Experiential Education is inductive, beginning with "raw" experience that is processed through an intentional learning format and transformed into working, useable knowledge.

Common forms of Experiential Education

- Internships
- Service-Learning
- School-to-Work
- Cooperative Education
- Field Studies
- Cross-Cultural/International Education
- Leadership Development
- Active Learning

Experiential Education has been shown to positively impact at-risk students, put learning into context, and make learning more meaningful for students.

Online Resources:

National Society for Experiential Education

The National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE) is a nonprofit membership association of educators, businesses, and community leaders. Founded in 1971, NSEE also serves as a national resource center for the development and improvement of experiential education programs nationwide. NSEE serves as a national network deeply committed to advancing experiential education as a tool for education reform, civic awareness, and workforce development.

<http://www.nsee.org>



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Association for Experiential Education

The mission of the Association for Experiential Education is to develop and promote experiential education. The Association is committed to support professional development, theoretical advancement, and evaluation of experiential education worldwide.

<http://www.aee.org/index.html>

Outdoor and Experiential Education Programs for Adolescent Girls

A sample of programs nationwide and miscellaneous resources.

<http://www.womanonsafari.org/girlsresource/>

National Service-Learning Clearinghouse

The Learn and Serve America National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (NSLC) supports the service-learning community in higher education, kindergarten through grade twelve, community-based initiatives and tribal programs, as well as all others interested in strengthening schools and communities using service-learning techniques and methodologies. The Clearinghouse stands ready to assist with materials, references, referrals, and information.

<http://www.servicelearning.org/article/frontpage/1/>

The Journal of Experiential Education

JEE is a professional journal that publishes a diverse range of articles in subject area such as outdoor adventure programming, service learning, environmental education, therapeutic applications, research and theory, the creative arts, and much more.

<http://www.aee.org/publications/journal/aeejourn.html>

Outdoor, Experiential, and Environmental Education: Converging or Diverging Approaches? ERIC Digest.

Adkins, Carol; Simmons, Bora

This digest examines the definitions of outdoor, experiential, and environmental education and clarifies the boundaries and essential elements of each tradition. Early in its history, outdoor education was influenced by advocates of camping education and nature study. Today outdoor education includes outdoor experiences designed to meet objectives in many areas and has emerged as a context for learning. Experiential education was embraced by outdoor and adventure educators as a method of using real-life experiences to achieve learning goals. Definitions have progressed from "learning by doing" to more constructivist notions of learning through carefully chosen experiences supported by reflection and critical analysis. While tracing its lineage, in part, to outdoor education, environmental education began to take concrete form in the late 1960s with the first Earth Day and publication of the first journal of environmental education. The basic aim of environmental education is to develop environmentally literate citizens with the core concepts and skills needed to take responsible action with regard to the natural environment. Educational practices commonly draw from combinations of outdoor, experiential, and environmental education. Examples of combined approaches are given.

<http://www.ericdigests.org/2003-2/outdoor.html>



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Does Service Learning Make a Difference in Student Performance?

Fredericksen, Patricia J.

Journal of Experiential Education v23 n2 p64-74 Fall 2000

A study examining the characteristics of students engaged in service learning and the association between service learning participation and student performance involved 699 college students in an American government course over three semesters. Females and lower-income students were more likely to be service learning participants, and service learning participation was positively associated with academic performance.

http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3907/is_200010/ai_n8908332

Foxfire

Foxfire (The Foxfire Fund, Inc.) is a not-for-profit, educational, and literary organization based in Rabun County, Georgia. Foxfire's learner-centered, community-based educational approach is advocated through both a regional demonstration site grounded in the Southern Appalachian culture that gave rise to Foxfire and a national program of teacher training and support that promotes a sense of place and appreciation of local people, community, and culture as essential educational tools.

<http://www.foxfire.org/>

The Foxfire Approach to Teaching and Learning: John Dewey, Experiential Learning, and the Core Practices. ERIC Digest.

Starnes, Bobby Ann

The Foxfire approach to teaching and learning emerged from an experiential education program that used oral history methods to teach English to high school freshmen in Appalachian Georgia. In the 30 years since that program began, hundreds of teachers have helped develop and revise Foxfire's 11 core practices. This digest describes the Foxfire approach to teaching and learning as defined by the core practices, the decision-making framework the approach provides to teachers, and the ways that the framework fits with John Dewey's notion of experiential education. The core practices call for infusing all work with learner choice and design; the teacher as collaborator or facilitator; academic integrity of the work; work characterized by active learning; emphasis on peer teaching, small group work, and teamwork; connections between classroom work and the real world; audience beyond the teacher for student work; basing new activities on past learning experiences; encouragement of imagination and creativity in the completion of learning activities; student reflection on the work; and rigorous, ongoing evaluation. Over 50 years ago, Dewey expressed the belief that "all genuine education comes through experience." The 11 core practices are compared to Dewey's ideas about four aspects of education: the relationships among teachers, learners, the curriculum, and the community; the ways learning occurs; preparing students for full lives as citizens and individuals; and reflection and evaluation

<http://www.ericdigests.org/1999-3/foxfire.htm>



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Outdoored.Com

A web resource for outdoor & experiential education professionals. The purpose of OutdoorEd.com is to provide a rich community for professional outdoor and experiential educators to come together and share their knowledge, ideas, questions, and issues.

<http://www.outdoored.com/>

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