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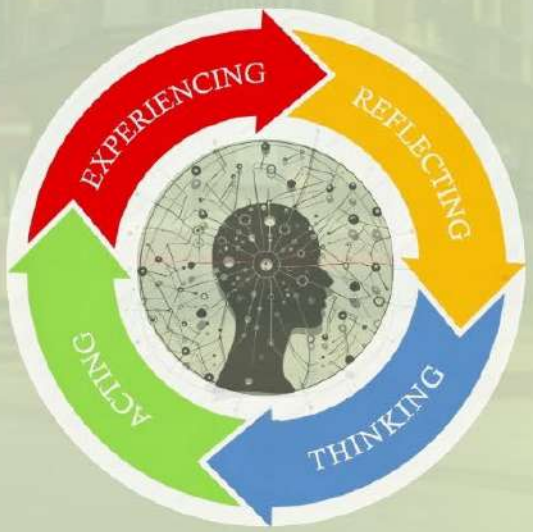
2025 MAR 19-21 KATOWICE POLAND In-person & Online

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CONGRESS

FULL TEXT PROCEEDINGS



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Editors

Prof. Dr. İlke EVİN GENCEL
Duygunur AKGÜN

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EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CONGRESS

The Experiential Learning Congress 2025 is an international forum that brings together scholars, educators, and practitioners dedicated to advancing Experiential Learning Theory and practice. Hosted in Katowice, it provides a platform for sharing research, innovative pedagogies, and contemporary applications of experiential learning across diverse contexts.

Organized with the International Experiential Learning Network (IELN), the congress features keynotes, research sessions, and interactive workshops that foster dialogue on meaningful learning, global citizenship, and transformative educational environments. Bringing together participants from multiple countries and disciplines, the congress promotes international collaboration, evidence-based practice, and new perspectives on learning and professional development.

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WELCOME NOTES

Michał Pietrzok
FEIO European Institute of Outsourcing
Co-president of the Congress 2025

There are moments in our work when we are called to step beyond what is safe, stable, and familiar. Organizing the first Experiential Learning Congress in Katowice was one of those moments ambitious, uncertain, full of risk, and full of meaning.

In the world of non-governmental organizations, we often chase stabilization. We build repeatable formats, proven models, recognizable patterns. That's natural after all, professionalization gives us structure. But I've learned that in doing so, we sometimes lose something essential: the courage to do something new, something bigger, something that might not work. Something meaningful.

The idea of the Congress was born out of that courage. What followed was nearly half a year of preparation, decision-making across borders and time zones, countless conversations, and just as many compromises. Our Polish and Turkish teams worked tirelessly to bring this vision to life. It wasn't easy — and I'm convinced that's exactly why it became so valuable. If it had come together effortlessly, it might have been just another event. But it wasn't. It demanded our time, our energy, our trust, and our resilience.

We had to scale our vision back from time to time. The original scope was broader, the numbers higher, the ambitions limitless. But part of the maturity of such work is knowing when enough is enough — when something compact, focused, and human is better than something overwhelming. And in the end, I believe we created a space that was not perfect, but good, real, and unforgettable.

I often think of Kolb's Learning Cycle when I reflect on the Congress. For many participants, I hope the experience mirrored the curve of that model: entering with ease, engaging with others, reflecting deeply, and leaving with ideas ready to test and grow. But as organizers, we saw a different side of the cycle — one that was messy, nonlinear, and exhausting. And yet, also full of "aha" moments: when a new partnership was formed, when someone agreed to support the idea, when we realized that despite the doubts it's happening.

Looking back now, I feel deep gratitude. For our partners, for my co-presidents Ilke and Mustafa, for the teams who stood behind this project, and for everyone who believed in it. The Congress may now be behind us, but its spirit continues in this publication, in future collaborations, and in all those who carry forward the values of experiential learning.

Thank you for being part of this journey.

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Prof. Dr. İlke Evin Gencel
Co-president of the Congress 2025

Academic life occasionally offers rare moments when research, practice, and human connection converge in meaningful ways—moments that shape how we think, teach, and collaborate. The Experiential Learning Congress 2025 in Katowice was exactly such a moment for me. It brought together scholars, practitioners, youth workers, educators, designers, and leaders from multiple sectors with one shared purpose: to deepen our understanding of how people learn and to build bridges between theory and real-world practice.

As an academic whose work centers on experiential learning, curriculum design, and teacher education, I have believed that the strength of experiential learning lies in the dynamic interaction between research and practice. I would also like to acknowledge the lifelong contributions of David A. Kolb and Alice Y. Kolb. Their generous support and our many years of collaboration have continually deepened my understanding of experiential learning and strengthened the foundations upon which this congress was built. This congress demonstrated that power in its most complete form. Each keynote, workshop, and presentation reflected a commitment to transforming learning through authentic experience, whether in universities, NGOs, schools, companies, or community settings. Each keynote, workshop, and presentation reflected a commitment to transforming learning through authentic experience, whether in universities, NGOs, schools, companies, or community settings.

The papers presented at this congress offered valuable evidence on how experiential learning enhances reflection, strengthens professional identity, encourages creativity, and supports collaboration across sectors. This cross-pollination of perspectives is not merely an enrichment; it is what makes experiential learning a powerful tool for social and institutional transformation.

Equally important was the spirit in which this congress was created. In many ways, our organizing process mirrored the experiential learning cycle itself: concrete challenges, reflective conversations, conceptual redesigns, and active experimentation. Every step—from planning across countries to hosting participants in Katowice—was part of a shared learning journey.

I am grateful to my co-presidents, Michał Pietrzok and Mustafa Erdoğan, to the organizing committee, and to every participant who contributed with their expertise, passion, and openness. Experiential learning has always been more than a method; it is a way of seeing the world, acting within it, and creating meaningful change.

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Mustafa Erdoğan
President of DeM Experiential Training Center
Co-president of the Congress 2025

Our journey into experiential learning began many years ago within the European Union youth programs, where we first encountered the transformative potential of learning through experience. As practitioners grounded in the field, we later established the Experiential Training Center and, eventually, the International Experiential Learning Association—guided by the conviction that experiential learning should be accessible, understood, and strengthened across communities.

Over the years, we have recognized an essential truth: when practitioners work without theoretical grounding and when theorists remain detached from practice, the learning ecosystem becomes fragmented.

Experiential learning reveals its full power only when research and practice meet. The Experiential Learning Congress 2025 embodied this principle. Bringing together professionals from non-formal learning, academia, civil society, and diverse fields, it created a unique global platform for dialogue and collaboration. From the United States to Africa, from Europe to the Middle East, experiential learning communities came together at an unprecedented scale—marking an important step toward shaping the global future of the field.

Today, in an era shaped by artificial intelligence, the ability to learn from experience has become even more critical. AI may process information, but it cannot replace the human capacity to connect, reflect, contextualize, and create meaning. The congress made one message unmistakably clear: the future of learning depends on cross-sector collaboration.

Only through genuine cooperation among academia, non-formal education, the private sector, and civil society can we build a learning culture that is meaningful, inclusive, and impactful.

This publication is more than a collection of congress papers; it is a milestone in the shared memory and ongoing development of our experiential learning community. I extend my gratitude to all institutions and individuals who contributed to this vision: our international network, the International Experiential Learning Network; David A. Kolb and Alice Y. Kolb, whose lifelong work continues to guide us; our host organization, Fundacja Europejski Instytut Outsourcingu (FEIO); and all volunteers, researchers, facilitators, and practitioners whose dedication shaped this event.

This congress emerged through our collective effort—and together, we have strengthened the future of experiential learning.

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KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Prof. Dr. David A. Kolb
Chairman
Experience Based Learning Systems

David A. Kolb is an internationally recognized scholar and the principal developer of Experiential Learning Theory. His work has shaped contemporary understanding of how individuals learn, grow, and perform in educational and organizational settings. As Professor Emeritus of Organizational Behavior at Case Western Reserve University, he has made foundational contributions to adult learning, experiential education, and professional development. His publications and models are widely used across disciplines and remain central to research and practice in learning and development worldwide.

Dr. Alice Y. Kolb
President and CEO
Experience Based Learning Systems

Alice Y. Kolb is the President of Experience Based Learning Systems (EBLS), a research and development organization dedicated to advancing and applying experiential learning worldwide. She co-developed the Kolb Learning Style Inventory 4.0 and led the team that created the Kolb Educator Role Profile, both widely used in adult education and organizational development. Born in Brazil and educated in Japan and the United States, she holds a Ph.D. in Organizational Behavior from Case Western Reserve University and is fluent in Portuguese, Spanish, Japanese, and English.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CONGRESS

Prof. Dr. David & Dr. Alice KOLB

David and Alice Kolb delivered an interactive keynote highlighting key developments in Experiential Learning Theory, the shift to experiential learning profiles, and the role of the Educator Role Profile. Through personal insights and global examples, they addressed common misconceptions, discussed implications for diverse learners and online settings, and emphasized experiential learning as a deeply human, reflective, and future-oriented response to the challenges of an AI-driven world. Their dialogue invited participants to engage with experiential learning as a collaborative, meaning-making process grounded in authentic experience and shared inquiry.

From "Learning Styles" to Experiential Learning Profiles

Question: Why the transition from Kolb Learning Style Inventory to Kolb Experiential Learning Profile?

David Kolb

Public discourse increasingly labeled "learning styles" a myth, often critiquing instruments not grounded in a learning theory. The Kolb instrument was frequently lumped in with these critiques despite being distinct.

Experiential learning has always centered the learning cycle a dynamic process of how people engage experience, reflect, conceptualize, and act. "Style" is best seen as one's habitual resting places or emphases within the cycle. The term "profile" better captures this dynamic, theory-based orientation not a fixed label.

Alice Kolb

Experiential Learning Theory is the foundational theory behind the Kolb instrument. Among popular tools, this theory uniquely offers a systematic, integrative learning theory grounding the instrument. The shift to profile clarifies that the tool is about how individuals engage the learning cycle, not about typologies detached from theory.

The Educator Role Profile and Its Complementarity with KELP

Question: How does the educator role profile help educators teach to diverse learning profiles?

Alice Kolb

Educator Role Profile was developed in 2009 in response to educators' needs for a tool complementary to KELP, shifting the focus from how we learn to how we teach along the learning cycle. Research shows many educators tend to teach as they learn (e.g., "concrete" educators excel in relationship-oriented debriefing and questioning; "abstract" educators emphasize content and critical thinking). Educator role profile helps educators map their teaching roles across the cycle and invites them to expand repertoire so that, over a course or year, they navigate the full cycle with learners.

In its simplest form, becoming a good educator, one must first be a learner—open to self-reflection, flexibility, and continuous development.

What Experiential Learning Is Not? Common Misinterpretations

Question: What are the most common misunderstandings?

Alice Kolb

Practices (e.g., trips outside classrooms, ropes courses, wilderness exploration) that emphasize motion or activity without integrating the full cycle especially reflection, debriefing, feedback, and revised action. Experiential learning requires the whole cycle: Concrete Experience → Reflective Observation → Abstract Conceptualization → Active Experimentation. Activity alone, without guided reflection and conceptual integration, is not experiential learning.

Personal Journeys into Experiential Learning

Question: How did you get into this field? What led you here?

David Kolb

This question has been asked of me many times over the years, and each time I have reflected on it, I have realized that my first encounter with experiential learning happened earlier than I once thought.

It began when I was teaching organizational behavior to engineering students at MIT. I was, frankly, a terrible lecturer. My first contact with experiential learning was a desperate attempt to find a way to reach my students, who were clearly not engaged by traditional lectures.

A second turning point came a year or two later, in the early 1960s, when I attended an early group dynamics workshop in Bethel, Maine. At the beginning of the second week, I stepped outside one morning, saw the sunrise through the trees, and felt a deep sense of wholeness and connection with the people in my group. The experience was profoundly moving.

Still later, while reviewing some old papers, I found one I had written in 1959 for a seminar led by Bernard Loomer, a professor at the University of Chicago School of Theology. He had come to Knox College, where I was studying psychology, philosophy, and religion, and asked us to write a paper on "What is your elephant?" referring to the parable of the blind men and the elephant.

In that paper, I was already exploring ideas about the learning cycle, perception, conception, and the limits of conceptual understanding—concepts that continue to shape my work. It was striking to see how early these thoughts had appeared.

From this, I have come to believe that the learning that truly matters is not stored in declarative memory, which fades, but in what transforms our beliefs. One becomes changed not by theory alone but through experience that engages the body, relationships, and community. Genuine learning is lived, not merely remembered.

Alice Kolb

From my perspective, experiential learning was at first an unrealized truth. I began teaching in my early twenties and believed learning resulted from hard work and practice. My students gave me positive feedback and earned good grades so I thought I was a good teacher.

That assumption began to change in 1987 when I first read Experiential Learning, shortly after moving from Japan to the United States. I remember thinking about what the learning cycle and learning style meant. As is the case with many teachers, I viewed learning as the student's responsibility and teaching as mine. I had been unaware of learning as a transformative, constructivist process.

As I continued reading, I realized the theory challenged me to look inward. I began experimenting with the learning cycle and saw how much I had to change as a learner myself. This internal struggle shaped the beginning of a continuing process of transformation.

Experiential learning leads educators to confront their own contradictions. These conflicts become opportunities to reflect deeply and decide whether education is truly their path. Through this process, I understood that experiential learning is not only a theory of teaching but also a way of living.

Born and raised in Brazil, I speak Portuguese and today I work on translating Kolb and Kolb materials into various languages. In Portuguese, the experiential learning cycle is known as the cycle of life, which beautifully captures its essence. Together with my Japanese colleagues, I am also translating Experiential Educator and Experiential Learning Profile into Japanese. In that language, the word reflection carries an active meaning. it suggests not only thinking but also taking responsibility and acting upon it.

Similarly, in Portuguese, experience literally means to live. Across cultures, language itself expresses the experiential nature of life. This reminds me that we are all experiential learners, wherever we come from. Every culture carries within its language notion that to live is to learn.

Online Learning, Presence, and Sentience

Question: Can the experiential learning cycle be transformed online?

David Kolb

It's really about this idea I mentioned earlier that belief is the true measure of learning. You have to believe in what you are going to do before you do it.

One of the problems with online learning is that it deals mostly with the lexical, not the empirical. There are two kinds of experience: empirical experience, which we touch, feel, see, and hear; and lexical experience, which is what is said and how it is interpreted.

In its essence, the online experience lacks the empirical part of experience. It has to be added in, so to speak. For example, trying to bring a sense of presence into the online environment is tremendously important. Presence has to do with participation and involvement, and achieving that kind of interaction is absolutely critical for online learning.

Alice Kolb

I think it is a challenge, but even before online courses became so prominent, there were already concerns about web-based learning and the classroom slowly being transferred into the web world.

I believe that a purely online course has certain limitations. If you have a hybrid system, where you can actually meet the person face to face and do something together, the relational part of learning can be preserved. In online learning, that relational part is severely handicapped. This is not to say that online learning does not have incredible strengths you can learn from a distance, and that is powerful.

But I think the paper that David, Karen and Philip wrote, which will likely guide our future work, focuses on the idea of sentience. It goes to the heart of understanding one another by looking into someone's eyes, touching, hugging, smiling, eating together. That part, which they

refer to as empirical experience, cannot be replaced by online means. That is our concern moving forward.

If there is a way or an effort to incorporate physical presence somehow, I think it would have a much greater impact on learning. That is my opinion.

As someone who has taught online courses, the part I miss most -despite all my efforts to ask questions and have conversations with students- is the ability to be with them. To take the temperature of the room, to see how they look, their eyes, their body language. I miss that as a teacher, and as a person who wants to learn together with students. I don't know if that answers your question, and I'm sure it's not very satisfying for you, but that's my experience.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Experiential Learning

Question: Is AI a threat or support to experiential learning?

David Kolb

What we are concerned about is that there are many predictions about how artificial intelligence is going to merge with our cortex through nanotechnology and other advances in science, allowing us to access the internet and everything else through the powers of artificial intelligence and computation.

The question I'm left with is: who's going to run the store? What will be left of us as human beings if we are assimilated into a system with a hundred million times more computing power in our brains? Do we become, as David Brooks wrote in his Atlantic article, "brains on a stick"?

It seems to me that experiential learning is essential especially its conversational dimension, and Paulo Freire's idea of naming experience through dialogue, what you might call solidarity. Sentience becomes really important here. Human feeling becomes very important.

The arts, on one hand, and blue-collar work and work with the hands on the other, are both sentient activities that have been diminished by an overemphasis on conception. That's the short version of the paper too.

The Future Trajectories of Experiential Learning

Question: Given your emphasis on multilingual engagement and your commitment to expanding experiential learning across diverse contexts, how do you envision the future development of experiential learning? What is your broader vision for the directions in which experiential learning can evolve in the coming years?

Alice Kolb

My vision is connected to the question about AI. I see experiential learning as critical as a form of resistance to AI. David and I talk about experiential learning as the future of our fight against AI and our effort to survive in an AI-dominated world. It may sound like we are dreamers, but we have to dream big.

Experiential learning has always been the underdog. It has been discounted many times in higher education and in many other places, yet it remains alive. In this critical moment, when the world seems to be in such a dire situation, experiential learning has a bright future in terms of what it can offer.

I was born in Brazil in 1957, and by 1964 Paulo Freire was exiled to Chile, in Latin America, because of his radical experiential learning philosophy. I rediscovered Freire through experiential learning, and I feel that now is a good time to dive deeper into his work and recover the ideas that are so relevant to the time we live in.

One of the reasons I am putting so much effort into sharing experiential learning starting with the tools in other languages because, we are "dialoguers among equals," as Freire describes. We make sense with each other, and this is what AI cannot do. We mimic each other, we make sense of each other, and through that dialogue among equals, we create meaning. That means we create reality together. I believe this is the way forward—this is the way out of AI.

For example, experiential learning becomes much richer and more valid when you can take KELP in Turkish or Polish rather than only in English, because that shared experience can only be created by you. To give another example, we just finished an extensive translation into Brazilian Portuguese, and my colleagues are running workshops, seminars, and faculty development in Portuguese. I cannot imagine how much richer, more intimate, and more real the learning outcomes are when this kind of interaction happens in one's own language. This is just a small example.

When we remember, sentience is about owning our experience and our feelings. I believe that this is the future of experiential learning. We will move in that direction one step at a time. That is my position, my hope, and my belief.

David Kolb

I'll add a more concrete point. I follow the research on experiential learning closely. What we have seen since around 2000, since the beginning of the 21st century, is a boom in experiential learning. You can measure this in many ways: in the number of papers published, in the universities that have centers for experiential learning, or those that have based their entire institutional strategy on some form of experiential learning. All of this has increased dramatically since the turn of the century, and I predict that this trajectory will continue.

The thing is, many of these centers and many programs offering experiential learning are still not entirely sure what experiential learning actually is. This is why the work you are doing in this congress is so important. This is also the mission Alice and I have to bring the ideas of the foundational scholars who have been so influential in our lives, and break those ideas down into pragmatic, practical programs that truly help learners learn and empower them to believe they can learn. That, is a very bright future.

Integrating Experiential Learning into Language Education

Question: Why is experiential learning not more widely applied within the field of language education, despite the existence of numerous relevant examples?

Alice Kolb

Actually, several studies and practices in which experiential learning has been applied within language education. For example, an interesting study from Japan examined a teacher who aimed to teach English to Japanese students. His approach was to structure language instruction around the experiential learning cycle by incorporating theatre-based activities. He created role-play scenarios in which students enacted different aspects of the learning process depending on the topic. Because many students felt intimidated when learning English particularly due to fear of making mistakes or mispronouncing words the teacher sought to reduce their anxiety by making the environment safe and playful. Through role-play, students were able to have fun, take on characters, and engage with the content in English without feeling judged.

This approach proved successful. The teacher intentionally embraced the experiential learning cycle, designing each role or task to align with different modes of the cycle doing, feeling, reflecting, and conceptualizing. By rotating roles, students naturally moved through each mode, allowing the teacher to guide them through the learning cycle while they practiced English. It was a highly creative method.

There are also other studies exploring the use of experiential learning cycles in the teaching of various languages. Therefore, experiential learning in language education is not uncommon. Moreover, it is a promising area indeed a very practical one because experiential learning provides a flexible framework for designing engaging and enjoyable classes.

Experiential Learning in Autism-Inclusive Education

Question: How can experiential learning be effectively applied in educational contexts involving autistic children and autistic individuals?

Alice Kolb

One significant example comes from an exceptional dissertation completed in Australia a few years ago. The researcher examined the learning styles of four autistic students in an Australian educational setting. Although the sample size was small, the faculty member designed the study around the hypothesis that autistic learners can indeed learn, but that they learn differently.

While the specific details of the study are not fully recalled, the core argument emphasized that autistic learners are capable, yet the learning environment must be radically redesigned to meet their needs. One notable finding was related to learning flexibility: the students in the sample demonstrated a high level of flexibility, even though such flexibility does not typically appear in their behavior within a conventional classroom environment.

This made the study particularly interesting. To date, it remains the only dissertation encountered that examines this topic in such depth. The sample included individuals across the

autism spectrum, including students with Asperger syndrome and those with more advanced forms of autism. These were not individuals with profound impairments that prohibit daily functioning, but rather learners situated within the broader autism spectrum.

While definitive answers cannot be offered based on a single dissertation, one conclusion that emerged from the study is that learning outcomes appear to vary depending on the severity or manifestation of autistic characteristics. Although terminology in this field must be used carefully, the dissertation highlighted that learners labeled or diagnosed as autistic or as having Asperger syndrome are competent learners. However, they require distinct approaches and, most importantly, a fundamentally different learning environment.

The learning environment itself appears to be a key factor for these learners to thrive. While this is the extent of what can be shared based on that dissertation, the topic clearly represents an important area for further research particularly within the field often referred to as learning disabilities.

Co-funded by the European Union

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Prof. Dr. David Crookall

International Simulation and Gaming Association (ISAGA) Honorary Member

David Crookall is an internationally renowned academic specializing in experiential learning through simulations and games. His seminal work emphasizes debriefing as the critical component of the learning process. A former Editor-in-Chief of a leading journal and an Honorary Member of the International Simulation and Gaming Association (ISAGA), Dr. Crookall has held university positions globally, including at the Université Côte d'Azur. He currently focuses his expertise on addressing global challenges such as climate change and environmental communication, notably serving as a Lead Guest Editor for Geoscience Communication.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CONGRESS

Prof. Dr. David Crookall

David Crookall's keynote underscored the essential role of structured debriefing as the core mechanism that transforms raw experience into meaningful learning. Drawing on examples from simulations, internships, fieldwork, and high-stakes professions such as aviation, medicine, and the military, he emphasized that debriefing is often overlooked in education despite being critical for reflection, emotional processing, skill development, and adaptation. His talk highlighted that effective debriefing requires clear structure, learner-centered facilitation, adequate time, and a trusting environment, arguing that without proper debriefing, experiential learning remains incomplete.

Debriefing:

An Essential, But Overlooked, Method For Transforming Experience Into Learning

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Abstract

Debriefing can be described as a structured episode during and/or after a learning activity, in which participants reflect on and share their experience with fellow participants, with the purpose of transforming it into learning. During my talk, I will attempt to show how crucial debriefing is for any learning experience. This includes field trips, research, internships and simulation/games. Debriefing is particularly important for transforming learning experiences that tend to generate difficult emotions, for example, a difficult internship, a problematic field trip, simulation/games about the social and psychological dimensions of climate change. In my talk, I touch on things like debriefing structure, learner independence, preparation, sequence.

Keywords: Debriefing, Transformation, Adaptation, Experience, Learning

Introduction

The main purpose in my keynote presentation was to emphasize the critical role of debriefing in transforming experience into meaningful learning. Debriefing is a structured reflection and sharing process that is accomplished during (a break in) or after learning activities.

The prime goal of debriefing is to encourage participants to reflect on their experiences and share insights with each other, and thus to deepen understanding and transform those experiences into actionable learning. A proper debriefing is especially vital in emotionally- challenging experiences, such as difficult internships or simulations related to climate change.

Debriefing is not just an informal and an all-too-often teacher-centred chat. For debriefing to be effective, it must be a structured process. Effective debriefing requires a clear sequence of topics (e.g., feelings, what happened, what went well, future commitments), multiple steps, participant-centred approaches and a mix of individual and group activities. It can be multi- staged, extending over days or weeks, with tasks like individual reflection forms, small group discussions and presentations. It also requires careful, participant-centred, facilitation in a trusting environment. My talk underscored the necessity of giving the time needed to work through all issues.

*Professor, Université Internationale de la Mer, France

Debriefing is vital and mostly obligatory for training and continuous improvement in high- stakes fields like the military, medicine, firefighting and diving. In contrast, it is often neglected in education, sustainability and geoscience contexts, often to the disadvantage of learners and trainees. Debriefing may be overlooked in such fields because of a lack of awareness of its benefits, a focus on traditional teaching methods, the absence of structured reflection processes in educational curriculums, fear of the facilitation process, lack of debriefing training, among other reasons. If a trainer calls themself an 'experiential trainer' and they do not use proper debriefing, then they are not a true experiential trainer and they need to get debriefing training in one way or another.

In addition to the improvement of knowledge, skills and behaviours, in all areas of learning and endeavour, debriefing extends to providing insights for decision makers and policy developers. Most decision simulations and policy exercises would be flat without proper debriefing.

As Kolb (1984) states, "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created by the transformation of experience". Debriefing is the process that enables this transformation. Debriefing guides the process of adapting from experience, leading directly to meaningful learning. Ultimately, debriefing enhances learning by guiding learners through transforming raw experience into actionable knowledge and by encouraging them to adapt.

My keynote highlighted the following points:

- Debriefing is a structured and organised process for reflection and sharing during or after experiences.
- It is essential for processing emotionally-challenging situations like internships and climate simulations.
- Effective debriefing requires a clear sequence of topics and structured activities.
- Participant-centred approaches enhance engagement and learning outcomes.
- Adequate time and planning are crucial for successful debriefing sessions.
- Debriefing transforms raw experiences into actionable knowledge and skill for future applications.
- It improves learning and decision-making in professional and educational contexts.
- Debriefing is underutilized in softer professions, limiting effective learning.
- Structured debriefing enables deeper understanding of skills and behaviours through shared experiences.

Transforming experiences into knowledge requires a shift away from traditional teacher-led approaches.

The rest of this document contains many of the slides that I used in my keynote. Some slides have been altered, mostly the textual slides; some slides have been used as is. Some visuals have been condensed

into a smaller space. Each slide, part thereof or group of slides has been given a header and a short commentary. Please note that a long chapter contains most the information below in far greater detail – link at the end.

Learning From Debriefing

Engagement

"the essence of the experiencing mode of the learning cycle is being **fully present and involved** in the **here-and-now** through **engagement** in a recurring cycle of sense engagement and **active participation**"

(Stock, Cola & Kolb, 2025, *Sentience and experiential learning: The role of the senses in learning*)

Experiential learning demands full engagement and participation by learners and trainees. The text is a quote from Stock, Cola & Kolb (2025). The picture illustrates the very opposite of "being fully engaged", of "being fully present and involved" and of 'active participation". In order to conduct an experiential learning activity, and to allow your participants to reap the benefits of debriefing, you need to make sure that they quickly become fully engaged.

Debriefing transforms experience into learning

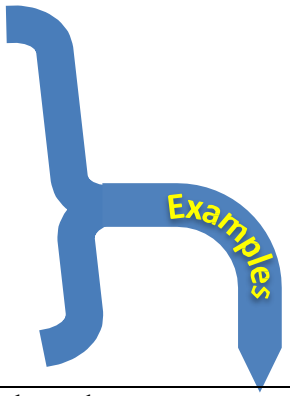
One possible description (not definition) of debriefing is:

"Debriefing can be *described* as an episode during or after an activity in which participants **reflect** on and **share** their experience with fellow participants, with the purpose of **transforming** it into learning." Adapted from Crookall (2023).

Ubiquity of debriefing

Many people, situations, domains, professions:

- do debriefing **everyday, everywhere**
- **focus** on debriefing
- do **research** on debriefing
- **publish** on debriefing
- make it **compulsory** to debrief
- make debriefing the **heart** of their training



Debriefing is far more widespread than we would think, and yet many seem to shy away from it. With a little training, most teachers, trainers and professionals can easily learn the rudiments of how to facilitate a rewarding debriefing and be on the way to helping their learns learn. The slides below illustrate some critical situations in which debriefing is compulsory. Airline personnel, for example, including pilots and crew, do regular sessions in simulators and go through extensive debriefing. Without that, flying would not be the safest way to travel.

High-stakes fields always use debriefing




Military


Aviation

Beginnings of medical simulation & debriefing

Meeting on 'training facilitators of medical simulation', San Antonio, TX, USA, Sept **2002**.
http://medical.simulation.free.fr/

- Brought together three highly professional and heavily technological fields:
  - **military**
  - **aviation**
  - **medical**

- Never first time on a patient
- Sim compulsory
- 'Debriefing with good judgement'
- *Promoting Excellence and Reflective Learning in Simulation* (PEARLS)



From briefing, through scenario, to debriefing: the maritime instructor's work during simulator-based training

Charlott Sellberg[1]

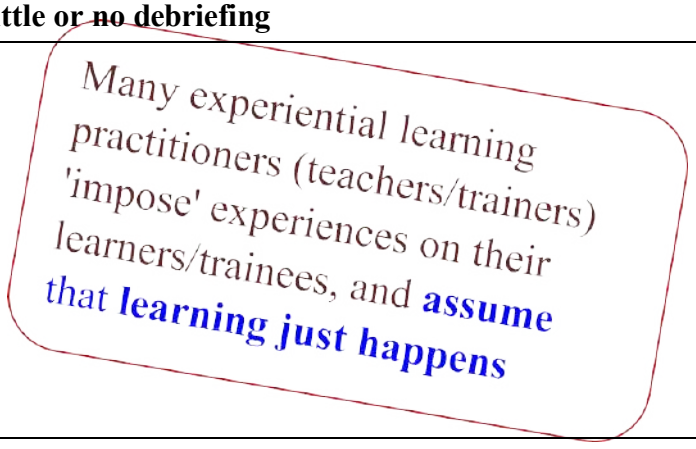
FIREFIGHTER NATION

"Debriefs are an **essential** part of **learning**, **improving** and **identifying** how human factors affect our actions at every incident. Firefighters were born to **talk**, and that's how they should conduct a debriefing"

Many professional trainers in high-stakes fields would consider it strange (even laugh) if they knew that most areas of education failed to use debriefing. Even some people using simulation/games fail to implement debriefing or to implement it fully and properly.

Informal debrief
→ low impact, gentle, intimate, reassuring We do it every day – naturally and 'unthinkingly' o Family o Friends o Meal, café, … o Work colleagues o (Doctor, psychologist, …) o Conferences, congresses !!
Most of us, every day, engage in an activity that resamples debriefing to a certain extent, namely allowing them to reflect on and share experience, and thus to better understand whatever problem it is that they chose to talk about. When you go to have tea with a friend, much of the time you engage in exchange of experience or share worries and thus debrief them informally. If you can do that, then you can learn debriefs facilitate more formal debriefs.

Little or no debriefing
o Field trips o Internships o Research projects o Simulation/games o Task-based activities o Problem-solving challenges o Etc, etc



I repeat: Many professional trainers in high-stakes fields would consider it strange (even laugh) if they knew that most areas of education failed to use debriefing. Even some people using simulation/games fail to implement debriefing or to implement it fully and properly.

If we fail to debrief people whom we have asked to patriciate in an experiential activity, then we are failing those people. That is unprofessional and irresponsible. They key is **always** to debrief an experiential learning activity.

Why do 'we', in the 'softer' professions
(e.g., teaching, teamwork, ocean & climate literacy, sustainability, history, geography, …),

- **not** debrief?
- **avoid** debriefing?
- **minimise** debriefing?
- pay **lipservice** to debriefing?
- **deny** the necessity of debriefing?

These questions would form an excellent piece of PhD research. Is debriefing avoided, minimized or denied because of a lack of awareness of its benefits, a focus on traditional teaching methods, the absence of structured reflection processes in educational curriculums, fear of the facilitation process, lack of debriefing training? Probably several reasons together might explain the lack of debriefing.

Some purposes of debriefing:

- Decision makers / organisers get insight into a system (e.g., airline, hospital)
- Learners / trainees & trainers get insight into their skills, behaviour, knowledge
- We **learn** more **effectively**
- We know better what and how to **improve**
- **We are better able to transform experience into learning**

I am sure that you can think of more purposes; they are probably as numerous as the ways, activities and materials used for learning.

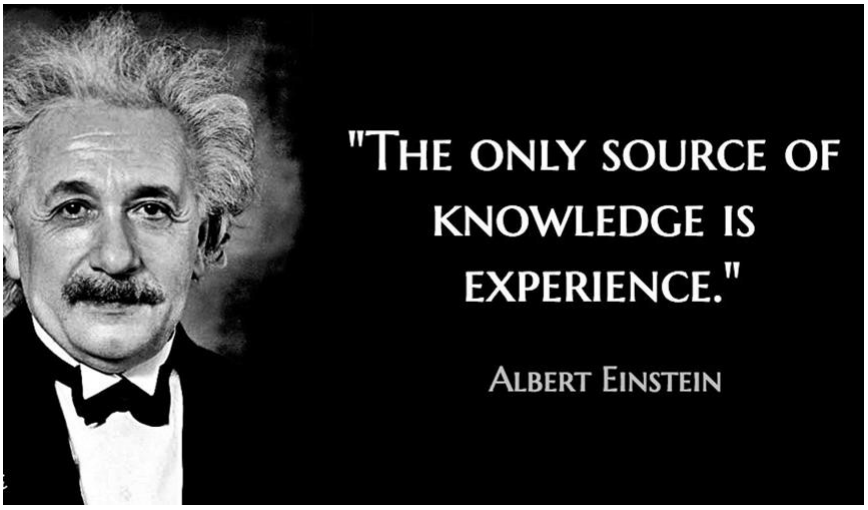
Transforming experience ➔ learning
"**Learning** is the **process** whereby **knowledge** is **created** by the **transformation** of **experience**." (Kolb, 1984)    … but how to transform?    **… but how to debrief?**
Dave Kolb's famous sentence is a key to understanding the role of debriefing at the heart of

the experiential learning cycle. Transformation of experiential happens most effectively if proper debriefing is conducted. That is why critical professions (flying, health, diving) use debriefing systematically.

1. Experience

Experience

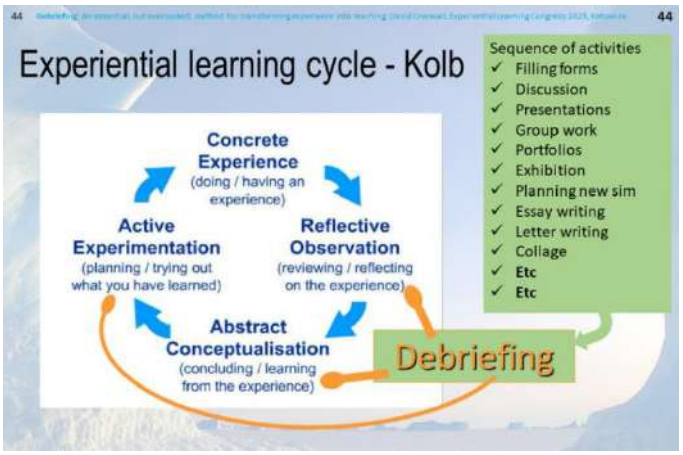
It is difficult to know what experience is. Every day, every human being on Earth experiences experience in one way or another. The above slides are an attempt to provide a visual idea of what experience. Understanding a word is often enhanced by looking at its etymology.

Einstein and experience

Our greatest scientist, well before the modern upsurge in experiential training, knew and asserted the fundamental relationship between experience and knowledge. However, he forgot to mention debriefing ☺.

2. Learning Through Debriefing

Learning & learning through transforming experience
Learning: ➢ is not usually straightforward ➢ is often **taken for granted** ➢ **needs**: effort, time, engagement, emotion, … Many **kinds**: active, experiential, cognitive, affective, kinaesthetic, social, … No learning → no science, no society, no language, no telecoms, no culture, no books, no confs, … Experience: **Assumptions** about learning from Experience o Wrong = in Experience, learning 'happens' 'by itself' = dead wrong o **Correct** = Experience must be **processed** / **transformed** to result in learning o Even more important for an internship, as it is not exactly the 'real' thing
Learning is messy. That is why some enlightened schools and universities place emphasis on learn to learn, on learning skills and on method. The first thing that educators need to understand about learning is that it derives from processing or transforming experience.

Kolb's experiential learning cycle & debriefing



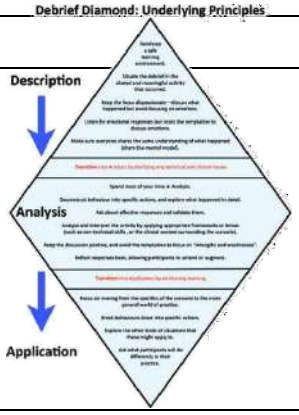
Three of the four quadrants of Dave Kolb's experiential learning cycle can be conceived as types of debriefing. Good debriefing requires elements from all three quadrants: reflection on and sharing experience, conceptualising aspects of the experience and testing out new insights or skills.

Experience and debrief in practice

The show different stages of a simulation that I ran as part of a workshop with university teachers in Thailand on the topics of teamwork and debriefing. Pictures 1 to 3 show various steps in a simulation/game – the experience. Picture 4 shows the first part of debriefing – filling in a questionnaire. Picture 5 shows two small groups discussing the various issues, dependently of the facilitator. Picture 6 (not shown ☺) would have shown a plenary 'or whole-class meeting, in which each groups share their debriefing conclusions with all other groups.

4. Debriefing

Structure - Inside the debrief



Not just a chat!!

It must have **structure**:

- Several steps/stages (activities)
- Sequence of topics (in each step)
- Individuals & group
- Variety of activities

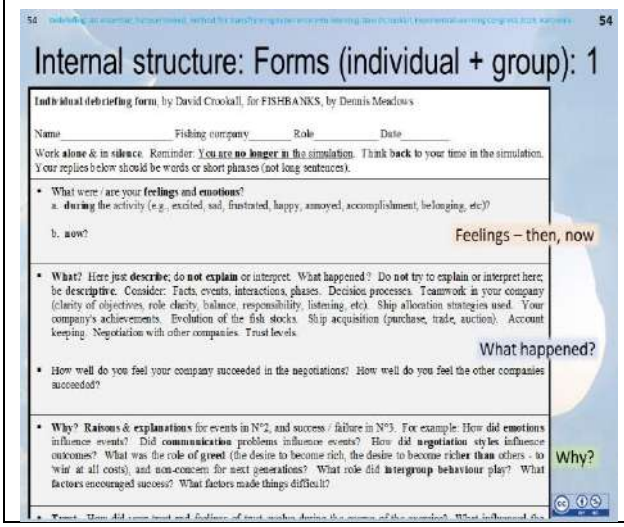
Internal structure: Topics (as many as are relevant)

- Feelings/**emotions**? Effects on your behaviour?
- **What** happened?
- **Why** it happened?
- (**Similarities** to & differences from 'real' world?)
- What went **well** / not so well?
- What **changes** would you make to the activity?
- What would you do **differently** next time?
- What do you think that you **learnt**?
- **Commitments** for the future?
- Any other comments?

A proper debriefing must cover a number of topics, and in a certain order. You should choose the topics according to the learning goals of the experience. The first topic (emotions) is pretty well compulsory, as it allows participants to express and 'evacuate' any negative feelings, allowing them to focus on the subsequent topics. Of course, you can also create topics that are not listed above. The next slide illustrates a particularly large debriefing questionnaire.

An effective debrief must be structured, with a sequence of topics (see below), with individual, small group and plenary work, and involve a variety of debriefing activities.

Example of the internal structure (topics) of a debriefing questionnaire

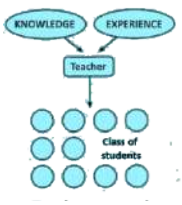


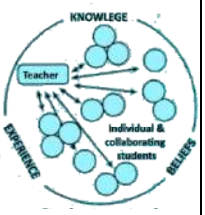
Doing the debrief: Two modes

Teacher centred, controlled

Participant centred - implies:

- Groupwork, observers, …
- Participants learn to debrief on their own,





Debrief as data generator Coproducing sea ice predictions with stakeholders using simulation *Weather, Climate and Society* 14, 2

https://doi.org/10.1175/WCAS-D-21-0048.1

Data can be collected during debriefing and thus be valuable for research.

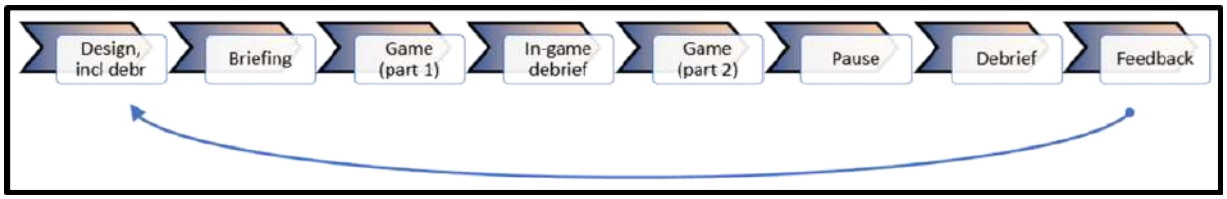
Mufti-stage debrief (several days to weeks)

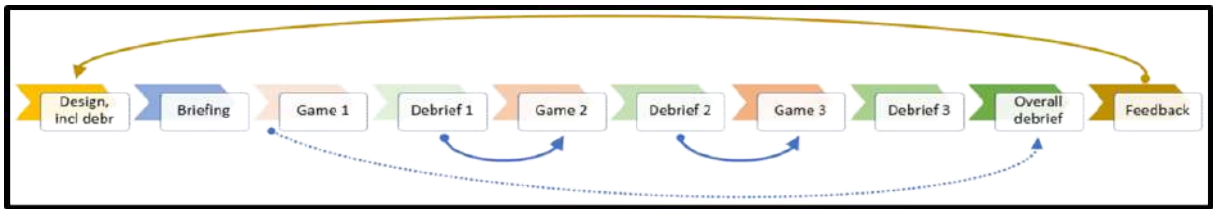
Task (stage)	**Place done**	
Individual questionnaire	In or out of class	
Small **group** discussion	In (or out of) class	
Plenary (informal)	In class, with Qs & comments	
Prepare **ppt** (group)	Out of class (homework)	
Presentation (group)	In class, with Qs & comments	
Other experiences & structured debriefs; weeks & months		
Portfolio (group)	Out of class	

Contrary to what some people assert, debriefing does not need to be concentrated into a few minutes immediately after an activity. Debriefing can be spread out over a day or a week.

Debrief sequences – three schemes

1. Basic
2. One experience, intermediate debriefs
3. Series of experiences, connecting debriefs





Debriefing and experience can be intertwined in any way that enhances learning. The above three schemes refer to games, but are just as relevant for any experiential activity.

An experience

> may include **multiple reflection** moments, such as time-outs ..... Use of such tactics makes the final debriefing easier because **learning cycles have already been initiated**. As a result, participants can find it easier to gain an **overview** of what they have learned from the [experience] and to assess whether they **achieved** their intended learning goals. (adapted from Wijse-van Heeswijk et al, 2025)

Transforming experience through debriefing
Learning from an experience is accomplished largely through **debriefing** Debriefing must be: o **plan**ned and **prepare**d ahead (e.g., questionnaires) o given the necessary **time** o focused on the **learning goals** (not the activity objectives) o well **structured** (clear steps) o **participant centred** (no controlling trainer) o **non threaten**ing; be done in a climate of **trust**
Each time when you plan and conduct a debriefing, make sure that you will hit **all** of the above points. They are keys to facilitating an effective debriefing.

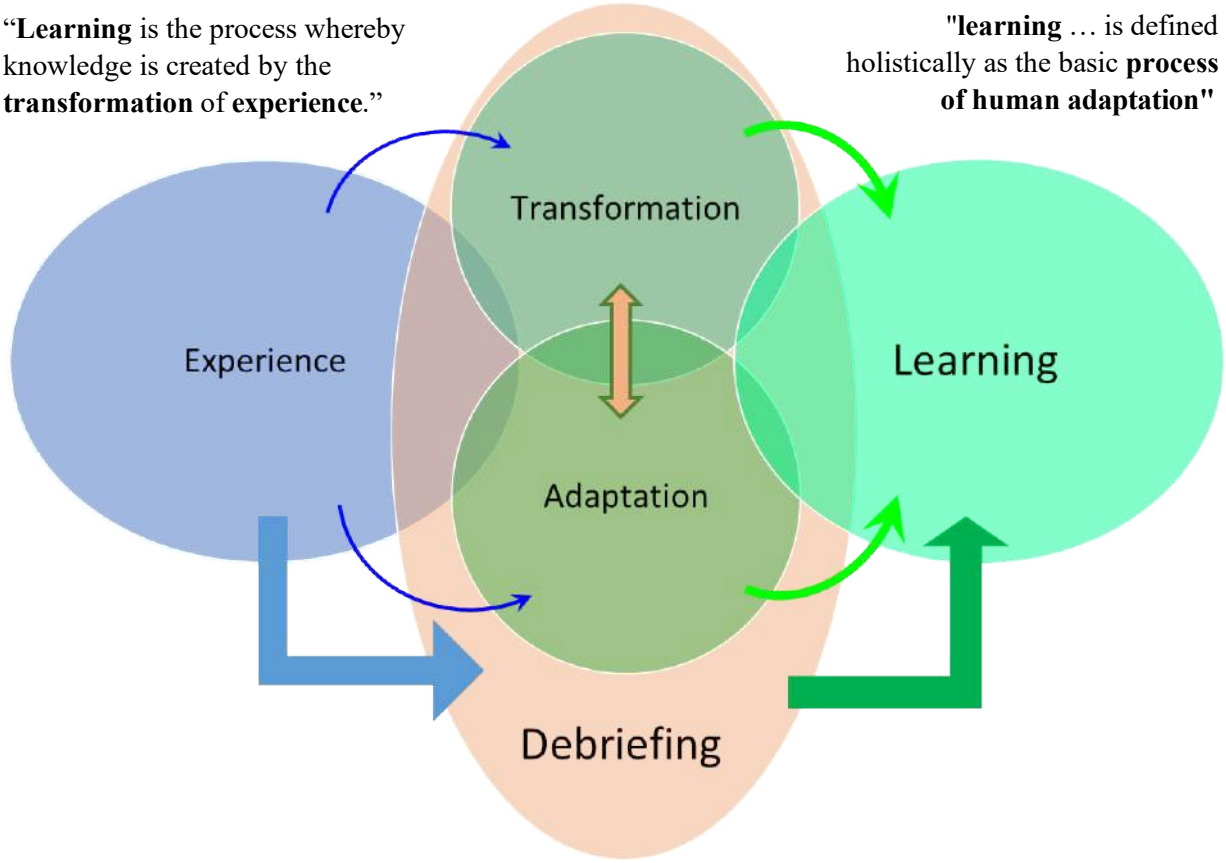
5. Further Thoughts

Learning is (also) adaptation

o **"Learning** lies at the core of the management process when learning … is defined holistically as the **basic process of human adaptation**." (Kolb & Kolb, 2008).
o Experience + transformation → learning
o Experience + adaptation → learning
  o Debriefing enables/guides transformation
  o Debriefing enables/guides adaptation
o Experience + debriefing → learning
o **Learning** happens in the **debriefing**

I often say that a synonym of learning is change. In order to learn, you have to accept, even more **want**, to change. If you change, it means that you have learnt. People who refuse to change do not learn. Of course, we can be afraid of changing, but our debriefing must therefore reassure and encourage a desire to change and thus to learn. Both transformation and adaptation are forms of change. Debriefing helps us to accomplish the change needed for learning.

Debriefing as transformation and adaptation to encourage learning



Abstract representation of the processes of transformation of experience and personal adaptation enabled and guided by debriefing leading to learning, inspired by Kolb (1984 & 2008), © Crookall (2025).

Chapter on debriefing

Note that the chapter focusses on debriefing for simulation/gaming, but all the debriefing principles and practices in the chapter can be applied in all experiential learning activities more generally.

Chapter on debriefing (2023)

Debriefing: A practical guide

Contains many **refs;** Careful: Large file (free)

If you wish me to run a workshop for you, contact me here crookall.simulation at gmail dot com.

References

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Some interesting quotes, all relevant to the debriefing and learning process.

- Simulation without including adequate debriefing is ineffective and even unethical. Willy Kriz
- The debriefing is where the 'magic' happens. Dick Duke
- We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience. John Dewey
- We must become adept at 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action'. Donald A Schon
- It is not the task of a model to predict the future, but to help us understand the systemic forces that are shaping the future. Dennis Meadows

Co-funded by the European Union

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Prof. Dr. Howard Williamson

University of South Wales

Howard Williamson is a distinguished academic and researcher specialising in European youth policy and youth work. He currently serves as Professor of European Youth Policy at the University of South Wales, with a long-standing track record in higher education leadership, international youth programmes and policy development across Europe.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CONGRESS

Prof. Dr. Howard Williamson

Howard Williamson's keynote examined experiential learning through the lens of European youth work, highlighting how non-formal education turns everyday experiences into meaningful development for young people. Drawing on his long career across research, policy, and practice, he addressed key challenges facing youth, the need for realistic evidence, and the importance of cross-sector cooperation. His reflection emphasized patience, meaningful encounters, and inclusive practice as essential foundations for effective experiential learning. He urged participants to consider how experiential learning can more effectively reach the young people who need it most.

Future of Education & Training

Introduction

Anxiety regarding such engagements is described as minimal, with these situations perceived as variable over time. A parallel is drawn to exchanges with government ministers in various countries, in which the expression "I am going to give you nine absolutely useless ideas, but be patient, because the tenth is brilliant" is frequently used. A comparable dynamic is evoked in relation to the present context. Expertise in experiential learning is acknowledged as limited, despite extensive application over the years and efforts to promote it within universities and in direct work with young people. A primary professional identification with youth work situates the forthcoming reflections within the youth sector.

The term "non-formal education and learning" is intentionally selected due to the proximity of certain youth work practices to formal education. Some forms of youth work involve instructing young people on specific matters, such as risks, which does not constitute experiential learning. Other forms occupy a significant space between formal education and community-based informal learning. Youth work and non-formal education and learning often reside along the boundary with schooling. Personal and social development curriculum programs in schools display similarities with certain forms of youth work, underscoring the permeability of these boundaries. Accordingly, an adversarial framing "that is bad over there and this is brilliant over here" is discouraged, given the presence of numerous points of connection.

A further aspect of youth work is highlighted: supporting young people in transforming casual, informal, accidental, and everyday learning arising from family and community environments into learning that can be consciously applied in other contexts. Youth work is therefore positioned as both facilitative and educational, providing the rationale for the terminology employed.

Reference is made to a four-minute, five-second video created for the World Organization of the Scout Movement at the request of Ahmed Al-Indari, due to the inability to attend the world's first Non-Formal Education Conference in Brazil, which is believed to have taken place in November 2019.

A substantial workload is noted, alongside mention of a previously authored book intended for review during travel but left unread. The publication, Intercultural Learning via Experiential Learning and Outdoor Education: Reflected Experience of a Long-Term Training Course in Belgium and Lithuania (2005), was co-authored with Mark Taylor, known for pioneering contributions to training and now deceased. The collaboration involved participation, observation, documentation, discussion, and verification with participants within a training team in which Taylor served as one of the trainers.

Familiarity with the field is acknowledged, and recent discussions have reinforced key themes such as coaching and reflection. Insights gained from David Crookall's work on debriefing are noted. Entering this setting is likened to entering a "temple of experiential learning" in which

David Kolb occupies a central conceptual position, prompting consideration of how such frameworks relate to long-term practice in youth work.

The intention of the presentation is to convey observations derived from European contexts while encouraging the audience to consider intersections between experiential learning and youth work. Although numerous connections exist, these are not defined explicitly. The concluding ideas will be presented for consideration by the audience, who may assess their relevance or value.

Two photographs are referenced for archival purposes. The photograph on the right depicts the European White Paper on Youth team in 2001. This team was responsible for writing the first European Union White Paper on Youth.

The photograph on the left records an unexpected recognition of contributions to youth work in Wales. The individual on the right side of the image is Mark Drakeford, the First Minister of Wales. He attended a Youth Work Excellence Awards meeting, an event initially founded in 1994 to acknowledge progressive and innovative youth work in Wales, supported at the time by £6,000 from a bank. His presence was unexpected, as First Ministers typically do not attend youth work conferences or related events.

After the various excellence awards had been distributed, Mark Drakeford took the stage, offered several remarks, and subsequently invited the individual to receive a Youth Work Excellence Award for an outstanding contribution to youth work in Wales. During the ceremony, the Children's Commissioner stated, "Most young people in this room have never heard of Howard Williamson, but I guarantee that every young person in Wales has a slightly better life because of something he has done." The moment elicited a strong emotional response. In the photograph, hands are placed on Mark Drakeford's shoulders because the recipient leaned forward, attempting to regain composure.

The image is described as particularly meaningful due to its association with reflections on the trajectory of a professional life.

Challenges and the Value of Experience

The observations presented are framed as relevant both to the field of experiential learning and to the domain of youth work. A critical point is raised: if experiential learning functions at the exceptional level often claimed, and if youth work possesses comparable strengths, the persistent struggles to secure political and financial support would not exist. This constitutes a challenging but necessary home truth.

A second point, positioned as particularly pertinent to contexts such as the United States, draws on a statement written in Wales 25 years earlier: the quality of opportunity and experience provided is sometimes more significant than the specificity of outcome. Contemporary practice is subject to intense pressure to demonstrate measurable outcomes and impact. Yet many evaluations, including those referenced in recent presentations, focus on short-term effects, despite widespread understanding that such work often involves long-term transformation with lifelong influence.

A consequential question emerges: negative interventions in the lives of young people are likely to produce negative outcomes, while positive interventions acknowledged as subjective judgments are likely to produce positive outcomes. However, the timing and location of these outcomes remain unpredictable.

Sustained contact with numerous young people into their middle age has revealed that individuals frequently recall specific experiences from youth work settings many years later. These remembered experiences are not always the ones originally presumed to have been most impactful.

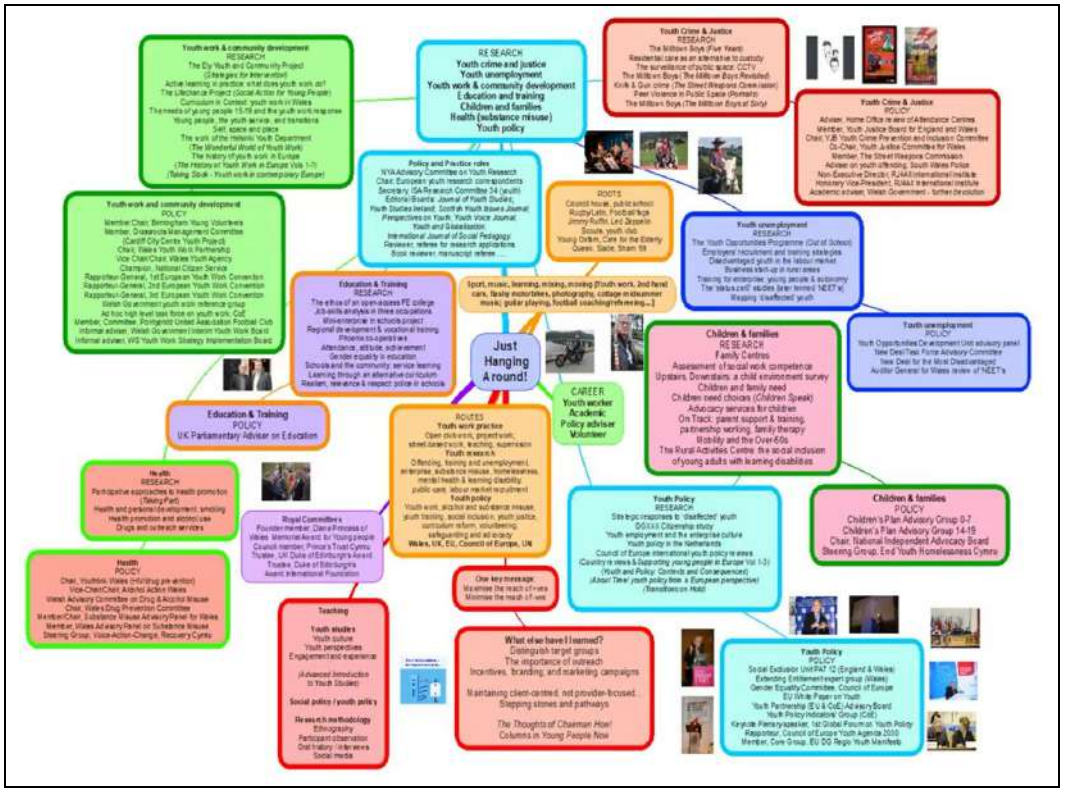
Concerns are articulated regarding the increasing prevalence of what is described as youth work "nonsense." This includes the need to distinguish rhetoric from reality. Within the European context, an environment has emerged in which individuals who are highly proficient in the discourse surrounding this field appear in increasing numbers. Although their language is persuasive, confidence in their substantive practice is lacking.

This situation has contributed to the development of a market or environment that enables entry into the sector by individuals who, in practice, should not be part of it and whose presence may be viewed as detrimental. This assessment is acknowledged as severe but is presented as necessary.

A Triangle of Research, Policy, and Practice

European framework is invoked through the depiction of a triangle summarizing experience across research, policy, and practice in multiple areas of public policy affecting young people. These areas include education and training, youth and community work, criminal justice, substance misuse, and enterprise and entrepreneurship. The configuration reflects a varied balance of experience: in some instances, minimal research combined with extensive policy involvement; in others, limited policy experience paired with substantial research; and in

additional cases, extensive practice experience with relatively little policy engagement. The framework serves as a condensed representation of these diverse trajectories and was regarded with a degree of surprise once assembled.



This configuration enables an ability to view the field under discussion simultaneously from internal and external vantage points. At times, engagement occurs with police officers, politicians, and academics who approach the practice domain with a more critical perspective. At other times, engagement occurs with practitioners, providing access to the perspective held within the practice environment.

Buzzword Perspective

Two frequently referenced terms currently dominate discussions in the European youth sector. At the Council of Europe meeting held in May 2023, heads of government agreed that all future work of the Council should focus on embedding a “youth perspective.” The term “perspective” has become a central buzzword, although its precise meaning has yet to be defined.

Following the European Year of Youth in 2022, the European Commission adopted “youth mainstreaming” as its principal thematic term. The concept remains largely undefined as well. The use of such terminology can easily lead to superficial formulations such as “the importance of mainstreaming a youth perspective” or “the value of adopting a perspective that incorporates mainstreaming,” enabling extensive discourse without substantive clarity.

Despite their ambiguity, both terms highlight a significant concern: young people in Europe are encountering a convergence of major challenges, including climate-related threats, security issues, employment instability, rising living costs, social media pressures, and various other factors. These developments underscore the need for public policy to acknowledge these realities and to ensure that policy measures do not exacerbate existing disadvantages for young people.

Youth Work Conventions and Accelerating Youth Work

The upcoming Youth Work Convention in Malta, scheduled for the end of May, features the strapline "Accelerate Youth Work," a phrase characterized as paradoxical. Within the United Kingdom, youth and community work training programs continue to close extensively, including what is considered to be one of the oldest such programs globally, the YMCA National College, which ceased operations at the end of February.

In 2010, practitioners from various segments of the youth field -youth workers, detached youth workers, street-based practitioners, center-based staff, youth projects, and youth organizations- were convened to examine the question of why they collectively identify as youth workers. Experiential learning forms a central component of much of this work. However, from an external perspective, the sector presents a highly fragmented picture, with numerous distinct activities all described under the term "youth work."

A second convention was held to explore the question, "What do we share?" This process produced an unexpected degree of commonality. These reflections connect to considerations of cross-sectoral cooperation: specifically, the need to ensure that the concept of experiential learning within university contexts aligns with how it is understood in the youth sector, and whether the same practices are being referenced.

Debate also emerged regarding documentation and written output. It was suggested that many young people engaged in youth work settings would be unlikely to engage in extended writing activities. When writing did occur, it might include extensive informal language or expletives, with uncertain usefulness though potentially containing meaningful insights.

An alignment of institutional leadership in December 2020 when Germany simultaneously held the presidency of the European Union and the chairmanship of the Council of Europe for one month created an opportunity to organize a third convention during that period. The aim was to encourage both institutions to adopt a coordinated approach to youth work development in Europe.

Relevant outputs from this period include a Resolution on the European Youth Work Agenda issued by the European Commission in early December 2020 and a Declaration of the Third Convention outlining eight key objectives for advancing youth work in Europe. These materials are acknowledged without further elaboration, given the need to proceed through the content rapidly.

Young People and Young Policy

The diversity of young people, noted during previous working group sessions, necessitates the adaptation of methodologies according to the specific groups being engaged.

A conceptual framework frequently employed is the "three V's": valued, vulnerable, and villains. Work by Filip Coussee and others identifies that public policy directed toward valued young people focuses on liberation and emancipation, expressed through measures such as youth councils, participatory structures, and the amplification of youth voice. In parallel, public policy concerning those categorized as "villains" emphasizes regulation and control, prioritizing behavioral management over engagement. This binary approach is characterized as overly simplistic, suggesting the need for a broader focus on developing all young people toward greater participation and equality within society.

Discussion also addresses the term NEET. In certain contexts, such as Hong Kong, the reference group is labeled "non-engaged youth," representing a relatively rare instance in which the NEET designation is not employed.

Engagement with high-achieving young people is illustrated through involvement in initiatives such as Student Forum 2000 in Prague and the European Forum Alpbach in Austria, where large groups of highly motivated, intellectually engaged young individuals participate. Such contexts allow for extensive use of simulation activities and challenge-based pedagogical approaches.

In contrast, another reference group the "Milltown boys," associated with a 50-year ethnographic study of young offenders represents a markedly different cultural and social context. A recent interaction with a younger family member of this group, who had spent more time incarcerated than outside prison over a span of 32 years, revealed that typical peer conversations were limited to topics such as the weekly availability and quality of cannabis. This contrast underscores the distinct cultural contexts that shape young people's lives.

The overall emphasis highlights the importance of recognizing the diversity of environments and lived experiences among young people who may be engaged through non-formal education and experiential learning approaches.

Continuity and Change in Youth Work

Although youth work is often described as a "laboratory for democracy," the approach referenced here diverged from conventional democratic practice. Rather than privileging majority decision-making such as allowing older male adolescents to determine the evening's music preferences intentional efforts were made to protect minority voices, including younger participants with different tastes.

Standard assumptions about what was considered "typical" were deliberately challenged. This included altering rules on activities such as pool every few weeks, introducing variations such as "mixed doubles" or "losers stay on." These changes frequently generated objections based on norms outside the youth center (e.g., "winner stays on"), which were countered by

emphasizing that the youth center constituted a distinct environment with its own pedagogical purposes.

A central principle emphasized in this context is the importance of continuous conversation and dialogue with young people. While many youth centers appeared structurally similar, the level of active engagement varied significantly. It is noted that some practitioners remained disengaged, spending time leaning against walls or drinking coffee rather than interacting meaningfully with young people. By contrast, the model described here involved sustained dialogue during every session.

A guiding motto informed this practice. When asked if such a motto existed, the response emphasized that theoretical understanding often developed retrospectively, rather than informing practice in advance. When questioned about responsibilities during off-site youth activities, the principle articulated was: tasks would be undertaken on behalf of young people only when age restrictions prevented them from performing those tasks themselves. For example, young people could not drive or take legal responsibility for consent forms, but they could complete tasks such as shopping.

This philosophy was illustrated in an article titled “Tea Towels and Toilet Rolls.” The narrative describes taking a group of 14-year-olds to a supermarket with £100 to purchase food for a weekend trip. While young people could select meals and items they wished to buy, they frequently overlooked items such as toilet rolls and tea towels, assuming these would be provided automatically. The learning process involved recognizing that these items also needed to be purchased. By age 16, forgetting such essential items would require them to confront the consequences directly and find alternative solutions.

Messages From Experience

Approximately ten or eleven years ago, the United Nations convened its only Global Forum on Youth Policies, during which a single professional keynote was delivered to an audience of 700 participants representing 170 countries. The United Nations requested the formulation of three core messages to guide global approaches to working with young people and youth policy.

The first message highlighted a persistent structural issue: positive opportunities fail to reach the young people who most need them. These opportunities do not extend far enough, nor do they penetrate deeply enough into the broader youth population. The underlying challenge is the considerable effort required to engage these groups. A central theme emerging from the current conference is presented as essential, emphasizing the need to cultivate patience when working with young people facing complex circumstances.

This observation led to the first recommendation: extending the reach of positive interventions. Conversely, the second recommendation emphasized the need to limit the reach of negative interventions. Governments often design restrictive or punitive measures directed at young people, and such measures are frequently applied to individuals who do not require them.

An illustrative example is drawn from work within England and Wales, where Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) became a key governmental focus. ASBOs could be imposed for

behaviors such as verbal misconduct, resulting in severe restrictions, including being required to remain under parental supervision for extended periods. Although the underlying offenses were not imprisonable, and 52 percent of young people who violated these orders subsequently entered the prison system. The consequences were severe.

In Wales, through engagement with the minister and the four chief constables, the decision was made to avoid the use of ASBOs. As a result, very few were issued, in contrast to England, where ASBO ambassadors were appointed to encourage municipalities to employ these sanctions broadly, restricting young people's mobility and activities. The long-term implications of such measures for affected youth were considerable.

The third recommendation centered on mentoring, conceptualized as the presence of "critical people at critical moments." Many young people value relationships with individuals they trust and whose guidance they take seriously. Such figures need not be formal mentors; they may include siblings, peers, partners, community members, or professionals such as police officers.

One example involved a young girl who had experienced significant difficulties in school and expressed strong dislike for teachers, with the exception of one. The positive relationship with this teacher originated from a moment of mutual recognition. This seemingly minor connection formed the basis of a supportive relationship that remained influential at age 16, despite substantial challenges in other areas of the girl's life.

Elements of Entitlements

Experiential learning commitments are presented as components of what is described as a package of entitlement for young people. This framework originated in Welsh youth policy developed in 2000, 25 years ago. The approach does not center on addressing "horrible 14-year-old problems" such as teenage pregnancy, drug misuse, school dropout, or offending behavior but instead asks what experiences 21-, 22-, and 23-year-olds who have become well-adjusted young adults typically have had in their lives that supported their development. The same question is extended more broadly: what foundational experiences have contributed to positive development in earlier generations?

Common responses include supportive family environments, adequate schooling, extracurricular engagement, access to sport, music, and cultural activities, and opportunities for experiences away from home. Many of these experiences inherently incorporate elements of experiential learning.

From this analysis, a list was produced identifying 10 key components considered essential for young people in the 21st century components that should be made available to them as part of a broader entitlement framework.

European Youth Policy Framework

A framework of European youth policy is identified as generally positive. Within European institutions operating in the youth sector, there is a reluctance to refer to "difficult" young people or to focus on offending behavior. Instead, emphasis is placed on viewing all young people as being on a developmental trajectory toward active citizenship.

A set of major challenges confronting young people is acknowledged, accompanied by the central question of the extent to which practices within experiential learning and youth work contribute to addressing these challenges.

Research consistently indicates that youth work and, by extension, experiential learning supports personal change. The concept of transformation is frequently highlighted. Such personal change is presented as a prerequisite for individuals to consider positional change within their lives.

Caution is advised when making claims that these forms of practice directly prevent crime or secure employment for young people, as such causal assertions are not supported. However, when youth work is implemented effectively, emphasizing reflection on experience and examination of attitudes and aspirations, it can support young people in reassessing their circumstances and contemplating alternative developmental pathways.

A framework referred to as the "five P's," presented in Brussels one year earlier, is cited, with particular emphasis placed on the importance of evidence.

Experiential Learning in Youth Work

The idea of "making the familiar strange," a phrase referenced multiple times during recent discussions. This concept emphasizes expanding the imagination and horizons of young people, constructing group and individual experiences, and learning from those experiences both physical and cognitive. The process is not limited to dialogue; contributions which focused on learning through physically demanding outdoor activities and deriving meaning from those experiences, exemplify this.

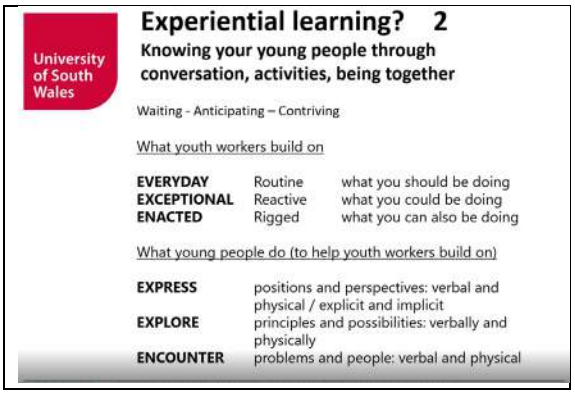
Another dimension involves altering roles and expectations. An illustration frequently cited in youth work suggests placing the most well-known thief in a youth club in charge of finances during a residential program. The logic is that, given their reputation, any financial discrepancy would be attributed to them regardless, resulting in heightened responsibility and accountability.

Reflective methodologies are widely employed. Some are planned in advance; for example, there were occasions when the evening's approach would be chosen based on the anticipated arrival of particular groups at the youth center. At other times, reflective processes emerged spontaneously, prompted by a conversation, a story, or a conflict such as an incident in a park that required immediate yet flexible engagement. Some issues were addressed within a brief 20-minute period, while others required revisiting and continuation at a later time.

The distinction between "compelled and voluntary" participation has also been explored. Although it is not a widely embraced concept, there are situations such as after a significant argument during a residential weekend when the responsible course of action involves requiring all participants to reconvene and discuss the incident. Even when individuals resist such discussion, the need to process the event, identify causes, and collectively address its impact may necessitate a compelled approach. Ideally, however, these reflective processes evolve more organically and voluntarily.

Waiting – Anticipating – Contriving

Youth work often involves waiting for an experience to emerge, anticipating when a meaningful incident may occur, or intentionally constructing an experience and integrating it into the context of young people's lives.



Youth workers are understood to build on the everyday. Many routine events take place, while at times exceptional circumstances arise such as conflicts or a young person arriving at the youth center after being removed from home. In other instances, moments are deliberately enacted; the practitioner may assume a particular role to provoke discussion. An example involves addressing the dominance of boys in occupying a hall for three-a-side football, which can open a broader dialogue about why this occurs, whether alternative arrangements such as allocated time slots for girls and boys should be introduced, and what it means if the girls do not wish to use the hall at all, resulting in an unused space.

Young people frequently bring narratives from their wider lives, providing material that can be engaged with constructively. Such engagement can take physical or verbal forms. Encounters constitute a central element of youth work. This term, referenced in recent discussions, captures the importance of direct interaction. Youth work often involves disagreement and argumentation, and there are occasions when encounters must be deliberately facilitated.

One example involves three girls attending a special school who lacked basic numeracy skills and were marginalized within the youth center. To facilitate interaction between these girls and the broader group, they were placed behind the coffee bar, a position requiring communication with others who approached to purchase drinks or snacks. Although financial discrepancies occurred regularly and required adjustment to prevent misunderstandings, the primary purpose was the social inclusion of the girls within the youth center environment rather than the financial operation of the coffee bar. These reflections highlight a set of concepts and practices considered valuable for understanding the dynamics of experiential interactions in youth work settings.

The Future of Education and Learning

A central aim of youth-focused practice is enabling young people to make sound decisions in their lives when professional support is no longer present. This idea emerged from an event held at Windsor Castle involving both shadow and in-power education ministers during the period when David Cameron was elected. The principle articulated was that, through education, training and learning opportunities, young people should ultimately be equipped to make better choices independently.

A related concern reflects a point raised in a lecture delivered approximately forty years earlier to the British Local Government Association on the future of education. The argument presented was that young people must learn when to demonstrate initiative and when to

demonstrate compliance. Displaying initiative in situations where compliance is expected can result in exclusion or negative consequences, while displaying compliance when initiative is required can lead to missed opportunities. This distinction highlights the difference between being well educated and being well socialized.

It is recognized that highly progressive educational practices may cultivate strong academic or cognitive development but may inadvertently disadvantage young people in navigating routine social expectations. This serves as a caution regarding approaches that are overly radical or exclusively progressive. Most young people eventually return to environments that operate according to conventional norms, and the task is therefore to support them in managing their lives across the varied contexts they will encounter, rather than abandoning progressive aspirations.

This relates to the fundamental question of purpose specifically, the inquiry “Why?”: Why is a particular practice undertaken? Why is an issue considered significant?

On the other hand, Future patterns of youth behavior remain uncertain. Young people may assume greater responsibility for the planet, or they may conclude that environmental collapse is inevitable and therefore prioritize enjoyment and reduced responsibility. The outcomes are unknowable. Similarly, the future of the rule of law, human rights and democracy in Europe is uncertain. Several countries including the one referenced in the original account have experienced recent or ongoing periods in which the rule of law has been weakened.

Conclusion

Consideration is required regarding the composition of the proposed package of entitlement for young people and, equally, how to reach those who stand to benefit from it most. For example, in the case of the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award the International Award for Young People participation is widespread in independent schools among young people who already possess

multiple advantages. For these individuals, this form of non-formal achievement is not particularly exceptional. By contrast, for a young person in a custodial institution with no formal qualifications, the same achievement may carry substantial significance.

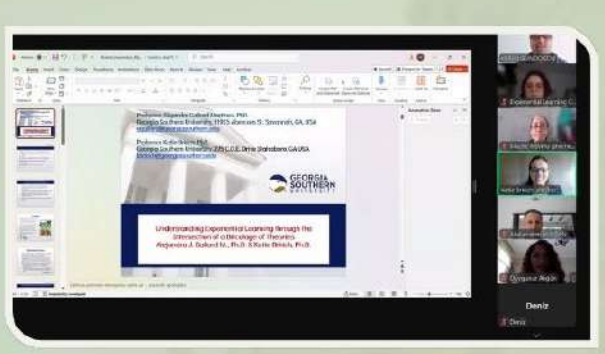
The issue of reach is therefore critical, and current efforts remain inadequate. The European Commission likewise struggles in this regard. Rather than primarily receiving applications from individuals proficient in drafting them, there is a need for more proactive outreach in the use of Erasmus+ resources.

The positioning of non-formal education and learning, along with youth work, must be examined within this entitlement framework. The same applies to experiential learning: its place in the package requires reflection, whether as an independent form of practice or as a collaborative practice operating alongside institutions and agencies. Advocacy for its role within the broader framework is essential.

The congress itself focused on bringing together multiple sectors and fostering cross-sectoral cooperation represents an important progression. It moves the field beyond isolated, self-referential settings and into more demanding territories, where broader alignment and support may increasingly emerge. Engaging with these wider arenas and articulating the underlying rationale remains necessary.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CONGRESS

Paper Presentations



Numerous paper presentations were delivered during the International Experiential Learning Congress 2025, encompassing both in-person sessions and online contributions. These papers addressed a wide range of themes such as experiential learning practices, teacher development, sustainability, inclusion, digital competence, and applications of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory. Together, the presentations enriched the scientific scope of the congress and reflected the growing international interest in experiential learning research. This diverse body of work demonstrates the congress's role as a global platform for exchanging innovative ideas and strengthening scholarly collaboration.

Empowering, Investing, and Transforming Conceptual Understanding Through Experiential Learning

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Abstract

This paper explores David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) and its transformative potential when integrated with sociocultural awareness and ethical praxis. It examines how experiential learning, grounded in a four-stage cycle and diverse learning styles, intersects with foundational pedagogical theories from Bourdieu (1986), Dewey (1925; 1938), Freire (1970), and Habermas (1984). Central to this analysis is the concept of Contextual Mitigating Factors (CMFs) (Gallard et al., 2020), which highlights the dynamic sociopolitical influences shaping educational environments. By acknowledging CMFs and embracing praxis, educators can foster inclusive, responsive, and empowering experiential learning experiences that reflect the complexity of learners' identities and communities.

Keywords: Experiential Learning, Contextual Mitigating Factors (CMFs), Praxis, Sociocultural Dynamics, Critical Pedagogy

Reimagining Experiential Learning in a Sociocultural Era

In an era marked by rapid social transformation, political polarization, and the intensification of cultural and epistemic diversity within classrooms, educators face an urgent imperative: to rethink traditional approaches to teaching and learning. The dominant paradigms, rooted in standardization, individualism, and cognitive abstraction, are increasingly ill-equipped to address the complexities of contemporary educational life. Against this backdrop, experiential learning (ELT) emerges not merely as an alternative method but as a relational and ethical reorientation of pedagogy. Kolb's experiential learning theory can be described as a cyclical model of growth within a sociocultural context. ELT offers a compelling framework for understanding how learning unfolds as a dynamic, recursive process. Built on a four-stage cycle, ELT reflects the natural rhythm of human inquiry and adaptation:

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1. Concrete Experience: Learners engage in a new experience or reinterpret a familiar one through embodied, affective, and relational encounters.
2. Reflective Observation: They pause to reflect, identifying patterns, tensions, or insights that emerge from the experience.
3. Abstract Conceptualization: Through reflection, learners generate or refine conceptual understandings, often shaped by prior knowledge, cultural narratives, and social positioning.
4. Active Experimentation: These insights are tested in new contexts, generating further experience and deepening the cycle.

In addition to ELT's four-stage cycle, Kolb also identified four learning styles: Diverging, Assimilating, Converging, and Accommodating. Each of these learning styles represents a different orientation toward the cycle. These styles underscore the importance of differentiated instruction and personalized learning pathways. Additionally, these processes are not linear but iterative, spiraling rather than sequential, allowing learners to continuously refine their understanding through lived engagement. Lived engagement is contextual; thus, being able to identify and mitigate negative contextual factors is critical. Several examples illustrate the power of experiential learning when informed by Contextual Mitigating Factors (CMFs) (Gallard et al., 2020) and praxis:

- STEM education in marginalized communities that integrates local knowledge and challenges dominant narratives
- Environmental science projects that engage students in real-world problem-solving and advocacy
- Civic engagement initiatives that connect classroom learning to social justice movements
- Arts-based inquiry that allows students to express identity and critique societal norms

These applications demonstrate that experiential learning is not confined to any one discipline but a universal approach to education that fosters meaningful learning. David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory offers a foundational framework for this shift, emphasizing that knowledge is not passively received but actively constructed through experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application. Yet to fully realize its transformative potential, ELT must be situated within the sociocultural realities that shape every learning encounter. Experience is never neutral; histories, identities, power relations, and place mediate it.

Integrating ELT with CMFs and Ethical Praxis

This paper argues that ELT must be expanded through two critical lenses: the concept of *CMFs* and the ethical imperative of *praxis*. Developed by Gallard Martínez and colleagues (2020), CMFs illuminate the dynamic sociopolitical forces that shape educational environments, including community norms, family structures, identity markers, historical legacies, and institutional policies. These factors are not peripheral; they are constitutive of how learners engage, resist, and make meaning. Simultaneously, praxis, which is rooted in the work of Paulo

Freire (1970) and deepened by feminist, decolonial, and critical theorists, calls for the fusion of reflection and action in pursuit of justice. It reframes teaching as a relational and political act, where educators are not transmitters of content but co-creators of possibility.

Toward Equitable, Inclusive, and Responsive Learning Environments

By integrating ELT with CMFs and praxis, educators can design learning environments that are not only effective but also equitable, inclusive, and socially responsive to mean:

- Centering lived experience as a source of knowledge, especially for those historically marginalized by dominant epistemologies.
- Recognizing context as a pedagogical force where a lesson on water quality, for example, evokes different meanings in a rural Indigenous community than in an urban immigrant neighborhood.
- Engaging in ethical co-creation, where learners and educators reflect together on their positionalities, assumptions, and shared responsibilities.

In this expanded vision, experiential learning becomes a form of *relational justice* or a choreography of care, critique, and transformation. It is not a method to be applied, but a mission to be embodied, requiring situating ELT in sociocultural and antineoliberal frameworks. Specifically, to increase the robustness of Kolb's model, it must be situated within broader theoretical and sociocultural frameworks to address the complexities of contemporary education. Learning does not occur in a vacuum; it is always mediated by power, identity, history, and place. As Gallard Martínez et al. (2020) argue through the concept of CMFs, educational experiences are shaped by community norms, institutional structures, and sociopolitical forces. These factors influence not only what is learned, but how, by whom, and to what end.

Toward a Relational and Responsive Experiential Learning Theory

To fully realize its transformative potential, Experiential Learning Theory must evolve beyond its cognitive scaffolding and become a living, breathing pedagogy, one that listens, responds, and co-creates. ELT must be reimagined not as a neutral framework, but as a relational and ethically charged practice attuned to the complexities of human experience.

- Contextualized: Learning must be situated within the cultural, historical, and political textures that shape each learner's reality. It must honor the specificity of place, memory, and struggle.
- Relational: At its core, learning is a dialogic encounter—a choreography of care, reciprocity, and mutual recognition. It thrives in spaces where vulnerability and trust are cultivated.
- Pluralistic: ELT must open itself to diverse epistemologies—Indigenous, feminist, decolonial, diasporic—refusing the epistemic monoculture of dominant paradigms.
- Ethical: Learning must be guided by a commitment to justice, dignity, and the flourishing of all beings. It must resist commodification and embrace the sacredness of inquiry.

A Sociocultural Deepening of ELT

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory resonates profoundly with sociocultural paradigms that view learning not as an isolated cognitive act, but as a relational, historically situated, and culturally mediated process. The following thinkers illuminate how ELT can be expanded into a socially responsive and ethically attuned pedagogy:

- Bourdieu's concept of *cultural capital* (1986) reveals how educational systems often reproduce social hierarchies by privileging dominant forms of knowledge, language, and habitus. From a sociocultural perspective, experiential learning becomes a counter-hegemonic practice when it recognizes and legitimizes the lived experiences, vernaculars, and epistemologies of marginalized learners. ELT, when grounded in Bourdieu's insights, invites educators to interrogate whose experiences are valued, and to design learning environments that redistribute symbolic capital through inclusive, dialogic engagement.
- John Dewey's (1925; 1938) principles of *continuity* and *interaction* situate learning within the dynamic interplay between the individual and their sociocultural environment. Learning is not isolated from life—it is life. Dewey's vision of education as a democratic and reconstructive force aligns with ELT's emphasis on reflection and transformation. Socioculturally, this means recognizing that social structures, cultural narratives, and historical contingencies shape every learner's experience. ELT, in this light, becomes a method for cultivating agency, adaptability, and ethical responsiveness within complex social ecologies.
- Freire's notion of *conscientização* (1970) advocates for an education that fosters critical consciousness and empowers learners to transform oppressive realities. Experiential learning, when infused with Freirean praxis, becomes a vehicle for social justice, where reflection is not passive rumination but a prelude to action. Sociocultural thinking deepens this by emphasizing the dialogic nature of learning, the co-construction of meaning, and the necessity of situating inquiry within the lived struggles and aspirations of communities. ELT thus becomes a pedagogy of liberation, rooted in solidarity and ethical imagination.
- Habermas's theory of *communicative action* (1984) foregrounds the importance of rational discourse, mutual understanding, and intersubjective validation in democratic life. ELT aligns with this by fostering collaborative inquiry and reflective dialogue. Through a sociocultural lens, this entails creating learning spaces where diverse voices can engage in meaning-making free from coercion or spaces where knowledge is not transmitted but negotiated and constructed. Habermasian ELT encourages educators to foster dialogic ethics, where learning is a collaborative pursuit of truth, justice, and human flourishing. Together, these theorists offer more than conceptual scaffolding; they offer a call to reimagine ELT as a socially embedded, ethically charged, and culturally responsive pedagogy. In this expanded view, learning is not merely experiential; it is existential, relational, and transformative, and positioned by sociocultural mitigating factors.

The concept of Contextual Mitigating Factors (CMFs), developed by Gallard Martínez et al. (2020), offers a powerful lens for understanding how sociopolitical forces shape educational environments. CMFs are not static variables—they are dynamic, interwoven, and historically situated constructs that reflect the complexity of learners' lived realities. They include:

- Community norms and values
- Family structures and expectations
- Identity markers such as race, gender, language, and ability
- Historical and political contexts
- Institutional policies and practices

In antineoliberal sociocultural frameworks, CMFs challenge the illusion of a "neutral" classroom and expose how dominant educational paradigms often erase difference, flatten context, and reproduce systemic inequities. Educators are being called upon to move beyond universalist models and adopt a pedagogy of *situated responsiveness*—one that listens, adapts, and co-creates with learners. Listening, adapting, and co-creating with learners is mitigated in neoliberal educational systems because context is often treated as an interference and an inconvenient variable to be standardized, sanitized, or ignored. The dominant logic privileges abstraction over embodiment, efficiency over complexity, and universality over specificity. Within this framework, learners are reduced to data points, and pedagogy becomes a mechanism of control rather than a site of co-creation.

However, the theory of CMFs, as articulated by Gallard Martínez and colleagues (2020), offers a radical counterpoint. They foreground the ontological (what is), epistemological (how we know), and axiological (what we value) dimensions of learning, insisting that education is always situated and always entangled in histories, identities, and power relations. CMFs invite educators to ask:

- *Whose knowledge is being centered?*
- *What histories are being silenced?*
- *How do institutional policies reflect or resist broader systems of power?*

These questions are not peripheral. They are foundational because they shift the educator's role from content deliverer to context listener, from technician to ethical interlocutor. This approach aligns with Boaventura de Sousa Santos's (2014) call for *epistemologies of the South*, which reject the monoculture of knowledge and affirm the pluriverse of ways of knowing. It also resonates with bell hooks' (1994) vision of *engaged pedagogy*, where teaching is a relational and ethical act rooted in love, vulnerability, and justice. CMFs do not merely restore relevance; they reframe relevance as a form of resistance. They transform experiential learning from a method into a mission, where the act of learning becomes a gesture of reclamation, a choreography of context, and a refusal to forget.

CMFs in Practice: From Relevance to Resistance

In practice, CMFs require educators to design learning experiences that are not only meaningful but also politically and culturally responsive. A science lesson on water quality, for instance, cannot be divorced from the land, the community, and the histories it touches. In a rural

Indigenous context, it may evoke ancestral relationships to water, colonial dispossession, and ecological stewardship. In an urban immigrant neighborhood, it may surface issues of environmental racism, infrastructural neglect, and linguistic marginalization.

To teach through the theoretical lens of CMFs is to teach with attunement, which means to listen for the silences, the ruptures, and the rhythms that shape each learner's world. However, relevance is not enough. What is relevant must also be resistant: resistant to erasure, to abstraction, to the flattening of difference. Consider a science lesson on water quality. In a rural Indigenous community, this lesson may evoke ancestral relationships to land, colonial histories of resource extraction, and ongoing struggles for sovereignty. In an urban immigrant neighborhood, it may surface issues of environmental racism, housing precarity, and linguistic marginalization. The CMF lens compels educators to design learning that is not only *relevant* but *resistant* to erasure, abstraction, and assimilation. This is a good example of what Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) means when she argues that Indigenous knowledge is not content; it is context, relationship, and resurgence. Or as Marcello Musto (2012) critiques how neoliberal education estranges learners from meaningful labor, community, and self, reinforcing the need for transformative approaches. The idea of the existence of CMFs honors this by situating learning within the social ecologies that shape meaning.

CMFs and Experiential Learning as Praxis

Praxis is defined as ethical action and reflective practice from an antineoliberal perspective. Praxis, rooted in Paulo Freire's emancipatory pedagogy, is not merely the application of theory; it is the dialectical fusion of reflection and action aimed at transforming unjust realities (Freire, 1970). From an antineoliberal perspective, ELT must also be reimagined as a form of *praxis* by integrating into experiential learning, the identification of those CMFs that have the potential to transform pedagogy from method to mission by unearthing the sociocultural barriers that have entered a classroom and dissuade the notion of inclusivity (attuned to diverse identities and experiences), the rational aspect (grounded in community and interdependence), and the empowerment of both the learner and the educator (orientation toward critical consciousness and collective transformation). Inclusivity, rational aspect and empowerment align with Paulo Freire's (1970) notion of *conscientização*, where reflection and action are inseparable. When CMFs are made explicit, this knowledge becomes the terrain on which praxis unfolds: a terrain marked by complexity, contradiction, and possibility. In antineoliberal sociocultural frameworks, praxis becomes a form of resistance to the commodification of education, the fragmentation of human experience, and the erosion of collective meaning-making. It is a commitment to relational ethics, epistemic justice, and transformative solidarity because learning is not merely cognitive, but also emotional, ethical, and relational (Hooks, 1994). In this light, the ELT cycle becomes a choreography of resistance: a dance between experience and transformation, rooted in the learner's sociocultural reality.

Antineoliberal praxis involves several key dimensions that challenge dominant ideologies and reframe educational and social engagement. **Critical reflection** becomes a political act that moves beyond mere introspection to interrogate how neoliberal logics such as competition, individualism, and performativity shape one's role and assumptions. Silvia Federici's (2012)

feminist critique of unpaid labor and care work reminds us that ethical reflection must also account for the invisible economies of affect and embodiment. **Adaptability**, rather than being market-driven flexibility, is reimagined as relational responsiveness to community needs, ecological interdependence, and historical trauma. Boaventura de Sousa Santos's (2014) epistemologies of the South exemplify this by advocating for learning that listens to silenced knowledges and adapts through dialogic humility. Finally, a **commitment to equity** is understood not as a metric but as a movement toward structural transformation. This dimension of praxis demands dismantling systemic barriers and reimagining education as a shared resource or commons.

Praxis as Mission, Not Method: Reclaiming Experiential Learning through Antineoliberal Sociocultural Thought

Experiential learning, when rooted in antineoliberal praxis, transcends its instrumental framing as a pedagogical method. It becomes a mission, an ethical, relational, and historically situated act of co-creation. Rather than facilitating skill acquisition for market readiness, it activates the soul, disrupts dominant contexts, and reclaims education as a site of collective transformation, and learning becomes a process of liberation. In this light, experiential learning is not content delivery; it is context disruption. It is not about preparing students to fit into the world as it is, but empowering them to remake it. For example, when a teacher integrates local environmental issues into a science curriculum, they are not merely fostering civic engagement; they are also promoting environmental awareness. They are enacting *ecological justice*, cultivating *place-based solidarity*, and resisting *extractive pedagogies* that treat land, labor, and learning as commodities. When experiential learning is rooted in sociocultural awareness and ethical intentionality, it transcends mere pedagogy. It becomes a transformative force or one that challenges dominant paradigms and reclaims education as a site of justice, care, and collective becoming. This is praxis as resistance, as resurgence, as relational ethics.

To deepen this mission of praxis as resistance, we must turn to sociocultural frameworks that challenge the epistemic and structural foundations of neoliberal education. The following are alternative sociocultural frameworks that deepen the mission of praxis.

- James Lantolf & Matthew Poehner draw on Vygotskian sociocultural theory, reframing praxis as the dialectical unity of theory and practice (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). They reject the consumerist divide between research and pedagogy, emphasizing that cultural tools, social interaction, and historical context always mediate the learning process. In their view, experiential learning must be dialogic, scaffolded, and attuned to the learner's evolving agency.
- Andrew Feenberg's (2002) critical theory of technology introduces the concept of *democratic rationalization*, where praxis involves reclaiming tools and systems for collective empowerment. In educational contexts, this means resisting the technocratic logic of datafication and instead designing learning environments that foster autonomy, dialogue, and ethical use of technology. Experiential learning, in this frame, becomes a site for reimagining the relationship between humans and their tools.

- Georg Lukács (1971) and later Frankfurt School theorists critique *reification,* which refers to the process by which human relations are objectified under capitalism. Their philosophy of praxis calls for the reintegration of human subjectivity into historical transformation. In experiential learning, this means resisting the reduction of learners to data points or future workers, and instead honoring their full humanity, agency, and capacity for critical reflection. It is a call to restore the ethical and existential dimensions of education.

These thinkers offer not only critique but also generative pathways for reimagining experiential learning as a dialogic, ethical, and historically situated practice. Their work expands the terrain of praxis, moving it from abstraction to embodiment, from method to movement.

Institutional Constraints in an Antineoliberal Frame

Neoliberalism reduces education to a transactional enterprise: students become data points, teachers become technicians, and learning becomes a commodity. In contrast, antineoliberal sociocultural frameworks call for education as a commons or a space of co-creation, critical inquiry, and collective transformation. Potentially, experiential learning holds radical potential to democratize education, restore relational meaning, and cultivate ethical agency. Yet its implementation is often obstructed by entrenched political and institutional forces shaped by neoliberal logics. These barriers are not merely logistical; they are ideological, reflecting a broader crisis of meaning, relationality, and justice in contemporary education (Giroux, 2014; Hooks, 1994; Mignolo, 2009; Noble, 2018). Gallard et al. (2020) refer to these and the examples below as CMFs.

Standardized testing (a CMF) exemplifies neoliberalism's obsession with measurability or the logic of quantification. It enforces a regime of *epistemic flattening*, where diverse ways of knowing — embodied, ancestral, and relational —are subordinated to narrow cognitive metrics. Safiya Noble (2018) warns that data systems, often presented as objective, replicate racial and gendered hierarchies under the guise of neutrality. As Giroux (2014) argues, this audit culture transforms students into passive recipients of information and teachers into enforcers of compliance, thereby eroding the space for creativity, critical reflection, and ethical engagement. This logic is not neutral; it is political. Brkich et al. (2025) demonstrate in their case study from Georgia that the rejection of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and their replacement with the Georgia State Science Standards were driven by ideologies of anti-federalism, anti-intellectualism, and regional conservatism. These decisions reflect a broader politicization of curriculum, where educational standards become battlegrounds for cultural hegemony. The implications are profound: what is taught, how it is taught, and whose knowledge is legitimized are all shaped by these ideological currents.

The aggregation of data and the erosion of the learner's presence are significant contributors to systemic inequities in education. In the age of algorithmic governance, big data promises personalization but often delivers abstraction. Learners become statistical silhouettes, flattened, categorized, and stripped of nuance. Aggregated metrics obscure individual needs, erase cultural specificity, and reinforce algorithmic biases that disproportionately affect marginalized communities. Data systems frequently replicate racial and gendered hierarchies under the guise

of neutrality, embedding oppression into the very architecture of educational decision-making (Noble, 2018). When experiential learning is reduced to data points, it loses its relational core. It becomes a simulation of engagement rather than a lived encounter. The learner is no longer seen as an embodied, situated, and socially entangled being, but as a variable to be optimized. Antineoliberal praxis demands a radical reclamation. In other words, a return to the learner as a whole person, whose knowledge is shaped by context, whose agency is cultivated through relationship, and whose growth is inseparable from community.

Traditional metrics often fail to capture the richness of experiential learning. Instead, educators should consider:

- Portfolio assessments that document growth and reflection
- Narrative evaluations that honor individual journeys
- Community-based projects that demonstrate real-world impact
- Self-assessment and peer feedback to promote agency and collaboration

These methods align with the principles of CMFs and praxis, ensuring that assessment is both rigorous and responsive. It is a reimagining of the evaluation and accountability.

Political Ideologies and the Erosion of Inclusivity

Educational standards are often shaped by dominant political ideologies that resist pluralism and reinforce monocultural narratives, undermining inclusive practices by marginalizing subaltern histories, languages, and epistemologies. Mignolo's (2009) concept of epistemic disobedience invites educators to challenge these hegemonies and reclaim curriculum as a site of decolonial resistance. Experiential learning, in this context, must be reimagined as a form of border pedagogy. Chapman and Gallard Martínez and (2023) describe borderlands as "complex sociocultural sites in which cultures are enacted and contested and filled with multiple cultural paths that determine numerous ways of being" (p.1). Pedagogical borderlands are spaces where difference is not assimilated but amplified. Borderland spaces include teacher preparation programs that neglect the sociopolitical aspects of pedagogy. Thus, many teacher education programs remain complicit in neoliberal paradigms, emphasizing classroom management and instructional efficiency over sociopolitical awareness. Without grounding in critical theory, teachers risk reproducing systemic inequities rather than disrupting them. Experiential learning must be embedded in an essential praxis of consciousness, where educators are equipped to navigate and transform the sociopolitical terrain of their classrooms.

To overcome these barriers, such as not seeing the learner as an embodied, situated, and socially entangled being, experiential learning must be re-rooted in a transformative reimagining of its foundations. A vision that refuses abstraction and embraces complexity, plurality, and care by considering the following positional ideas:

- **Pluriversal Pedagogy**: Embracing multiple epistemologies and rejecting the universalizing tendencies of neoliberal curricula through honoring Indigenous, diasporic, feminist, and decolonial ways of knowing as equally valid and vital (Santos, 2014).

- **Relational Ethics**: Centering care, reciprocity, and interdependence in learning design (Federici, 2012; Simpson, 2017). Education becomes a space of mutual nourishment, where learners and educators co-create meaning through shared vulnerability and trust.
- **Critical Reflexivity**: Equipping educators and learners to interrogate the systems they inhabit and co-create alternatives (Hooks, 1994; Giroux, 2011). Reflexivity is not a solitary act—it is a collective praxis of questioning, resisting, and reimagining.

This reimagining is not a reform; it is a rupture. It is a refusal to participate in the erasure of the learner's humanity. It is a call to design pedagogies that are not only effective but also just, inclusive, and alive. It is also a call to bridge theory and practice in teacher education by integrating CMFs and praxis into its core curriculum. To do so involves:

- Educating educators to recognize and respond to sociocultural dynamics
- Encouraging reflective practice and ethical decision-making
- Designing experiential learning activities that honor student identities
- Promoting interdisciplinary collaboration and community engagement

Such an approach does not merely train teachers, but rather educates them by preparing educators to navigate complexity and foster inclusive learning environments. As a result, they are empowered to challenge inequities and advocate for systemic change.

The Role of Educator Identity and Belief Systems: A Sociocultural Lens

Educator identity is not formed in a vacuum. Instead, it is shaped by a constellation of sociocultural influences (CMFs), including race, class, gender, language, religion, and geographic location. These factors inform how teachers perceive knowledge, interpret curriculum, and interact with students. Sociocultural theorists such as Vygotsky (1978), Rogoff (2003), and Ladson-Billings (1995) emphasize that learning is a socially mediated process, and educators are both products and agents of their cultural contexts. Specifically, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory posits that learning occurs through interaction with more knowledgeable others and is mediated by cultural tools. For educators, this means their own cultural tools—language, values, epistemologies—shape how they facilitate learning. A teacher who views science as a neutral and objective discipline may inadvertently reproduce dominant Western paradigms, thereby excluding Indigenous or community-based knowledge systems. This reflects what Bourdieu (1986) refers to as symbolic violence: the imposition of dominant cultural norms as universal truths.

Conversely, educators who embrace epistemological pluralism, recognizing multiple ways of knowing, can create inclusive learning environments that validate students' lived experiences. Gloria Ladson-Billings' (1995) framework of culturally relevant pedagogy advocates for teaching that affirms cultural identity, promotes academic success, and develops critical consciousness. Educators must therefore engage in ongoing reflection about their own positionality and biases. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) argue, teacher learning should be inquiry-based and critically reflective, enabling educators to interrogate their assumptions and adapt their practice. This reflective process is central to the concept of praxis, which involves the ethical integration of theory and action. Praxis demands that educators not only understand

the sociocultural dynamics at play but also act to transform inequitable structures. When educators recognize how their beliefs intersect with CMFs, they become better equipped to understand the dynamic sociopolitical forces shaping education. They are then able to design experiential learning that is responsive, equitable, and transformative (Gallard Martínez et al., 2020).

Policy Implications and Advocacy: A Sociocultural Imperative

Educational policy is a powerful determinant of what happens in classrooms. It reflects societal values, political ideologies, and historical legacies. Apple (2004) argues that curriculum and policy are sites of ideological struggle, often privileging dominant cultural narratives while marginalizing others. Sociocultural frameworks require us to view policy not as neutral, but as deeply embedded in power relations. This implies that to support experiential learning that is culturally responsive and socially just, policy must be reimagined through a sociocultural lens to include:

- Flexible standards that allow educators to adapt content to local contexts and student identities. Standardization often erases cultural specificity, undermining the relevance of experiential learning.
- Funding for community partnerships and field-based experiences, which connect classroom learning to real-world issues and local knowledge systems. These partnerships honor the sociocultural richness of students' communities.
- Support for culturally responsive curriculum development, including resources for integrating Indigenous, immigrant, and historically marginalized perspectives, aligns with Banks' (2006) multicultural education framework, which calls for curriculum transformation.
- Protection of teacher autonomy and academic freedom, enabling educators to exercise professional judgment and engage in critical pedagogy without fear of censorship, is essential for fostering democratic education and resisting political interference.

These policy shifts are not merely administrative in nature. No, they are ethical imperatives grounded in sociocultural theory that recognize that education is a relational, contextual, and transformative process. By advocating for policies that value diversity, promote equity, and empower educators, we can foster conditions where experiential learning thrives as a powerful tool for social change.

Conclusion: Toward a Transformative Pedagogy

Experiential learning, when integrated with Critical Methodological Frameworks and praxis, evolves into a dynamic force for transformation—one that not only informs but also empowers. It enables students to engage deeply with content, reflect critically on their lived experiences, apply knowledge in contextually meaningful ways, and navigate the complexities of sociocultural dynamics with agency and awareness. This approach positions learners not as passive recipients of information but as co-creators of knowledge and change.

For educators, investing in this pedagogical model means embracing a shift from a transmission-based approach to one that fosters transformation. Learning becomes a relational

and ethical endeavor that is rooted in context, sustained through connection, and driven by the imperative for change. This investment calls for a redefinition of educational spaces as inclusive, dialogic, and justice-oriented environments where diverse ways of knowing are valued and where equity is not merely an outcome, but a guiding principle.

By embracing this holistic and antineoliberal model, we move experiential learning beyond the confines of standardized metrics and toward a vision of learning as a **shared resource** and a collective endeavor that nurtures critical consciousness, fosters solidarity, and cultivates the capacity to imagine and enact more just futures.

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Educator in Face of the Need for Massive Teacher Sustainability Preparation. Self-Education as an Available Solution

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Abstract

The article looks closely at contemporary challenges to help real-life experiences become more sustainable. Thus, the significance of education in the field of sustainable development is fundamental and indispensable. However, collective behaviours and life routines of the inhabitants of our globe show that they are not balanced. People need common, novel education. That shift demands properly prepared teachers. Unfortunately, they generally stay sustainability illiterate. Profound educational changes need to be implemented. Waiting for the change, the best option for each teacher for the time is to undertake a self-education activity in the realm of sustainability issues. The eponymous concept of self-education is presented as a two-fold concept, with two main actors: an internal learner (the "me-learner") and an internal teacher (the "me-teacher"). To illustrate the roles of both sides and demonstrate how they can interconnect and intermingle, the article is divided into three parts. In the first one, the general perspective on the place of a teacher in contemporary surroundings is presented. In the second one, the author considers theoretical issues and didactical paradigms that can be used in self-education processes. In the third, the Kolb Educator Role Profiles (KERP) model as an inspiring tool for educators' self-development is presented and discussed. In all the parts, the division between the concept of self-education (encompassing self-teaching and self-learning) and self-moral education (with various other possible terms) creates a grid for deliberations. The sustainability issue establishes the framework for them.

Keywords: sustainability, teacher's self-education, moral self-cultivation, me-learner & me-teacher, didactical paradigms, Kolb Educator Role Profiles model.

Introduction

Sustainability, especially education for sustainable development, influences many aspects of life (Rogalska-Marasińska, 2017). The quality of our future depends on modern education, which is why teachers, as key actors in the teaching-learning process, should incorporate sustainability issues into their courses. To make it possible and visible, education for sustainable development must be widespread, practical, and connect theory with real-life experience. However, teachers currently lack sufficient preparation. Despite declarations, systemic support

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is limited, and training is mostly confined to local initiatives that offer limited approaches to the issue. As a result, only the most committed teachers engage in self-education in this field.

Thus, the purpose of the text is to present ways of self-development in sustainability using a learning model that helps adult learners (teachers) acquire theoretical and practical knowledge. The focus is on the challenges of self-learning and moral self-education in the context of education for sustainable development, given the absence of adequate systemic teacher education in this area.

Presenting a broad educational standpoint, acting for common well-being opts to rethink critical issues, such as sustainability itself; knowledge; learning; teachers and teaching; work, skills, and competencies; citizenship; democracy and social inclusion; public education; and higher education, research, and innovation (UNESCO, 2021a, p. viii). The collective (teacher-student) context framing of the purposes of new education enables us to view it as a more profound, complex, and less obvious challenge. Deep and culturally immersed propositions based on public dialogue and inclusive participation give us hope to work out and achieve inspiring and sustainable solutions. It entails the reflection on five directions of change:

1. Make educational systems places of equal opportunity and shared abundance by advancing inclusion through changes to educational cultures and practices that reduce competition and selection.

2. Foster curricula focused more on connections than categories by supporting interdisciplinary, intercultural, and ecological approaches in and outside formal education.

3. Support teachers to create transformative education by investing in teaching that builds cooperation and solidarity.

4. Ensure that the digital connects us to each other and to the world by building open-access content, public platforms, and committing to democratic, participatory governance.

5. Strengthen education as a global common good by ensuring more equitable cooperation within and across countries (UNESCO, 2022).

Making the presented deliberations closer to the eponymous self-education approach, we need to concentrate on some aspects of the abovementioned issues analysed from a teacher's perspective. Thus the core direction is the one in the middle of the list. It means that in planning profound educational changes so deep that no one even imagined them earlier, not a single person of policymakers and other responsible agents of change should forget teachers' role, influence, and importance. Teachers' impact on building or rebuilding education is fundamental. That's why their systemic sustainability education should be a contemporary priority.

However, the lack of formal availability to professional sustainability development is common. Thus, prompt support is needed. There are different paths of helping teachers in the process of self-education. But still the dominating and paradoxically most effective is self-engagement, meaning self-learning accompanied by moral self-forming.

Therefore, the study concentrates on presenting a rational of referring to adults' didactical models of education (here Kolb's model) and concurrently suggests the explanation of the choice by a three-level structure built by the three main questions:

1. *What explains the contemporary urgency in pre-service and in-service teacher education regarding sustainability issues?*
2. *What theoretical traditions and paradigms underpin self-education and moral self-cultivation, and can be used in a trajectory toward sustainability?*
3. How to apply the Kolb Educator Role Profiles model in an educator's self-development for sustainability?

Sustainability: How do we understand it now? What is the contemporary position of teachers in the process?

To establish a vital connection between education and sustainability issues, one should consider the crucial agents driving the shift. One of them is an educator. The role and the position of the group are pivotal. However, upon closer examination of the issue, one can easily conclude that the actual situation is far from ideal. Therefore, posing the question: *What explains the contemporary urgency in pre-service and in-service teacher education regarding sustainability issues?* seems reasonable and correct.

The 70s of the 20th c. are usually understood as the beginning of the global shift towards sustainability. At that time, the primary concern referred to the relationship between the global economy and the state of Nature, which meant the catastrophic influence of money greed on the natural environment. Now, a general perception of the notion of sustainability is that it deals with the viability and variety of all aspects of the human world, encompassing the production processes of things and symbols, our relationships with the natural environment, and the way we treat one another. The terms "sustainability" and "sustainable development" have been used in various ways. Hence, several discourses exist on them, depending on who is speaking and for what purposes. Therefore, each sustainability discourse is steeped in moral meaning, which in turn legitimises actions to achieve desired goals (Gougoulakis, 2019, 291–292).

As far as education is concerned, in the context of sustainability, it is common to describe its mission in terms of contribution to social, economic and political justice, democratisation, equality of gender relations, the right to learn, to work and enjoy living in peace with others and in harmony with the environment (Gougoulakis, 2019, p. 292). Concurrently, it is worth emphasising that, like every human activity, education is also deeply rooted in culture. Thus, the cultural aspect of education for sustainable development is one of the pivotal factors influencing the shape and character of teaching-learning communication and mutual understanding, as well as the effects of these processes. In addition, culture constitutes the overwhelming background and foundation for all sustainable concepts and activities, igniting and keeping them in motion (Dessein et al., 2015, p. 29).

Therefore, in the face of cultural and multicultural variety and its presence in the school environment, various, complex, and sometimes contradictory approaches to sustainability

particularly need properly prepared teachers. Approaches to help educators navigate new roles and face novel expectations have been rather casual, unsystematic, and short-term in their impact. A notable period worth mentioning was the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD, 2005-2014), during which there was a growing expectation and acceptance of introducing engaging topics or multilayered projects into school practice, bringing students closer to sustainability. That creative movement in education brought a lot of teaching-learning materials, teacher manuals, and guidebooks. The idea was to ease teachers' work in response to new tendencies and to emphasise the importance of incorporating sustainable topics into existing subject content. The need to solve inter-curricular problems and to use combined methods and teaching-learning strategies dominated. Later, there was a period of stagnation with minimal reference to the practical achievements of the DESD. There was no real movement to enhance teachers' common sustainability literacy.

Not long ago, in 2021, at the UNESCO Berlin World Conference on Sustainability, the idea of broadening sustainability issues in pre-service and in-service education came to the forefront of discussions on the "futures" of education and the lives of the following generations. The conference participants committed to: "recognise the crucial role of teachers to promote ESD and invest in the capacity development of teachers and other education personnel at all levels and to ensure a whole-of-sector approach to the necessary transformation of education." (UNESCO, 2021b, p. 4). Also, some new multinational initiatives have been undertaken. Between 2019 and 2023, under the motto: "Sustainability starts with teachers", UNESCO implemented the project (onsite and online versions), preparing teachers from southern countries of Africa: Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, South Africa and Lesotho, Tanzania, Malawi, Eswatini, Mozambique and Angola to become agents of sustainable transition (UNESCO, 2025). Regrettably, only 520 teachers participated in the onsite course, which, compared to the needs, reveals an overwhelming disproportion between the demands and the number of trained teachers.

The recalled documents and meaningful practical efforts demonstrate that the concept of ESD, with a significant role for every teacher's engagement, has been thought out and lucidly presented. In other words, the idea of reimagining education towards sustainability is taking root. However, educators are still not commonly prepared for the task of ultimate transition (Ferguson, Roofe, & Cook, 2021; Rieckmann, 2019). They need to learn it in various ways and approaches.

Generally, expectations towards a sustainability literate educator refer to some ideas, which can be listed as follows. In that context, a desired teacher:

- should have vision, optimism, determination, courage, and be open-minded, reflective and creative.
- should be keen to introduce improvements and implement novel and original solutions.
- should present the ability to take decisions and risks, act quickly and take on the competition, and be treated as a possibility to enter problematic areas that bring inspiration or recognition of unforeseen topics.

- should possess an intrinsic motivation and believe that such activities, though still incidental (not common), even against the grain, are profoundly worth their engagement.
- should keep on becoming more knowledgeable and skilled, and work on developing their sustainability competencies (be more sustainably professional).
- should be interested in flexible and contextual ways of acquainting their students with new problems and ways of coping with them.

Those optimal sustainable educator assets and thereby expectations directed towards teachers visibly prove that there is no such comprehensive pre-service and in-service teacher education yet. Therefore, unsatisfactory common education "enhances" active and responsible teachers to self-activity, in the sense of self-education from the perspective of content and axiological background and expectations.

Theoretical approaches and paradigms as inspiration for self-education

This section examines the nexus between self-development and the re-imagining of education for sustainability. The guiding question is: *What theoretical traditions and paradigms underpin self-education and moral self-cultivation, and can be used in a trajectory toward sustainability?*

Self-education constitutes a multifaceted phenomenon that integrates self-directed learning with value-oriented education and moral self-cultivation (Peters, Besley & Zhang, 2021; Śliwerski, 2024). Its conceptual foundations can be traced to diverse philosophical, cultural, and religious traditions, in which the individual's striving for self-improvement and independently acquired knowledge has been viewed as a central component of human development (Jankowski, 2012; Śliwerski, 2010). Historically, these traditions have positioned self-education as an axiological endeavour – one concerned with cultivating virtues, personal integrity, and socially responsible conduct.

John Amos Comenius, writing in the 17th century, emphasised the significance of lifelong learning and argued that individuals should aspire to wisdom, moral refinement, and the capacity to guide both themselves and others (cited by Śliwerski, 2010). His humanistic framework assigns self-education both a personal and a communal function, suggesting that self-directed efforts toward improvement contribute to the well-being and advancement of society. Abraham Maslow later expanded this anthropological view by characterising the individual as "one's own project," capable of anticipating future needs and assuming responsibility for shaping their existential conditions (Maslow, 1962/2010). Within the context of sustainability, such perspectives highlight self-development as a critical mechanism through which individuals engage with, and intentionally transform, the social, cultural, natural, and economic environments in which they operate.

Biographical approaches further clarify the internal dynamics of self-education. Scholars such as Duccio Demetrio (1996, 2000) and Zbigniew Pietrasiński (1977) describe self-education as emerging from a continuous interplay between the *Real Self* ("Who am I?") and the *Reflected Self* ("How am I perceived by significant others?"). Maintaining equilibrium between these

dimensions is essential: excessive reliance on external judgements may compromise autonomy, while overly internalised perspectives risk egocentrism (Jankowski, 2012).

Therefore, looking for balanced solutions as harmonious self-improvement leads to concepts of self-cultivation and moral self-forming. Bogusław Śliwerski, Polish contemporary pedagogue provides a systematic typology of methods associated with value-based self-education. These include:

a) methods of self-knowledge (introspection, analysis of others' evaluations, psychological and philosophical reflection);

b) methods of planning personal development (identifying tasks, cultivating traits through everyday activity);

c) autotherapeutic methods (self-regulation, relaxation, cognitive organisation);

d) methods of using key experiences (learning from mistakes, biographical reflection, expanding social networks) (Śliwerski, 2010, pp. 141–143).

The presented approaches, particularly those in groups (b) and (d), are clearly relevant to one's own developmental and sustainability-embedded processes. They foreground the individual's interaction with wider environments and support the translation of theoretical insights into deliberate, ethically informed practice.

Agreement on such a perspective leads to the following issues, presented by some essential questions that learners, future teachers, or already working teachers should thoroughly consider to generate or work out reasonable, valuable, and beneficial solutions. The inquiries understood as five framings of education's relationship to the future are:

I. What will education be like in the future?

II. What sort of education will prepare students for the future?

III. How can students learn to think reflexively about futures?

IV. How can education be liberated from the future?

V. How might education heal the future? (Facer, 2021, pp. 3–4)

All those crucial questions lucidly change the optics of understanding the role of education and a teacher's position. The vision of future-oriented and sustainability-literate educators requires novel teaching activities. New possibilities may be found by tracing existing educational paradigms and synthesising them into innovative didactical hybrids. Thus, they should look for new solutions worked out from already existing and practised concepts.

For further reflections on how to help oneself in the process of self-learning and self-forming in the face of sustainability demands, I suggest referring to the objective/normative paradigm (a hybrid between behavioural and cognitive paradigms), as well as humanistic, interpretative, and constructivist paradigms. They all can be used in educational practice, contrary to Thomas Kuhn's proposition (Kuhn, 1962). In refreshed didactical approaches, a multi-paradigmatism is not only possible but fully desired way of coexistence of various educational possibilities.

Different model concepts may co-occur, yielding borderline (or opposite) solutions. We can also discuss two types of paradigmatic eclecticism: valuable (eliminating the shortcomings of each paradigm/complementing each other) or superficial one (resulting from a misunderstanding of the assumptions of individual paradigms) (Klus-Stańska, 2018).

A behavioural paradigm (Baker et al., 2021) shapes desirable individual behaviours in accordance with socially determined expectations. Within this paradigm, there is a single external reality, allowing learners to acquire knowledge of singular truths. Learners are considered "blank slates", and learning involves acquiring correct information about the world. Learning or knowledge acquisition is viewed as a process concentrated on achieving the desired outcome of learning. Teachers shape this observable behaviour by transmitting knowledge to learners, using systematic conditioning and reinforcement (Pavlov, 1927/2003; McSweeney & Murphy, 2014). Reinforcement increases the likelihood that a specific behaviour will occur more frequently in the future by delivering or removing a stimulus immediately after the behaviour occurs. Desired behaviours thus become habits, traits or dispositions as they are reinforced and honed by use over time. Assessment and evaluation focus on learners demonstrating these desired behaviours, measured against external standards (e.g., professional activities).

The cognitive paradigm extends the behaviourist paradigm toward understanding why and when the behaviours may or may not be appropriate. This shift develops experts who can respond more flexibly to changing needs. Knowledge is still framed, but the focus is on how this information is stored in memory. Learning is considered by definition to involve the acquisition of knowledge through senses, experiences or formal instruction by teachers. Educators, like coaches, facilitate this processing through focused attention on how information is structured, organised and retrieved, and transferred to new situations.

The humanistic paradigm aims to prepare learners to progress towards the realisation or fulfilment of one's potential and autonomy (self-actualisation) (Maslow, 1943). This paradigm is focused on engaging the learner as a whole (cognitive and emotional domains). A learner is considered subjectively as a person. Schooling is paidocentric, and learning is viewed as the achievement of one's personal goals. Self-evaluation is the only meaningful assessment within this paradigm, as the purpose is to estimate whether an individual feels satisfied with their predetermined goals and aspirations. Thus, the humanistic paradigm promotes engagement in education (Kusurkar & Croiset, 2015).

The interpretative paradigm maintains that humans and knowledge are intricately linked, created within specific social and historical contexts (Saunders et al., 2009). Knowledge comes from viewing the objective world, as well as from people's activities and connections (Schwandt, 1998). Therefore, knowledge acquisition is a dynamic process that is continuously constructed and reconstructed through interactions and dialogue within society. The paradigm emphasises the importance of subjectivity and social construction, where each person's interpretative behaviour is impacted by personal ideas, expectations, and past experiences, evolving with ongoing exposure to new information. This view-point highlights the importance of varied perspectives and collaborative situations in enhancing and widening understanding.

The interpretative paradigm often seeks answers for research by forming and underpinning multiple understandings of the individual's worldview (Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

The constructivist (and cultural) paradigm begins with the social focus of education. Therefore, the creation of knowledge cannot be separated from the sociocultural environment. Cultural constructivism emphasises how knowledge is constructed through sociocultural influences and interactions (Vygotsky, 1980). Learning is understood as a process of identity formation and the co-creation of knowledge. That happens through participation in social contexts and *enculturation* (Brown et al. 1989). Thanks to constructivist learning students become active participants in communities. The role of the teacher is to facilitate social interactions and collaborative work.

The analysis of the Kolb Educator Role Profiles model from the perspective of a sustainability educator, being both a self-learner and a self-teacher

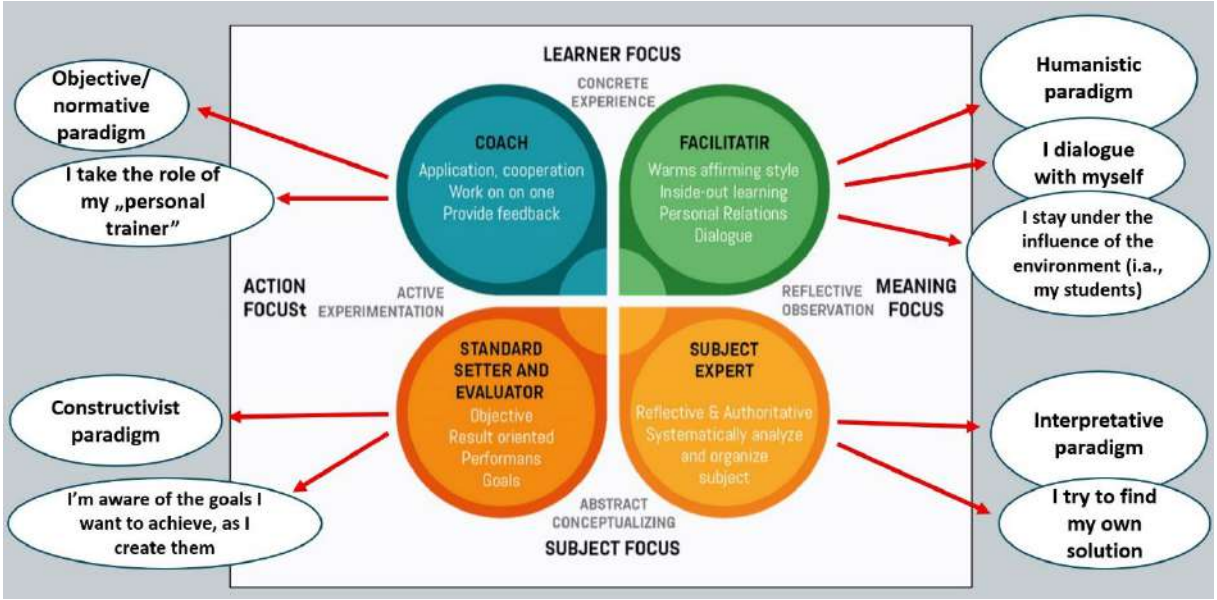
The issue that dominates in these reflections focuses on being simultaneously a teacher and learner for oneself, and aiming to become a sustainability professional. Thus, the question is: *How to apply the Kolb Educator Role Profiles model in an educator's self-development for sustainability?*

Sustainability is a new challenge, and teachers must be able to, as has been emphasised here many times, prepare themselves for it. Valuable educational models can help them in their self-improvement. There are many of them (Frąckowiak et al., 2019). The most well-known include Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984, 2000; Kolb & Kolb, 2022), Hiemstra and Brockett's Self-Directed Learning Model (Hiemstra, 1985), and Garrison's Model of Self-Directed Learning (Garrison, 1997). All of them adopt the student's perspective and highlight the essential elements of individual learning.

In my current reflections, I would like to refer to a model that would be simultaneously suitable for a student and a teacher. Therefore, I decided to adapt the equally well-known and accessible Kolb's Educator Role Profile (KERP) model, which initially proposes the teacher's perspective (Kolb & Kolb, 2013). It seemed interesting and compelling to me to expand the teaching model to include a learning perspective, thus creating a theoretical/model hybrid through which teachers, "forced" to work independently on themselves and achieve professionalism in the field of Education for Sustainable Development, would be able to verify their work as both a student and their own teacher. Referring to paradigms as the foundations of self-work is also crucial in this context.

Ultimately, the goal is to provide teachers with a tool that, through a deeper understanding of the issues of self-learning and self-teaching, will enable them to develop their substantive skills and morals responsibly and profoundly, thereby promoting sustainable development.

Figure 1. Kolb Educator Role Profile (KERP) Transformed into Self-education Teaching and Learning Model



Source: This model represents the author's extension of the Kolb Educator Role Profile (KERP), which incorporates speech bubbles containing content from the learner's perspective. Thanks to the broadening, the model is dual in possible understanding. The original teacher's perspective (ERP) intermingles with the suggested subjective learner's approach. Overlapping perspectives present a match between each teaching role and pedagogical paradigms, as well as pivotal aspects of learning activity at each phase. The core idea of the model is to enable individual analyses from both teachers' and learners' perspectives. Adapted from Erdoğan, M. (2023, March 9). *Kolb Educator Role Profiles*. Experianta. https://experianta.com/kolb-educator-role-profiles/. In the public domain.

According to Alice and David Kolbs, the KERP presents four types of teaching: Facilitator, Expert, Evaluator and Coach (Kolb & Kolb, 2013, pp. 38–39). Typically, educators choose to play these roles in a way that aligns with the aims and practices of a course's content, and adequately matches students' abilities to maximise their learning achievements.

In my author extension of the model, I not only added bubbles referencing paradigms but also input core ideas representing each learning type, maintaining a constant relationship to Kolb's teaching modes. That continued duality necessitated the use of a pronoun "I" as a linguistic operation, and simultaneously, a solution for representing the dual activity being played out within the same person.

The analysis of the model by reading it out has been particularly engaging because of the two approaches. The first one referred to the possibility of individual interpretation of each stage (element) of the KERP. The second was fascinating for looking for interconnections or overlapping areas between the "raw" model concept and references to sustainability issues. Thus, in my interpretation, the Kolb Educator Role Profiles with the sustainability and learner's extensions show, as follows:

1. The "Facilitator Role" highlights the role of inspiring a learner to make their own decisions, enhancing the need for dialogue, and suggesting possibilities of a slight shift in a student's attention to a different point of view or perspective. A teacher is more of

a mentor than a trainer. They are "quiet sages" who stay beside the learner. The learner is the seeker. That's why the humanistic paradigm is the best fit for this context. Thus, a "learner part" dialogues with their "teacher part", seeking a balance between both perspectives, one that is acceptable to the two sides' visions, interests, intrinsic motivations, and external influences. The me-teacher takes on the facilitator role, inspiring the me-learner to engage in various activities and leaving the latter space for decisions on what to follow and what to leave behind. What is more important from a perspective of a "real" teacher is that the two (me-teacher and me-learner) are constantly influenced by the social environment: different people (real students). Thus, me-teacher suggestions and help, and me-learner responses depend on the others. These are not separate worlds; contradictory self-education processes and changes rely on and depend on collective norms, reactions, and expectations. The idea of sustainability, in the face of the plethora of unsustainable examples, begins to emerge from that dense yet chaotic knowledge. Understanding the interconnections, whether of international corporate interdependencies or more minor instances of greed and shortsightedness, one can learn to combine pieces of information, data, and facts in a single place. Fragments of data and information start to match together like pieces in a puzzle. The effect of achieved knowledge may impress a learner and enhance a further, more planned and deliberate search (with the engaged participation of a me-teacher).

2. The "Expert Role" helps learners organise and systemise their knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Critical and reflective thinking is crucial. Holistic and broad thinking, or embracing the subject matter, is fundamental. Referring to good examples and analysing them (whether already experienced or to be created in the future - thus, planning/projecting/ pondering about the creation of a valuable activity) is one of the core steps here. Therefore, the interpretative paradigm is the most suitable. Finding individual solutions entails being attentive to what the rational side (me-teacher) expects to be done. That interdependence simultaneously arranges the learner's internal and external life according to the fresh perspective. A learner always has a chance to figure out or "discover" something new for themselves or look at the matter in a novel way. Thus, they learn to become experts in the area of interest. Thanks to the me-teacher in the expert role, one can learn to find the way to understand how various aspects of sustainable development influence each other, how they are structured (and what is the correlation between them), and how globally there is a conflict of interests that hinders and restrains the implementation of genuine and more sustainable solutions. The order gives a clearer insight into matters and inspires reflection and systematic analysis. That's why content or its nuances that were never thought of before may become clearly visible. Thanks to them, creating ideas and finding interconnections or solutions for the new times and challenges may become possible. Hence, the interpretative paradigm remains beneficial and constructive at this stage of one's engagement with sustainable issues.

3. From the perspective of (moral)self-education, the "Evaluator Role" is the most challenging. Being an objective judge of oneself is not an easy task. Evaluation in education, or more generally, students' development (thinking about all those who learn, including teachers), refers to assessing how far or precisely targets, aims, and goals have been realised and achieved. In the self-education option, it becomes even more complex and complicated. As a me-teacher, one may listen to the voice of the educator and try to self-evaluate more externally. On the other hand, assuming both perspectives are equal, which means the me-learner's voice is hearable, one should follow the me-student's arguments. Matching voices and rationals of both me-persons, one must perceive the sense of aims that the one really wants and needs to accomplish. Thus, the individual takes full responsibility for their development, approving external expectations or following their internal voice. They can utilise their flexibility and ability to construct their own aims and goals (under various conditions and through different interactions). Therefore, the constructivist paradigm seems the most proper one to use here. Being engaged in self-evaluation means understanding one's relationship with the content one is professionally immersed in, its context, depth, variability, and one's attitude towards it. From that perspective, sustainability issues encompass a vast array of topics, approaches, and activities. If somebody is passionate about them, they may even "seduce" them. Keeping the aims of sustainability engagement in mind helps prevent going off track. Then, each position and obligation of the evaluator role (me-teacher or me-learner) is not the source of slowing down and creating obstacles to self-improvement in sustainability topics, but rather truly helps one to learn responsibly and with engagement.
4. I perceive the "Coaching Role" as a collaborative and encouraging style, where individual experiences and plans align with the context of the contemporary learning environment and receive feedback from the teacher, stemming from the objective/normative paradigm. An educator takes the role of their "personal trainer". The relationship between me-teacher/coach/trainer and me-learner/student, is close and one-on-one. We "both" strive to reach the same aim, as we naturally collaborate, rely on, and trust each other. We "both" inspire each other and become engaged on the same level. It's a kind of a "mirror relationship". As a learner and a coach simultaneously, one needs to have a plan to achieve their mutual aims. Sustainability issues offer numerous opportunities for self-education, understood as gaining knowledge, developing skills, and profoundly deepening virtues and moral attitudes and behaviours. The "battle" between good and evil is constantly invoked. Despite the universal, common understanding of these two opposite values, there are local perspectives that may favour different ethical interpretations. These are the reasons why experiencing sustainability personally and sharing with others is a never-ending endeavour. Thus, as a human being and a teacher to others, one must undergo regular training in sustainability issues. The analogy between a sportsman and a coach is evident. As we consider self-development, the me-teacher in the coaching role keeps the me-learner motivated, even forcing them to go deeper and focus on specific issues or orders to stop,

take a break, relax, and gain a broader perspective from a distance. Reciprocal hard work brings pleasure and satisfaction for sustainability assets.

The presented self-developmental concept towards sustainability, along with the educator's dual role (me-teacher and me-learner) as outlined in the Kolb Education Role Profiles (KERP), and corresponding to them, the author's proposition concerning the learner's presence and activities, can be employed with varying intensities and different directions. One can use them in either direction or skip according to individual preferences. The order on the "game board" is not strictly fixed; it's instead a set of suggestions on how to circulate and move forward in self-education, being aware that we intrinsically possess the teacher and the learner sides to listen to and support, or better be supported by them in our sustainability challenges.

Conclusions

There is no doubt that the modern world needs well-trained teachers who can address sustainability issues in their daily teaching and learning practices. Implementing sustainability-related content is neither automatic nor straightforward. New and advanced preparation for the profession (as well as professional teacher development) that expands existing pedagogical education to include sustainability issues is becoming a fundamental need before our very eyes.

Unfortunately, international bodies are only now beginning to truly recognise the absolute need for practical change in teacher education. The previous failure to recognise this pressing need has resulted in today's teachers generally being able to rely only on themselves. Systematic and widespread preparation in the field of sustainability is lacking.

Therefore, it is worth helping teachers achieve this aspiration, often associated solely with individual effort, to become sustainability literate. Importantly, this isn't just about acquiring specific content/knowledge and skills in the field of sustainability, but above all, about developing attitudes toward a sustainable life. This requires a responsible examination of axiological issues, and in the processual development of sustainability attitudes in teachers, with a focus on moral self-education. Sensitising teachers to the challenges of sustainability requires a new perspective on the world of values. Moral self-education, as moral self-cultivation and moral self-formation, is essential and pivotal.

Pedagogical theories provide a solid foundation and valuable and inspiring approaches for such development – a substantive and axiological engagement with the issue of sustainability. Educational practice also offers many stimulating tools. These include, among others, adult learning models, as exemplified by the Kolb Educator Role Profiles model, which can provide effective leverage in professional self-development towards becoming a sustainably literate educator.

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Internships As Experiential Learning: Debriefing And Reflections

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Abstract

This study aims to examine internship experiences as a form of experiential learning through personal reflection and debriefing. As a Master's Geography student who has completed multiple internships in France, I share my personal journey so as to contribute insights that could benefit both students and internship organisations. I identify gaps in current internship implementation and propose improvements to enhance learning outcomes.

I employ reflective analysis of my diverse internship experiences. This ranges from climate change research to environmental education projects. Using Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle as a theoretical framework, I look at my internships to identify missing components that could have contributed to my learning. My approach involves personal reflection on skill development, challenges encountered and missed opportunities for deeper learning.

My analysis reveals that, although my internships did nominally bridge academic knowledge with practical application, in some cases, they lacked structured reflection and debriefing components essential for transforming experience into meaningful learning. I identified critical gaps including insufficient preparation guidance, limited opportunities for active experimentation and absence of structured reflection processes. For internships to live up to their calling, I propose that they implement regular debriefing sessions, put in place peer support systems and require How-I-Learned chapters in internship reports. These relatively simple modifications could transform internships from mere work into comprehensive learning opportunities that benefit both interns and host organizations.

Keywords: Debriefing, Experiential learning, İnternships, Reflection, Kolb's experiential learning cycle

Introduction

Internships are often considered to be an essential part of education because they place students in a professional work setting and thus allow them to apply and practice their classroom knowledge and skills in authentic work environments. However, internships fail to reach their full potential as learning experiences, simply because no proper debriefing is carried out.

This is hardly surprising given how little has been published (a) on the need for debriefing in all experiential learning activities (see, e.g., Crookall, 2025) and (b) on the topic of debriefing in internships. However, an example of research that was conducted on debriefing in experiential educational contexts is Flynn & Bordieri (2024). They found that structured

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debriefings significantly enhanced learning for undergraduate research participants. Debriefing and reflection have been extensively studied in simulation-based learning (e.g., Crookall, 2023) and experiential learning (e.g., Ali & De Jager, 2019). Crookall's (2023) practical guide emphasizes debriefing as a transformative tool for generating learning, while de Wijse et al. (2025) demonstrate how structured reflection assignments enhance self-reported learning outcomes. Transferring these insights to internship experiences could bridge the gap between mere internship tasks and meaningful, longer-term skill development. I see no reason why debriefing of internships would also not lead to enhanced learning. However, I found no compelling studies specifically examining how debriefing could improve internship outcomes.

Through my own internships, which have included climate change research, environmental education and scientific outreach, I have discovered both the benefits of hands-on work and the weaknesses of internships. With hindsight, I also began to realize that I had missed important opportunities for deeper learning.

Kolb's (2014) Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC) helps to explain the widespread shortcomings in many internships today. The ELC (according to Ali & De Jager, 2019) contains four distinct stages:

1. concrete experience (doing the work),
2. reflective observation (thinking about what happened),
3. abstract conceptualization (connecting experiences to theories) and
4. active experimentation (applying lessons to new situations).

Fulfilling and long-lasting learning requires all four stages. Unfortunately, many internships focus mostly on the first stage – the concrete experience, that is, the student accomplishing tasks in an agency or company. Most internships neglect the other three stages, with the result that the students often fail to think sufficiently about their experience, to conceptualise and to engage in experimentation.

This paper uses my own personal internship experiences to show how better planning, mentorship and reflective discussions (debriefing) can improve learning outcomes. My goal is to provide practical recommendations for both interns and intern-hosting organisations to help them make internships more valuable for students and their professional growth.

Methodology

In order to analyse my personal internship experiences as qualitative case studies, I adopted a simplified reflective-practice approach. The 'data' consists of retrospective evaluations of six internships, including roles in scientific research (e.g., climate change impacts on Alpine fauna) and educational outreach. I used Kolb's ELC stages to identify the strong and weak aspects of my internships. For example, the absence of debriefing sessions in one internship highlighted the missing reflective observation phase. No formal instruments or external participants were involved; the analysis is rooted in my own first-hand experience of internships and subsequent

reflection on them. Finally, I make a few proposals for ways in which internships may be improved.

Internships

Importance of internships

These points in this slide are the foundational benefits of internships. For instance, my internship at the Research Center for Alpine Ecosystems (CREA Mont-Blanc) involved applying my classroom skills to research in the field (Mont Blanc mountain). In this way, the internship directly translated classroom knowledge into practice. In the evening, we all descended from the Alps (mountain pastures) and spent the time debriefing informally.

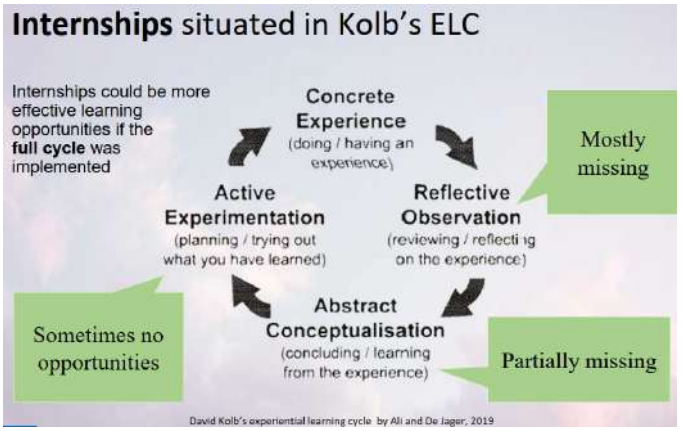
Skills **developed** during internships

Skills	
Data analysis & research	Data collection, analysis, interpretation, report writing
Computing, stats & GIS	GIS software (e.g., ArcGIS, QGIS), data visualization, statistical modelling and hypothesis testing, creating maps and spatial representations
Project management	Task management, planning, organization, team collaboration and coordination
Communication	Presentations, environmental education, outreach
Climate change	Understanding climate change causes and consequences, adaptation and mitigation strategies, participation in climate awareness campaigns, advocacy for sustainable practices

This slide lists some of the tangible skills that I learned, but, sadly, omits any mention of the learning process itself. For example, my skills in Geographical Information System (GIS)

software (in my internship on mapping flood risk) was achieved largely through trial-and-error, with no possibility to discuss and get feedback.

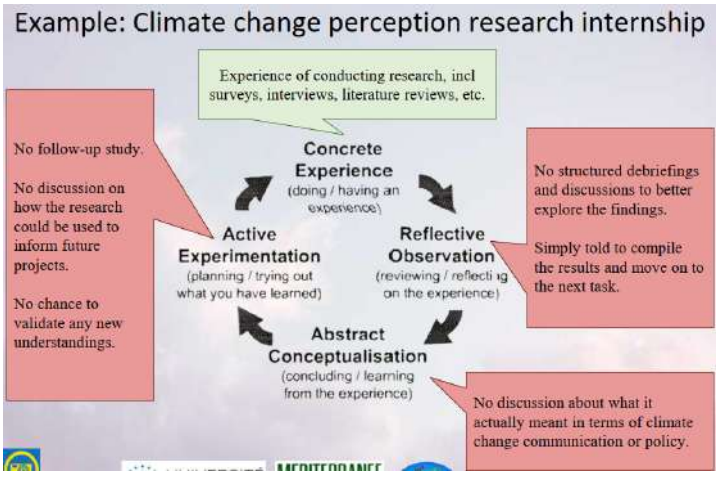
Placing internships within Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC)



My climate perception research internship exemplifies the missing ELC elements. I conducted 250 interviews for a survey, but no discussions were initiated to contextualize my work or findings and to encourage reflection on my work.

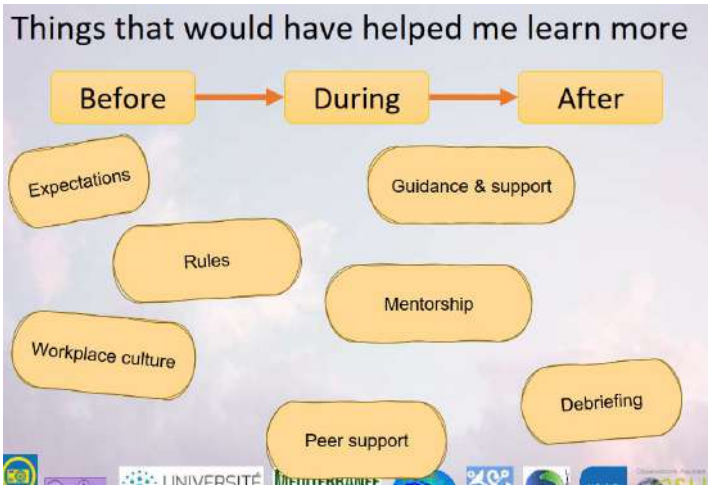
Findings

ELC gaps in internships



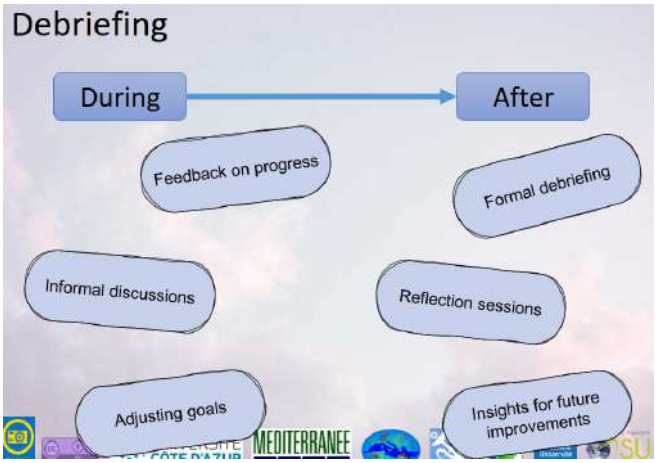
My internships provided concrete experiences (e.g., conducting climate change research, managing outreach campaigns). However, they lacked opportunities for structured, reflective observation and abstract conceptualization. For example, in my climate perception study, data collection (through interpersonal interviews in Nice) was followed by no discussion on how findings could inform future projects or validate new insights. Active experimentation was rare. Tasks ended abruptly without planning how learned skills could be applied in new contexts.

Missed learning opportunities



Weaknesses, such as unspoken workplace rules or infrequent feedback, left me unprepared to maximize learning. For instance, I retrospectively realized the value of documenting daily experiences, which could have aided reflection. Moreover, peer support and mentorship were inconsistent. Some internships offered rudimentary guidance, while others left me to "figure it out" alone.

Debriefing as a critical missing component



Only one internship included several fairly formal debriefing sessions. These really helped me to develop my skills and identify areas for growth. The absence of such sessions in other internships made it harder to connect the experiences to broader learning goals. Crookall (2023) explains that debriefing encourages learners to transform and consolidate isolated experiences into coherent learning because it provides space and time for guided reflection. Similarly, Alf et al. (2023) found that repetitive, structured reflection significantly improved learners' ability to connect experiences to theoretical frameworks.

Results and Discussion

My findings emphasize the distinct impression that most of my internships missed learning opportunities (Eyler, 2009). Kolb's ELC underscores the fact that learning requires cyclical engagement with experience, reflection and application (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). My internships, like many others (Jackson, 2015), prioritized task completion over deeper learning, mirroring the concrete experience trap noted by Moon (2013). For example, the climate perception research could have fostered Abstract Conceptualization by discussing how findings might influence policy, a step omitted due to time constraints and institutional priorities. In some cases, the lack of debriefing can be particularly detrimental. Debriefing is a cornerstone of experiential learning (Boud et al., 1985) because it enables interns to consolidate skills and identify transferable competencies.

Suggestions

To address ELC gaps in internship, I suggest three proposals below.

1. Structured debriefing protocols.
    - During internships → Weekly or fortnightly feedback sessions with mentors to adjust goals and reflect on challenges. Implementing Alf et al.'s (2023) model of circular reflection could help interns contextualize tasks within broader professional or academic goals.
    - Post-internship → Formal debriefings to review achievements and plan skill application. Employers could use templates to standardize this process.
2. "How I Learned" chapter.
    - Require interns to submit a reflective appendix to reports that includes:
        - Skills/knowledge gained (e.g., GIS, project management).
        - Evolution of understanding (e.g., "I initially viewed climate adaptation as technical; now I see it as socio-political").
        - Future applications (e.g., "I will use survey design skills in my thesis").

    This aligns with Schön's (1983) "reflection-in-action" model and benefits employers by clarifying program strengths/weaknesses.
3. Pre-internship preparation.

    Workshops on workplace norms, self-advocacy and Kolb's ELC to set expectations. For example, interns could draft learning contracts with supervisors to outline desired active experimentation opportunities.
4. Conduct research on debriefing in internships

    In the last decade, we have seen an upsurge in research on debriefing in medical simulation, in educational simulation/gaming. It would be relatively straightforward to extrapolate from the enormous amount of work already done there and conduct research

on a wide variety of aspects of using debriefing in internships. Of course, debriefing would first need to be undertaken in order to do research on it. If that is done, then internship research may take on a new lease of life.

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Enhancing Experiential Learning through Developing Teacher Educators' Digital Competence in Vietnamese Higher Education

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Abstract

In the age of digital transformation, Vietnam's higher education sector faces the urgent challenge of preparing future educators to incorporate technology effectively into teaching and learning. Experiential learning—encouraging critical thinking, creativity, and the application of knowledge to real-world situations—provides a powerful way to address this challenge. However, teacher educators encounter ongoing barriers, including limited digital skills, insufficient institutional support, and the lack of context-specific strategies adapted to local realities.

This study explores how developing digital competence can enhance experiential learning within the Vietnamese higher education system. Using the HeDiCom, DigCompEdu, and TPACK frameworks, it investigates how these models can be adapted to the Vietnamese context to foster innovative teaching methods. The research adopts a qualitative approach, gathering data from 30 teacher educators across public and private universities in Da Nang through semi-structured interviews and a self-assessment survey on digital competence. This approach aims to understand teacher educators' teaching experiences, challenges, and perspectives on integrating digital tools into experiential learning.

Preliminary findings reveal significant disparities in digital competence, especially in local strategies for implementing digital pedagogy and in institutional mechanisms that support professional development. These findings highlight the need for systemic and context-aware approaches to improving digital competence. The study contributes to the growing body of research on teacher education in the Global South by offering practical recommendations for policymakers, universities, and educators. Enhancing teacher educators' digital competence will be essential for advancing experiential learning and ensuring Vietnam's higher education system adapts effectively to the digital age.

Keywords: digital competence, digital transformation, experiential learning, higher education, teacher educators

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Background and Rationale

The rapid progress of digital technologies, combined with the significant impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution on individuals and the labour market, has necessitated a fundamental change in workforce skills and training within higher education institutions (Alenezi, 2021). This change increasingly focuses on learners and their learning processes, emphasising the integration of experiential learning activities in real-world contexts to develop comprehensive skills (Bisri et al., 2023). Globally, universities are adopting experiential learning models to boost student engagement, encourage active participation, and improve employability skills. In Vietnam, experiential learning is closely linked to ongoing national education reforms that prioritise developing practical skills and workforce readiness, ensuring graduates are well prepared for the fast-changing labour market (Dieu & Kim, 2018). Meanwhile, the digitalisation of education has significantly transformed how knowledge is created, delivered, and applied (Zhao et al., 2021)

Experiential learning, as a learner-centred approach, fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and the practical application of knowledge in real-world settings (D. A. Kolb, 2015). This approach is increasingly supported by digital tools—such as virtual simulations, AI-driven assessments, and collaborative online platforms—that enrich learners' engagement with complex concepts and facilitate the development of professional skills.

Teacher educators play a pivotal role in equipping future teachers with the digital and pedagogical competencies required to design, facilitate, and assess experiential learning (Tondeur et al., 2019). When teacher educators possess strong digital competence, they can harness technologies to create immersive and interactive learning experiences—such as virtual reality (VR), simulations, gamified environments, and digital project-based learning. The integration of these technologies enhances students' participation in practical tasks, deepens conceptual understanding, and enables them to address real-world challenges through reflection and active engagement (Pelaez-Morales, 2020).

Consequently, enhancing experiential learning in higher education is intrinsically linked to the development of digital competence among teacher educators. The intersection between students' experiential learning and educators' digital proficiency not only improves the quality of teaching and learning but also fosters a more dynamic, flexible, and innovative educational environment within the context of digital transformation. However, existing gaps in teacher educators' digital competence in Vietnam continue to constrain their ability to implement experiential learning effectively (Dieu & Kim, 2018). Therefore, examining how teacher educators develop digital competence to enhance experiential learning represents a critical area of inquiry for Vietnam's higher education system.

Theoretical Framework

To successfully integrate experiential learning into higher education, teacher educators must have sufficient levels of digital competence. This study is based on two main theoretical perspectives: Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2009), which highlights the importance of learning through experience, and digital competence frameworks,

which provide structured methods for evaluating and developing educators' technological and pedagogical skills. Together, these frameworks offer a theoretical basis for understanding how digital competence can improve experiential learning processes in higher education.

Experiential learning is a holistic educational approach that recognises the importance of individuals' life experiences, education, and work in shaping how they construct and apply new knowledge. Kolb's experiential learning cycle comprises four interrelated stages. The first stage, Concrete Experience, involves engaging in an activity or authentic learning situation and recognising one's immediate feelings and responses. The second, Reflective Observation, focuses on reviewing and interpreting those experiences to gain deeper insights. The third, Abstract Conceptualisation, enables learners to analyse their experiences, identify recurring patterns, and formulate general principles or theoretical understanding. Finally, Active Experimentation encourages the application of these insights in new contexts, testing ideas, and refining knowledge through action (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2009).

The increasing importance of experiential learning in higher education highlights the crucial role of teacher educators' digital competence in enhancing the learning process through intentional integration of technology in both teaching and assessment. According to Diên and Thy (2022), several frameworks are used internationally to assess educators' digital competence, including the European Digital Competence Framework for Educators (Carretero et al., 2017,Caena & Redecker, 2019), the TPACK framework (Koehler, 2013), the OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (2013), and the ACRL's Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (2000). In the Vietnamese context, the Ministry of Information and Communications established national ICT skill standards through Circular No. 03/2014/TT-BTTTT, laying an early policy foundation for digital competence in education.

More recently, the HeDiCom framework (Tondeur et al., 2023) has articulated a comprehensive model of digital competence for higher education teachers, defining it as a set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes essential for effectively integrating digital tools into teaching and learning. This study adopts the HeDiCom framework —Higher Education Teachers' Digital Competencies for the Future — as the primary analytical lens for evaluating teacher educators' digital competence. The framework identifies four interrelated dimensions: Teaching Practice, Empowering Students for a Digital Society, Teachers' Digital Literacy, and Teachers' Professional Development. Collectively, these dimensions offer a coherent structure for analysing how digital competence can support and enhance experiential learning in Vietnam's higher education context.

Research problem

The research focuses on a critical issue: the relationship between teacher educators' digital competence and the effectiveness of experiential learning in teaching within Vietnam's higher education system. This study is guided by the following primary research question:

How does digital competence impact the effectiveness of experiential learning among teacher educators in Vietnam's higher education system?

This study seeks to provide valuable insights into the role of digital competence in experiential learning and to propose solutions for improving digital capacity among teacher educators.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to investigate how digital competence affects experiential learning among teacher educators in higher education in Vietnam. The case study method is selected because it allows for a detailed analysis of teacher educators' digital skills within their natural institutional environments (Robert K. Yin, 2009). By focusing on a specific educational setting, this research aims to understand the complexities of digital competence development and its influence on experiential learning in Vietnamese higher education institutions.

This study focuses on 30 teacher educators from both public and private universities in Da Nang, Vietnam. The approach to studying enables a thorough examination of a particular regional educational setting, offering insights into the opportunities and challenges that teacher educators encounter when incorporating digital tools into experiential learning.

To analyse the main research question, which is based on four key dimensions of the Hedicom framework (Tondeur et al., 2023)regarding teacher educators' digital competence, the following sub-questions are proposed for qualitative analysis:

Teaching Practice: How digital competence affects the design and implementation of experiential learning activities

1. How do you currently integrate digital tools and technologies into experiential learning activities? Can you provide specific examples?
2. What challenges have you encountered when using technology to facilitate experiential learning?
3. How do you assess the effectiveness of technology-enhanced experiential learning in improving student engagement and learning outcomes?

Empowering Students for a Digital Society: How teacher educators equip students with digital skills necessary for experiential learning and future careers

4. How do you support students in developing digital skills essential for experiential learning?
5. In what ways do digital tools help students collaborate, solve real-world problems, and reflect on their learning experiences?

Teachers' Digital Literacy: How teacher educators' own digital competence impacts experiential learning implementation

6. How would you describe your digital competence in relation to experiential learning?

7. What digital tools or platforms do you most frequently use to support experiential learning?

8. What challenges do you face in adopting new digital technologies for experiential learning?

Teachers' Professional Development: How institutions support or hinder teacher educators' digital competence development

9. What types of professional development programs or training have you participated in to improve your digital competence for experiential learning?

10. What additional support (e.g., training, resources, mentorship) would help you enhance your digital competence in this area?

Data Collection Methods

Data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews with 30 teacher educators from both public and private universities in Da Nang. This method was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of educators' perceptions, experiences, and challenges in integrating digital competence into experiential learning. Semi-structured interviews provided the flexibility to explore individual viewpoints while maintaining consistency across key research themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The interview protocol was developed based on the HeDiCom framework (Tondeur et al., 2023) and Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (D. A. Kolb, 2015), focusing on: (1) self-assessment of technology use in experiential learning; (2) experiences and challenges in integrating digital tools; (3) institutional support and barriers in digital transformation; and (4) perceived impacts of digital competence on student engagement and learning outcomes.

All interviews were conducted online, lasting 45–60 minutes each. Recordings were transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns and emerging themes.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to systematically review and categorise the interview data. The process included several repeated steps: (1) familiarising oneself with the data by transcribing and rereading to gather initial insights; (2) creating initial codes to identify key patterns related to digital competence and experiential learning; (3) finding themes by grouping related codes into larger categories; (4) reviewing and refining these themes to ensure their coherence and relevance to the research goals; and (5) defining and naming the themes for a clear and thorough interpretation of the results.

To improve the trustworthiness and credibility of the analysis, member checking was carried out, enabling participants to review and verify the accuracy and relevance of the themes derived from their responses. This method ensured that the final interpretations genuinely reflected participants' perspectives and enhanced the validity of the qualitative findings.

Ethical Considerations

This study follows ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Before taking part, individuals will be given a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and confidentiality measures to ensure informed consent. Participants' identities will be anonymised to protect confidentiality and privacy, and all interview transcripts will be stored securely. Additionally, voluntary participation is emphasised, and participants can withdraw from the study at any time without facing any consequences.

Research Validity and Reliability

To guarantee the validity and reliability of the research findings, several strategies were used. Triangulation involved comparing results from different participants and institutions to improve data consistency. Peer debriefing included discussions with experts in digital pedagogy and experiential learning to refine themes and interpretations. Moreover, member checking enabled participants to review and confirm their interview transcripts, ensuring accuracy and credibility throughout the research process.

Results

This section outlines the main findings from semi-structured interviews with 30 teacher educators from public and private universities in Da Nang, Vietnam. The thematic analysis of the data, guided by the HeDiCom framework (Tondeur et al., 2023), identified four major themes.

Theme 1: Integration of Digital Tools in Experiential Learning (Teaching Practice)

Most teacher educators acknowledged that digital tools significantly enhance experiential learning by making lessons more interactive and engaging. Common technologies used include virtual simulations, online collaborative platforms, and gamification strategies. However, the extent of digital integration varied, with some educators relying only on basic digital tools (e.g., PowerPoint, YouTube) while others explored advanced options such as VR-based learning and AI-assisted assessments.

Participant N.T.K.H (Public University Educator, 8 years of experience):

I use online collaborative platforms like Miro and Google Jamboard for group projects, enabling students to brainstorm and visualise their ideas in real time. Compared to traditional methods, these tools encourage better engagement and creativity in experiential learning activities.

Participant N.T.T (Mathematics Lecturer, 10 years of experience, University of Education):

Integrating digital tools into experiential learning has transformed the way I teach mathematical concepts. Instead of relying solely on theoretical explanations, I now utilise practical examples and visual aids to improve understanding. Interactive simulations and AI-powered graphing tools help students visualise abstract mathematical principles.

Participant T.L.A (Public University Educator, 5 years of experience):

"Gamification techniques, like using Kahoot! and interactive quizzes, have made experiential learning more enjoyable for students. They actively participate and retain knowledge better, but I feel these tools are still underutilized due to a lack of structured training on their pedagogical application."

However, several challenges emerged from the interviews. These included a lack of pedagogical training on effectively integrating digital tools into experiential learning, resistance to change, as some educators preferred traditional teaching methods, and limited technical support from institutions, which hindered the implementation of technology-based experiential activities.

Participant H.N.H (Experienced Lecturer, Public University, 24 years of experience):

I've observed younger faculty members incorporating virtual labs and digital collaboration tools, but I still depend on in-person experiential learning. I believe face-to-face engagement is more effective than digital methods, especially in disciplines that require hands-on practice.

He also commented on the challenges when using digital technologies:

In theory, digital tools can make experiential learning more engaging, but in practice, poor internet connectivity and outdated hardware hinder the use of advanced applications like VR or AI simulations. This is a significant limitation, especially in public universities with limited budgets.

Theme 2: Preparing Students for a Digital Society (Empowering Students for a Digital Society)

The results show that teacher educators acknowledge the importance of equipping students with digital skills to prepare them for the modern workforce. Many educators believe that experiential learning enhanced by digital tools promotes collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving—all of which are vital for students to succeed in a technology-driven society.

Educators highlighted that students need to develop digital skills to meet the requirements of modern workplaces and digital classrooms. Many participants noted that incorporating experiential learning with digital tools enables students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios.

Participant P.K.N (Lecturer in Educational Technology, 8 years of experience, University of Education):

Integrating digital tools into experiential learning assists my students in acquiring skills essential for their future roles as educators. For instance, I have them design and deliver lessons using learning management systems (LMS), interactive whiteboards, and AI-powered assessment tools. This practical approach guarantees that they graduate with the technological skills necessary to teach effectively in a digital classroom.

Teacher educators noted that online collaborative platforms, cloud-based tools, and virtual teamwork applications enhance experiential learning by allowing students to engage in real-time problem-solving and knowledge sharing.

Participant T.T.T.V (English Language Educator, 7 years of experience, University of Education):

"One of the best ways to prepare students for a global digital society is to expose them to collaborative digital projects. I often assign group tasks where students from different universities collaborate through Google Docs, Padlet, and video conferencing to create lesson plans or research projects. This not only strengthens their collaborative and communication skills but also helps them build intercultural competence."

Many educators pointed out that digital tools help students track their progress, reflect on their learning experiences, and take responsibility for their own development.

Participant N.T.T (History Educator, 9 years of experience, University of Education):

"In my courses, I integrate discussion forums and reflective blogging platforms where students analyze historical case studies using multimedia sources. They write reflective pieces on how past events relate to modern issues, receiving peer feedback through structured online discussions. This digital approach fosters deep learning and analytical thinking."

Theme 3: Teacher Educators' Digital Competence (Teachers' Digital Literacy)

The findings indicate that most teacher educators possess a solid foundation in digital competence and actively seek opportunities to enhance their technological skills through self-directed learning and professional development. Many educators are proficient in using digital tools for experiential learning and demonstrate strong adaptability to new technologies. Most teacher educators are self-motivated learners who consistently update their digital skills through online courses, research, and peer collaboration. They demonstrate a high level of autonomy in adopting digital tools and often integrate them into their teaching without formal training from their institutions.

Participant P.T.L.H (Science Educator, 5 years of experience, University of Education):

"When a new technology becomes available, I immediately test it with my students and adapt my teaching approach. We, as teacher educators, must evolve continuously to meet the needs of the digital generation."

Rather than using digital tools just for convenience, teacher educators focus on meaningful integration to enhance experiential learning outcomes. They actively evaluate which tools best support critical thinking, problem-solving, and interactive engagement.

Participant T.T.T (Mathematics Lecturer, 8 years of experience, University of Education):

"I don't use technology just for the sake of using it—I carefully select tools like GeoGebra and Desmos that allow students to experiment with mathematical models and make real-time adjustments, which deepens their conceptual understanding."

While teacher educators are generally comfortable with digital tools, the main challenge is ensuring they truly enhance experiential learning rather than being merely passive or redundant additions.

Participant T.T.T (Mathematics Lecturer, 8 years of experience, University of Education):

"I am confident in using technology, but the challenge is in choosing the right approach. Not every digital tool is suitable for experiential learning, and we need to balance hands-on experiences with virtual simulations."

Theme 4: Institutional Support and Professional Development (Teachers' Professional Development)

The findings indicate that while teacher educators demonstrate strong self-directed learning in digital competence, institutional support for professional development remains insufficient. Most universities offer general digital training, but these programs often lack specificity about integrating experiential learning. Furthermore, professional development opportunities are still limited, leaving educators to independently explore how to optimise digital tools for experiential learning.

Participant T.T.M.H (Teacher Trainer, 17 years of experience, University of Education):

"Our university organises occasional workshops on digital tools, but they are more about basic technology usage rather than how to integrate these tools into active, experiential learning models."

Although many educators have successfully integrated digital tools into experiential learning, there are few institutional opportunities to share best practices. Educators often work in isolation, experimenting with different digital strategies without formalised knowledge exchange.

Numerous teacher educators in my faculty have developed excellent digital experiential learning techniques, but we lack a structured way to share these ideas. I would love to establish a dedicated community of practice where we can exchange methodologies and improve our approaches together.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study highlights the importance of digital competence in improving experiential learning for teacher educators within Vietnam's higher education system. Drawing on the HeDiCom framework (Tondeur et al., 2023) and Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2009), the results reveal both the potential and the limitations of digital transformation in teaching practice. Across all four themes—Teaching Practice, Empowering Students for a Digital Society, Teachers' Digital Literacy, and Professional Development—the analysis demonstrates that while teacher educators increasingly recognise the pedagogical value of digital tools, systemic and institutional barriers continue to constrain effective implementation.

Integration of Digital Tools in Experiential Learning

Consistent with international research (Wagner et al., 2024; O'Connor et al., 2023), participants confirmed that digital tools can significantly enrich experiential learning by fostering engagement, creativity, and reflective practice. Tools such as collaborative platforms, simulations, and gamified activities allow students to apply theoretical concepts to authentic

contexts—thereby aligning with Kolb's cycle of experience, reflection, conceptualisation, and experimentation. However, disparities in digital integration persist: while some teacher educators implement advanced technologies (e.g., VR, AI-based assessments), others remain limited to basic applications like PowerPoint or YouTube. This variation highlights a pedagogical gap rather than a purely technological one—emphasising the need for structured training on how to embed technology meaningfully into experiential learning designs.

Preparing Students for a Digital Society

The study reveals that teacher educators recognise their duty to prepare future teachers with the digital skills needed for the 21st-century workforce. Digital tools were found to foster collaboration, problem-solving, and intercultural communication—key skills essential for succeeding in a digitalised and globalised society (Nguyen, 2024). However, these practices often rely on individual initiative rather than institutional strategy. The findings indicate that empowering students for a digital society should become an explicit aim within teacher education curricula, supported by clear policy guidelines and digital readiness frameworks.

Teacher Educators' Digital Competence

Teacher educators in this study generally demonstrated strong self-directed digital literacy, aligning with the HeDiCom emphasis on autonomy and adaptability. Many demonstrated reflective and purposeful use of digital tools, selecting technologies that genuinely enhance experiential learning outcomes. Yet, the findings also caution against "technological overuse"—the uncritical adoption of tools that may not align with experiential learning principles. This reinforces the notion that digital competence should be conceptualised as pedagogical competence in digital contexts, rather than mere technical proficiency.

Institutional Support and Professional Development

The fourth theme reveals that while individual motivation is high, institutional support remains fragmented. Professional development programs are often generic, lacking focus on integrating digital tools into experiential learning pedagogy. The absence of structured communities of practice further isolates educators and limits knowledge exchange. These findings resonate with previous studies (Loughran, 2014; Van der Klink et al., 2017) that stresses the importance of collective professional learning and institutional leadership in sustaining digital transformation.

This study offers several significant implications for both policy and practice. Institutional leadership should prioritise context-specific professional development programmes that explicitly connect digital competence with experiential learning pedagogies, ensuring educators are supported in translating technological skills into meaningful teaching practices. Creating collaborative communities of practice is also vital to foster peer learning, facilitate the exchange of effective strategies, and sustain innovation across institutions. Furthermore, investment in digital infrastructure—especially within public universities—is essential to ensure equitable access to advanced technologies and establish favourable conditions for technology-enhanced experiential learning. At the policy level, both national and institutional strategies must recognise that digital competence is not solely a technical issue but also a pedagogical and systemic concern, requiring alignment between curriculum design, teacher training, and digital

transformation agendas. Overall, this research provides valuable insights into the dynamic relationship between digital competence and experiential learning in Vietnamese higher education. While teacher educators demonstrate strong motivation and increasing proficiency in digital tool usage, structural and pedagogical barriers still limit their capacity to fully harness the potential of technology-supported learning. Overcoming these challenges calls for a coordinated, multi-level approach that combines individual development, institutional support, and policy reform. Strengthening teacher educators' digital competence will not only improve experiential learning but also support Vietnam's broader vision of a digitally empowered, innovative, and globally connected higher education system.

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Culture as Catalyst: Experiential and Intercultural Learning for Building Inclusive, Innovative, and Resilient Communities

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Abstract

This reflective case study examines the *LIV: Local and International Global Goals* experiential learning exchange, a collaborative initiative between Stellenbosch University (South Africa) and VUC Storstrøm (Denmark). Grounded in experiential, transformative, and critical pedagogical frameworks, the programme sought to create opportunities for intercultural understanding, relational capability, and collective responsibility while advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 4, 12, and 13). Data were drawn from student expectations, reflective interviews, and post-programme feedback across two cohorts (April and September 2024), involving 40 students and 12 educators. Thematic analysis revealed that participants' initial expectations of cultural observation evolved into transformative experiences of empathy, inclusion, and self-awareness. Place-based learning encounters such as Robben Island, Die Vlakte Redress Walk, community engagement in Kayamandi, and school visits served as catalysts for critical reflection on privilege, justice, and sustainability. The findings demonstrate that experiential learning as intercultural awareness can foster deep reflection and social consciousness, providing authentic opportunities for developing inclusive, innovative, and resilient communities. The article concludes that experiential learning pedagogy, grounded in social justice and contextual engagement, offers a powerful framework for achieving the humanistic aims of the SDGs and transforming education into an ethical and relational practice.

Key words: Experiential learning, intercultural education, social justice, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), transformative learning, place-based learning, relational capability, global citizenship, inclusion, resilience

Introduction

In a time marked by globalization and digital interconnectedness, promoting inclusive, innovative, and resilient communities has become a key focus for advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and fostering social cohesion. Culture plays a vital role in shaping identity, influencing behavior, and encouraging cross-cultural understanding. In this context, the *LIV: Local and International Global Goals* program—an experiential learning partnership between Stellenbosch University (South Africa) and VUC Storstrøm (Denmark)—was designed as a platform for intercultural engagement and mutual learning across the global North–South divide (Andrews, 2024).

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The program was based on the belief that real human interaction and hands-on experience create a strong foundation for transformative learning. Through a six-day immersion involving academic, cultural, and community activities, students from different backgrounds engaged in reflection processes designed to build empathy, relational skills, and critical global citizenship. Guided by the theoretical principles of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984), Freire's Critical Pedagogy (1970), and Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (2009), the LIV initiative aimed to turn intercultural encounters into meaningful insights about identity, belonging, and sustainability.

The purpose of the LIV exchange, as articulated by the joint Stellenbosch University and VUC Storstrøm design team, was to *create an understanding of globally engaged civil society* by *building diverse and socially inclusive North–South communities of practice*. This intent was realised through learning objectives focused on intercultural engagement, critical thinking, communication, reflection, and digital competence. The design sought to enable participants to explore shared human challenges, compare educational and social systems, and reflect on how cultural awareness contributes to community resilience and innovation.

While previous experiential and intercultural programmes have demonstrated the potential for transformative learning, this study aims to explore whether the LIV exchange provided participants with the opportunity to develop these capacities within a structured pedagogical framework. Specifically, it seeks to understand the extent to which the programme's design and implementation facilitated intercultural learning, personal transformation, and collective consciousness.

Accordingly, the central research question guiding this reflective case study is:

To what extent did participation in the LIV: Local and International Global Goals experiential exchange provide opportunities for students to develop intercultural understanding, relational capability, and a sense of collective responsibility?

Supporting sub-questions include:

1. In what ways did participants' initial expectations align with or diverge from their lived experiences during the exchange?
2. How did reflective and experiential learning activities contribute to self-awareness, empathy, and transformation?
3. What evidence suggests that the programme fostered inclusion, innovation, and resilience as intended outcomes?

Through an analysis of student expectations, reflections, and feedback, this article reflects on the learning potential of intercultural engagement and experiential pedagogy in advancing global citizenship and inclusive education.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative reflective case study design to examine whether participation in the *LIV: Local and International Global Goals* experiential learning exchange created opportunities for participants to develop intercultural understanding, relational capability, and collective responsibility. A qualitative case study design was appropriate because it enables in-depth exploration of complex educational and social phenomena situated within real-world contexts (Yin, 2018).

As a reflective inquiry, the study was interpretivist in orientation, recognizing that meaning is co-constructed through experience and dialogue (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The *LIV* programme was designed as a living example of experiential learning pedagogy enacted across cultural, institutional, and geographic boundaries. The purpose was not to generalize but to illuminate the processes through which intercultural learning and social transformation are fostered.

Context and Participants

The *LIV* initiative emerged from a partnership between Stellenbosch University's Unit for Experiential Learning (South Africa) and VUC Storstrøm (Denmark). The programme aimed to build *socially inclusive South-North communities of practice* by integrating experiential, relational, and critical learning.

Two programme cohorts were implemented in 2024:

- Cohort 1 (April 2024): Hosted in South Africa
- Cohort 2 (September 2024): Hosted in South Africa.

Each cohort consisted of 40 students (20 from each institution) and 12 staff facilitators (4 Danish and 8 South African educators).

The programme was explicitly aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 13 (Climate Action). These goals were not treated as abstract policy references but as *pedagogical anchors* used to guide reflection, shape dialogue, and contextualize students' learning about sustainability, equity, and global citizenship.

Learning Context and Pedagogical Rationale

The *LIV* learning design combined experiential, critical, and place-based pedagogies, recognizing the importance of context and community in shaping educational encounters (Gruenewald, 2003; Smith, & Sobel, 2010; hooks, 1994). Social justice underpinnings informed every element of the programme: learning was conceived not as transmission but as *transformation* through participation, reflection, and praxis (Freire, 1970).

Place-based pedagogy [1]played a central role in facilitating experiential and embodied learning. Key activities included Robben Island, Die Vlakte Redress Walk, which traced the histories of forced removals and spatial segregation in Stellenbosch, connecting personal reflection to broader narratives of structural injustice and restoration. This engagement drew on Jansen and Kriger's (2020) critique of post-apartheid educational landscapes, encouraging participants to interrogate how race, history, and belonging continue to shape access to opportunity.

Similarly, school visits to institutions such as Rhenish High School and Kayamandi Primary enabled comparative exploration of educational equity and innovation within and across North–South contexts. Students observed classrooms, interacted with learners, and participated in dialogues about inclusion and access. These experiences were intended to connect SDG 4 (Quality Education) to lived realities, deepening participants' understanding of education as both a social right and a cultural practice.

Community-based learning further extended these insights through activities such as *Kayamandi on Foot* and *Journey of Hope and Healing*, which emphasized resilience, empathy, and collective well-being. These engagements embodied what Kolb (1984) describes as the *concrete experience and reflection* phase of learning, where knowledge begins through direct, sensory, and emotional involvement and reflection thereon.

Pedagogical Framework

The pedagogical model was informed by three intersecting frameworks:

1. Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984): Students engaged in iterative cycles of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application through field visits, storytelling, and collaborative design thinking. Digital journaling on Padlet and learning circle reflection sessions.
2. Social Justice Pedagogy (Freire, 1970): Through dialogic encounters, students questioned how systems of power, privilege, and oppression manifest in education and society. This approach emphasized *conscientização* (conscientization), positioning learning as an act of emancipation and solidarity.
3. **Transformative Learning (Mezirow, 2009):**
   Reflection was structured to enable disorienting dilemmas and perspective shifts. Participants engaged in daily reflection circles, peer dialogues, and self-assessments that linked personal transformation to collective action.

Zheng et al. (2021) further provided a framework connecting cultural learning with the Sustainable Development Goals, emphasizing that global competence depends on the ability to bridge cultural divides for shared well-being.

[1] *Place-based pedagogy* refers to an approach that situates learning within the local environment, community, and sociocultural context, emphasizing how knowledge is shaped by history, geography, and lived experience. It combines environmental and social justice education, encouraging learners to critically engage with and act upon the conditions of the places they inhabit (Gruenewald, 2003; Smith & Sobel, 2010).

Programme Activities

The learning journey unfolded in three structured phases:

- **Pre-immersion (digital preparation):**
  Students participated in online introductions, cross-cultural dialogues, and critical reflection tasks. Using Padlet, WhatsApp, and storytelling, they explored identity, belonging, and shared humanity.
- **Immersion (six days):**
  Activities included *Robben Island*, *Die Vlakte Redress Walk*, *Kayamandi on Foot*, *Journey of Hope and Healing*, *Design Thinking workshops*, *learning circles,* and *school visits*. Students collaborated in intercultural teams to document experiences using multimedia storytelling tools.
- **Post-immersion (synthesis):**
  Participants curated digital portfolios, posted final reflections on Padlet, and engaged in debrief sessions, aligning learning outcomes with SDG-related commitments within their respective communities.

Data Sources and Collection

The study analysed data from both cohorts, drawing on multiple sources to enhance validity:

1. Pre-immersion expectations (student reflections).
2. Post-programme feedback (evaluation forms).
3. Reflection interviews (video transcripts).
4. Learning design documents and educator handbooks.
5. Digital artefacts from Padlet, Miro, WhatsApp, and Google Drive Cell phone recordings from the Sound Journey Activity.

Data was collected through embedded reflective activities; no additional instruments were required. All participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained for the academic use of anonymized materials.

Data Analysis

Data were subjected to thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model. Codes were inductively developed from the data, clustered into themes corresponding to the research question and theoretical constructs:

- *Intercultural engagement and empathy*
- *Reflection and relational capability*
- *Transformation and global citizenship*
- *Commitment to collective responsibility (SDGs)*

Triangulation across data sources (expectations, reflections, feedback, and interviews) ensured analytical rigor. Reflective notes from facilitators and programme designers provided secondary validation of interpretations.

5. Findings

The data from *Student Expectations*, *Student Reflection Interviews*, and *Student Feedback* were analysed to address the three guiding sub-questions. Findings are presented thematically and demonstrate how participants experienced learning across intercultural, reflective, and transformational dimensions.

5.1 Alignment and Divergence Between Expectations and Experiences

Before the immersion, both Danish and South African students expressed strong curiosity about cultural differences and social realities. Danish participants anticipated "*learning about South Africa and seeing how people live differently from us*," while South African students wrote that they hoped "*to share our culture and to see how others view issues like inequality and justice*".

Analysis of post-immersion interviews indicates that while initial expectations centered on observation, experiences evolved into mutual learning and self-discovery. Danish participants described the experience as "*more emotional and life-changing than expected*," and reflected that "*through seeing ourselves through their eyes, we learned what we take for granted*."

The data reveal a critical shift: students moved from curiosity about *difference* to the realisation of *shared humanity* and *interconnected struggles*, an essential marker of intercultural understanding. This echoes Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, where direct experience generates transformative insight through reflection and action.

The process also illuminated the social justice dimension of SDG 4 (Quality Education), the creation of equitable, transformative spaces where knowledge emerges through lived experience. By engaging with schools, communities, and historical sites such as Robben Island, Kayamandi and Die Vlakte Redress Walk, as well as Pniel, students began to contextualize education not as abstract theory but as a human right connected to place, history, and justice.

5.2 Reflection, Self-Awareness, and Empathy as Transformative Outcomes

The second research question explored how experiential and reflective activities fostered self-awareness and empathy. Analysis revealed three interrelated processes:

(a) Emotional engagement through place-based learning:
Visits to Kayamandi, Robben Island, and local schools were repeatedly described as "*powerful and confronting*." One Danish participant stated,

"*Seeing the differences between rich and poor, and hearing people's stories, was a crazy and emotional experience. I will remember it forever.*"

South African students reported rediscovering their own histories through new perspectives:

"*I thought I knew my country, but hearing others react to what they saw made me feel and think differently. It opened my eyes to the everyday injustice we stop noticing.*"

These emotional engagements align with Freire's (1970) notion of *conscientização*, the awakening of critical consciousness through reflection on lived experience, and Mezirow's (2009) "disorienting dilemmas" that initiate transformation.

(b) Reflection as empathy practice:
Daily learning circles and digital storytelling spaces served as critical dialogic tools. Students emphasized that "*sharing our journals and hearing others made me realise that empathy is not about feeling sorry but about understanding deeply*".

Such processes embody SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) at an ethical level: students reflected on responsibility not only toward the environment but toward one another as global citizens.

(c) Re-examining privilege and identity:
Participants described grappling with inequality, race, and opportunity. A Danish student noted,

"*I never thought about privilege until I saw what students here face every day.*"
Similarly, a South African student reflected,
"*Talking about fairness with them made me question my assumptions about poverty and choice.*"

These reflections reveal the cognitive and affective shifts that constitute transformative learning, a reconfiguration of worldview and social responsibility. They also demonstrate the intersection of education with social justice, echoing Jansen and Kriger's (2020) argument that awareness of structural inequity is fundamental to transformation in post-apartheid education.

5.3 Inclusion, Innovation, and Resilience as Programme Outcomes

The third research question explored the extent to which the LIV programme cultivated inclusion, innovation, and resilience.

Inclusion:
Both cohorts described a strong sense of belonging by the end of the exchange.

"*We started shy and unsure, but by the last night we were all laughing, dancing, and didn't want to leave one another.*"
Students emphasized that inclusion was *experienced* rather than taught. This reflects the relational competency embedded in the programme design (SU and VUC Storstrøm, 2024), aligning with **SDG 4.7**: education that promotes tolerance, equality, and global citizenship.

Innovation:
Through the design-thinking workshops and collaborative projects, students defined innovation as *creativity with purpose*.

"*Innovation is not only about new ideas but new relationships — we learned to co-create across language and culture.*"
This redefinition mirrors Kolb's (1984) active experimentation stage, where reflection is

transformed into social action. It also reflects SDG 12's ethos of responsible, sustainable innovation that benefits communities.

Resilience:
Resilience was expressed as emotional adaptability and hope.

"*Resilience is not just about coping; it's about believing we can make small changes that matter.*"
Through exposure to histories of struggle and survival, particularly during the *Robben Island* excursion and *Die Vlakte Redress Walk*, participants articulated a renewed sense of agency and collective optimism, resonating with SDG 13 (Climate Action), the moral imperative to respond constructively to global challenges.

6. Discussion

The findings affirm that the LIV programme successfully created opportunities for the development of intercultural understanding, reflection, and transformative learning. Students' progression from *curiosity* to *critical empathy* underscores how experiential learning can activate deep engagement with diversity and social justice (Kolb, 1984; Freire, 1970).

6.1 Experiential Learning as Transformative Praxis

The alignment of experiential learning activities with critical reflection created a powerful learning ecology. Place-based encounters like *Die Vlakte Redress Walk* exemplified what Gruenewald (2003) terms a "critical pedagogy of place", one that situates learning within the sociopolitical and ecological contexts of real life.

Through immersion, students navigated emotional, intellectual, and ethical dimensions of learning, validating Mezirow's (2009) assertion that transformation requires both cognitive and affective engagement. The cyclical pattern of *experience → reflection → conceptualization → action* (Kolb, 1985) was evident in how participants articulated their learning and applied it to future aspirations.

6.2 Intercultural Dialogue and Relational Capability

Freire's (1970) notion of dialogue as the cornerstone of humanisation was vividly enacted through intercultural conversations, peer reflection circles, and digital collaborations. Danish and South African students co-created meaning rather than merely exchanging information. This dialogic interaction nurtured *relational capability* (Zheng et al., 2021), the capacity to bridge differences through empathy and mutual recognition.

In this sense, the LIV exchange exemplified SDG 4.7, advancing global citizenship education through empathy-based interaction. Learning moved beyond cognitive outcomes to include *ethical consciousness*, aligning education with social transformation (hooks, 1994).

6.3 Social Justice, Identity, and Collective Responsibility

The programme's social justice underpinnings were reflected in participants' confrontation with privilege, inequality, and history. Engaging with local schools and communities offered real-

time lessons on educational disparity and resilience. Such encounters brought Jansen and Kriger's (2020) critique of South African schooling into sharp focus, demonstrating how exposure to inequity can catalyse awareness and activism.

This emergent sense of *collective responsibility* aligns with SDG 12 and SDG 13, which emphasize ethical stewardship of resources and global interdependence. Students' reflections show that experiential learning can cultivate moral resilience, the willingness to act in solidarity with others for a sustainable future for all.

6.4 Towards Transformative Global Citizenship

The data indicate that the LIV experience generated early indicators of transformative global citizenship. Participants described seeing themselves as *part of something larger* (Danish Student, 2024)and developing *the courage to speak out for change* (South African student, 2024). These are hallmarks of transformative learning (Mezirow, 2009) and experiential learning as pedagogy for social justice's highest aim: turning reflection into ethical action.

The synthesis of intercultural empathy, reflective practice, and social justice consciousness demonstrates that experiential pedagogy can operationalize the humanistic aspirations of the SDGs. As Zheng et al. (2021) note, culture can serve as a mediator in achieving the SDGs by cultivating globally competent, ethically grounded citizens.

7. Way Forward / Recommendations

Based on these findings and theoretical insights, several recommendations emerge for sustaining and expanding the impact of the LIV programme:

1. **Embed Longitudinal Reflection:**
   Establish a digital follow-up platform where alumni can document ongoing actions related to SDG 4, 12, and 13, deepening learning continuity and impact assessment.
2. **Expand Critical Place-Based Pedagogy:**
   Continue integrating context-specific activities (e.g., local school visits, historical site walks) to sustain the social justice focus and foster critical spatial awareness (Gruenewald, 2003).
3. **Formalize Staff Development in Critical Pedagogy:**
   Provide structured training for facilitators in dialogic and transformative pedagogy to ensure consistency and depth of reflective engagement (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994).
4. **Leverage Digital Collaboration:**
   Maintain the use of Padlet, Miro, etc. to document intercultural dialogue, and extend their use for co-designing sustainability projects between cohorts.
5. **Integrate SDG Alignment into Assessment:**
   Explicitly link reflective outcomes to SDG indicators (e.g., empathy, ethical responsibility, innovation for sustainability) to strengthen institutional accountability and visibility.

6. **Research Continuity:**
   Future studies should explore longitudinal impacts on graduates' values and practices to assess how experiential learning pedagogy for social justice contributes to lifelong social responsibility.

Conclusion

The LIV: Local and International Global Goals exchange stands as a compelling example of how experiential learning and intercultural pedagogy can align education with the values of inclusion, innovation, and resilience. Through encounters with history, culture, and one another, participants embodied the transformative potential of SDG 4 (Quality Education) while engaging in reflective practices that addressed SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

Learning in the LIV context was not only about knowledge acquisition but about developing the ethical, emotional, and relational capacities to act for justice in a shared and fragile world.

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Experiential Learning Theory and Chosen Aspects of Hidden Curriculum

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Abstract

Hidden curriculum refers to learning beyond the official curriculum, encompassing norms, rituals, and social interactions experienced in kindergartens and schools. Often termed process or unwritten curriculum (Jackson, 1968; Gordon, 1982), it shapes education by fostering essential social skills and affective outcomes critical for integration into society. Teachers play a key role in this process, influenced by their interactions with children, parents, and colleagues, alongside their ability to empathize and understand. Experts highlight the importance of the physical environment in kindergartens and schools as a vital element of the hidden curriculum, shaping social learning experiences. Empathy, personality traits, and attitudes toward space are seen as central aspects, aligning closely with Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984). This theory emphasizes the transformation of experience into knowledge through reflection and abstract conceptualization. Daily experiences within educational settings provide rich opportunities for social interactions, fostering reflective practices that mold understanding and adaptability. The hidden curriculum is a universal feature of institutions such as schools, military organizations, hospitals, and prisons, cutting across geographical and societal boundaries. Its influence is particularly significant in guiding social learning and professional growth. Reflective practice as fundamental for professional development, urging individuals to address complex challenges by rethinking their approaches, testing interpretations, and refining their actions accordingly.

This perspective underscores the intricate ways in which hidden curriculum shapes educational experiences, emphasizing the interplay of interpersonal relationships, physical environments, and reflective practices in fostering meaningful learning and personal growth.

Keywords: attitudes toward space characteristics, empathy, hidden curriculum, personality traits.

Introduction

Hidden curriculum is “fresh” term in history of education, it is well described and related to the practice from the 1968 and the Phillip W.Jackson, who was first pshyologist who entered the classroom to observe and notice where exectly the discrepancy between educational theory and practice happens. He noticed that learning outcomes, the general atmosphere, but also student activity were influenced by factors that could not be detected by existing observation protocols or by the use of tests. For example, the relevance of the teacher's position in the classroom

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during the lesson itself: he noticed that the more active students were those who were physically close to the teacher and those whom the teacher praised more often (Jackson, 1968). Therefore, in focus of numerous reseachers () is what students at school learn, in addition to learning the content prescribed by the school curriculum, what is the 'something else'. This is the content of the process curriculum, the hidden (unwritten) curriculum. It's importance lays in it's influence on the course of education, appearing as a set of affective educational results, which are necessary for successful social integration (Oelkers & Prior 1982, O'Hagan & Smith, 1993, Bašić, 2000, Kentli, 2009).

The role of early childhood educators and preschool teachers is shaped by mutual relationships and communication between children, parents and educators, their ability to coexist and understand, and is based on the interactions, communication and personalities of (pre)school teachers (Bratanić, 1991). Furthermore, experts in the fields of education and architecture (Moore, 2006, Cencič, 2012, Bregar Golobič, 2012, Šuklje Erjavec, 2012) claim that space is a feature that needs to be considered in the context of the hidden curriculum just as much as the very meaning of kindergarten and school. Based on those findings Jančec & Lepičnik Vodopivec (2017) stated important questions like: "What else do children learn in kindergarten and school?", "What affects children's learning, and is nowhere to be 'measured' in the context of learning?", "Are the phenomena of hidden curriculum, that we want to look at, the same in the two neighboring countries, in the same groups of professionals?". There were populations of preschool and school teacher in Slovenia and Croatia, within results trying to describe current conditions in these vital populations of institutional life of children (more about the results in Jančec & Lepičnik Vodopivec, 2017). Therefore, dimensions of hidden curriculum that are suggested: empathy, personality traits and attitudes towards space characterteristics where education takes place are close to process of growing knowledge such it is in the experiential learning. If one considers mentioned selected dimensions of hidden curriculum, it means one takes reflection and abstract conceptualization into account when talking about educational process.

Hidden curriculum is often seen in everyday experiences like rituals, rutines, norms etc. present in school and within the classroom (Giroux, 1983; 2001). Daily experiences within educational settings provide rich opportunities for social interactions, fostering reflective practices that mold understanding and adaptability (Kolb & Kolb, 2012). Experiental learning is powerful with its crucial stand of reflection is the most often feature. For instance, Mann et al. (2009) states that current literature suggests reflection and a deep learning approach appear to be closely connected, each reinforcing and enriching the other. But in experiental learning, there is one aspect of experiential learning model in professional development situations. Donald Schön (1983) was among the first to cite and emphasize reflective practice as the foundation of professional development. Speaking of learning in an organizational context, he believed that learning would be meaningful if it was driven by the self-activity of the individual, which required the involvement of the highest level of reflection. Therefore, Schön, in collaboration with Argyris (1996, according to Vizek Vidović and Vlahović Štetić, 2007), expanded Lewin and Kolb's cycle of experiential learning, as they called it single-loop learning, into a double-

loop model, to which more recent authors introduce a triple loop (Cowan, 1998, Moon, 2005, according to Vizek Vidović and Vlahović Štetić, 2007). Schön himself (1983) argues that professionals should learn to shape and reshape the often complex and ambiguous problems they encounter in their work, test different interpretations, and then modify their actions as a result. In other words, it is about "reflection on action" and "reflection in action". Both forms of reflection represent a significant engagement of professionals, primarily involving demanding rational and moral processes in making reasoned judgments about desirable ways of acting. The first type of reflection involves looking back on an action sometime after it has occurred, while "reflection in action" requires conscious thinking and modification during work, i.e. it involves simultaneous thinking and doing (Hatton and Smith, 1995). Schön (1983) views "reflection in action" as a teaching skill because it encourages continuous interpretation, exploration and reflective conversation between the educator and himself about a problem in the immediate educational situation, while at the same time combining and using information acquired in previous experiences for experimental problem-solving "on the spot" (Sellars, 2017). This skill, which can be developed into an art, has a flaw that Hatton and Smith (1995) warn about. They pointed out that it can simply be a problem because practicing "reflection in action" implies that the teacher already has some appropriate experience relevant to the situation in which he is, which he can draw on, that is, that he has already reached a level of competence that allows him to consciously think about what he is doing and how it affects the course of work. In practice, there are cases, especially in the first years of work, when such types of experience are lacking, and it is necessary to act and make decisions based on, according to this view, the missing practice.

Theorists of Experiential learning can enrich this point of view and use the experience they have, as previous students and their experience of schooling using variety of methods. In every one of them, simulations and role-playing, case studies, field work / internships / service learning, problem-based learning (PBL), project-based learning, outdoor and adventure education, learning journals and reflective essays, workshops and labs and action learning (Neubert, Rams & Utical, 2020, Cherian & Prakash, 2022, Kleinheksel et al. (2023) Lau, Wong, 2025) one can get closer to the real situation, using genuine own experience. Considering origins for one's decisions and behaviors, experience has vital role. Personal experience of schooling is determining for one's own practice that the practitioner implements. This is what Dolar Bahovec and Bregar Golobič (2004) write about when they say that the educator and teacher are guided in their work by their own experience of school and schooling, more than by theory and professional knowledge. For example, Jackson's words (1990) emphasize that kindergarten is a period when children must confront the reality of institutional life. Through these formative years, they develop adaptation strategies that will remain with them throughout their schooling and beyond. Life at higher levels of education is certainly different from that at lower levels, but behind the obvious differences lies a basic similarity. In its fundamental meaning, school is school, regardless of the level of education (Jackson, 1990, xxi).

Methodology

Since the educational process is engaging for all stakeholders and represents learning material for everyone: children and students learn with a pre-thought-out teaching intention by a competent, prepared person, but also that same person – (pre)school teacher – based on what has been realized, prepares his work for the next opportunity, taking into account previous experience, doing exactly as the previous time or exactly the opposite (Jančec, Pintarić, in press.), it is in the focus of scientific interest with great practical implications.

Analyses of works on Experiential Learning Theory and the Hidden Curriculum are necessary for a better understanding of theoretical and practical approaches, regardless of the difference in qualitative or quantitative understanding of the aforementioned phenomena in upbringing and education.

Findings and Discussion

In this research, with predominantly content analysis were conducted, findings are necessary to be discussed.

The hidden curriculum is an unavoidable reality, part of every institution, and its role in Experiential Learning Theory is of great importance precisely because of the influence of the environment of reflection itself, i.e., encouragement to think, to become aware of what has been experienced, and consequently, to abstract. Of particular importance are the empathy, personality traits, attitudes toward space characteristics that are nurtured by the person who organizes and leads this process, the (pre)school teacher, because it primarily speaks of the great richness of experiences not only of the teachers, but also of children and pupils, in a way that is largely neglected in the official discourse dedicated to curricula in education, and their consequences transact over to all subsequent levels of education, and are integrated into everyday life (Jančec, Pintarić, in press.). For the purpose of implementing learning outcomes in formal settings such universities are, experiental learning methodology is quite encouring for all the subject in the process. Teachers and students in highlighted surroundings experience emphaty and personality in new, enriched context. A slightly different model of reflective learning is provided by Cowan (1998, according to Bilač, 2015), in such a way that Schön's model is supplemented by reflection before action, by which he pointed out the importance of planning, anticipating problems that a person may encounter, so that their occurrence can be prevented or solved more readily. Cowan (2006, according to Cowan and Stroud, 2016) explains this type of reflection as imagining, in which a person considers and chooses between different options in response to upcoming demands, and accordingly plans his own action. An appropriate central question can be formulated as "How should I deal with the upcoming challenge?", and it presupposes a series of sub-questions that can greatly help and be useful in this phase of reflection, useful for experiential learning.

Instead of Suggestions

Cowan and Stroud (2016) went further with explaining of their concept and their divergent yet gainful theory is suggestive for experiential learning theory. They find the role of sub-

questioning is to distinguish in more detail main requirements that the practitioner has to face, to notice shortcomings in the ways in which certain situations were solved in the past, but also to appreciate one's own possibilities and their implications. Cowan and Stroud (2016) later call it composting reflection: it actually represents an extension of reflection on action. Although it has a metaphorical name, when explaining this model, the person who carries out the reflection of composting purposefully digs through what he has already collected, turns over and sifts the compost while allowing it to receive fresh air, after which he again lets the compost "rest" for a while. In this way, as in the case of compost in reality, after some time the composted knowledge can be used to plant something special, with an improved quality of what will feed the new seedling and thus make it more fertile, colloquially called "black gold" or "gardener's gold". Therefore, in this phase of reflection, a person repeatedly encounters the existing collection of experiences, ideas, problems and possibilities that he has already thought about and reflected on, but which he may have never adequately applied or considered, but aimed at the development and progress of the individual. In fact, composting reflection represents a conscious effort to unearth, reverse and transform already realized reflections that could be useful. The leading question that is asked in this phase of reflection is: »How could all existing reflections enrich and make reflection for action or reflection more efficient?«

Jackson (1968, 1990), Kolb (1984), Schon (1983) and Cowan and Stroud (2016) are leaders in new insights on the education, the represent a new paradigm in thinking of educational process, giving new and sometimes critical consideration on the reflection as a dimension of progress and strength for the change. Their recommendations can be under analytical review both for hidden curriculum and experiential learnig theories, but in the practice, challenges in interpreting practice can be overcome precisely with collegial interlocutors, "critical friends", with similar experiences, interested and motivated to improve both their common and their own practice

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Promoting Innovation and Entrepreneurship Through Experiential Learning: Impact Assessment of CEFE Macedonia's Methodology (2014–2024)

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of innovation and entrepreneurship within the context of experiential learning, with an emphasis on the CEFE methodology (Competency-based Economies, Formation of Enterprises), an experimental learning innovative method, based on an impact assessment (2014–2024) of CEFE Macedonia's initiatives. The CEFE methodology serves as a foundational element in CEFE Macedonia's efforts to advance entrepreneurship and innovation through experiential learning approaches. It utilizes action-oriented tools and experiential techniques to enhance management and entrepreneurial competencies, targeting outcomes such as revenue enhancement, employment generation, and sustainable economic progress.

The objective of this research is to assess the aggregate effects of CEFE Macedonia's activities, focusing on the elevation of entrepreneurial culture and the socioeconomic benefits for participants in Macedonia and internationally. The study also aims to provide evidence-based insights into the efficacy of the CEFE methodology in promoting innovation and entrepreneurship, proposing strategies to optimize and broaden its application.

The analysis draws on an impact assessment of CEFE Macedonia's operations from 2014 to 2024. The sample comprises individuals and businesses engaged in CEFE's experiential learning programs. Data were gathered using surveys, interviews, and performance metrics, designed to evaluate outcomes related to skill acquisition, business expansion, and job creation. Data analysis employed qualitative and quantitative methodologies to identify patterns, obstacles, and achievements within CEFE's initiatives. The research framework is structured to examine the sustained impact of these programs on participants and the wider economic landscape.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Experiential Learning, Impact Assessment, Innovation, Skills Developme

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Introduction

In the context of today's rapidly evolving global economy, innovation and entrepreneurship are critical drivers of economic advancement, necessitating educational paradigms that extend beyond conventional didactic methods. CEFE Macedonia, established in 2008 in Skopje, Macedonia, has positioned itself as a leader in this field through its Competency-based Economies, Formation of Enterprises (CEFE) methodology. Developed in the 1980s by the German Ministry of Economics and expanded globally by the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), CEFE is recognized as a highly effective framework for adult education and business development. Over the period from 2014 to 2024, CEFE Macedonia has applied this experiential, action-oriented methodology to train over 12,000 individuals, delivering more than 600 training sessions and 12,000 consulting hours across Macedonia and internationally.

CEFE Macedonia's mission—to strengthen the business capacities of economic stakeholders—and its vision of fostering a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem and enhancing employment opportunities have directed its efforts toward equipping individuals with advanced entrepreneurial skills. The organization's extensive network includes over 30 consultants, 25 trainers, and a database of 5,000 contacts from small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and individuals. Since March 2020, CEFE has broadened its operational scope with the establishment of three new branches—CEFE ISTOK, CEFE Strumica, and CEFE Education & Training—further extending its impact in the eastern and southwestern regions of Macedonia.

This study presents the results of a detailed impact assessment conducted between September 2024 and February 2025, analyzing CEFE Macedonia's activities over the 2014–2024 timeframe. Utilizing surveys from 206 participants and interviews with 30 collaborators—including trainers, mentors, and project partners—the assessment highlights CEFE's significant contributions to innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic sustainability. Beyond functioning as a training entity, CEFE Macedonia has emerged as a pivotal component of Macedonia's entrepreneurial infrastructure, yielding quantifiable outcomes that impact individuals, businesses, and the broader society. This paper details CEFE's accomplishments and examines how its experiential learning framework can further contribute to the development of a dynamic entrepreneurial landscape.

Methodology

The impact assessment of CEFE Macedonia's activities over the 2014–2024 period was systematically structured to evaluate both the scope and magnitude of its effects. Utilizing a mixed-methods research design, the study integrated quantitative data with detailed qualitative analyses to achieve a comprehensive assessment of CEFE's programs. Data collection was conducted from September 2024 to February 2025, targeting outcomes spanning the decade from 2014 to 2024.

- Participant Surveys: A standardized survey was administered to 206 individuals who engaged in CEFE's varied programs, encompassing entrepreneurship workshops (participated in by over 54% of respondents), business skills trainings (approximately 30%), financial management courses (17.48%), and the Training of Trainers program (nearly 20%). The respondent pool reflected a broad demographic composition: 63.59% female and 36.41% male, with age distributions including 18–25 (28.43%),

  26–35 (23.04%), 36–45 (23.53%), 46–55 (18.14%), and over 55 (6.86%).

  Geographically, participants were drawn from urban areas such as Skopje (25.62%) and Bitola (17.24%) as well as smaller locales like Kochani (11.82%) and Struga (3.45%). The survey quantified outcomes including skill acquisition, business establishment, revenue growth, employment generation, and networking opportunities, providing a participant-centered evaluation of CEFE's effectiveness.

- Collaborator Interviews: Thirty detailed interviews were conducted with CEFE's trainers, mentors, guest lecturers, and program coordinators to enrich the qualitative component. These key stakeholders, essential to the implementation of CEFE's initiatives, offered insights into participant development, training efficacy, and the methodology's strengths, informed by their extensive involvement—over 600 training sessions delivered and numerous documented achievements.

- Performance Metrics: Quantitative measures assessed concrete economic contributions, such as the proportion of participants launching businesses (16.92%), job creation rates (42% of business owners employed additional staff), and revenue increases (38% reported higher earnings). Data analysis was performed using Google Surveys and Excel, producing statistical patterns (e.g., 89% indicating skill enhancements) complemented by qualitative accounts of participant progress.

  Although the assessment faced constraints—such as a 10% response rate from a 2,500-person database and dependence on self-reported data—the robust sample size and methodological diversity underpin the reliability and representativeness of the findings. CEFE Macedonia's adherence to thorough evaluation underscores its commitment to ongoing refinement and accountability in its operations.

Results and Discussion

The impact assessment definitively positions CEFE Macedonia as a key agent in entrepreneurship education, with its experiential learning methodology yielding significant outcomes across multiple parameters. The results demonstrate how CEFE's systematic approach enhances innovation and entrepreneurial competencies while contributing to economic development through its programmatic interventions. This section provides a comprehensive evaluation, synthesizing participant data, collaborator insights, and performance metrics to underscore CEFE Macedonia's substantial contributions to these objectives.

1.Skills Development and Entrepreneurial Mindset: A Foundation for Success

CEFE Macedonia's experiential learning methodology has demonstrated significant effectiveness in enhancing participants' practical competencies and entrepreneurial mindset, both of which are essential for success in dynamic business environments. A participant survey indicated that 89% of respondents reported improved business skills following their engagement with CEFE programs. Key areas of development included business planning, financial management, strategic decision-making, and leadership—competencies integral to navigating entrepreneurial challenges.

Collaborator assessments corroborated these results, with over 85% of participants exhibiting measurable improvements in their capabilities post-training. One trainer observed, “Participants demonstrate elevated strategic analysis and financial proficiency, resulting in increased professional competence.” This aligns with survey data: 77.67% of participants acquired new technical abilities, 47.57% expanded their understanding of entrepreneurial principles, and 41.26% enhanced their performance in job-specific functions. CEFE’s distinctive approach—utilizing action-oriented instruments such as business simulations and practical exercises—ensures that acquired knowledge is directly applicable rather than abstract. Notably, 63.82% of participants incorporated innovative techniques into their professional practices, underscoring CEFE’s capacity to facilitate adaptive and creative problem-solving.

The impact on entrepreneurial mindset development is also notable. Collaborators estimated that 75% of participants exhibited increased proactivity and risk tolerance, facilitating opportunity recognition and problem-solving in uncertain business environments. A participant’s testimonial illustrates this transformation: “CEFE equipped me with the skills and confidence to launch my own venture, shifting my approach from indecision to action.” These findings align with CEFE Macedonia’s objective of strengthening business competencies, reinforcing its role as a key contributor to entrepreneurship development and innovation.

2. Business Creation and Growth

CEFE Macedonia’s influence on business initiation and expansion is substantial, evidencing its capacity to convert experiential learning into measurable economic results. The survey revealed that 16.92% of participants established new enterprises following engagement with CEFE programs, while 17.69% augmented pre-existing businesses. Among business owners and managers, 82.8% reported improved operational management, attributing these advancements to the applied training provided by CEFE. Collaborators supported these findings, estimating that 70% of participants experienced career progression or enterprise expansion, with documented outcomes including acquisition of €2,000 grants and contractual agreements finalized during training sessions.

Revenue enhancement further validates CEFE’s efficacy. Over 38% of participants recorded a direct increase in financial returns attributable to their involvement, with 20.55% achieving increments exceeding 15%, 17.81% ranging between 10–15%, and 39.73% between 5–10%. For business owners, revenue increases were notable: 58.44% observed growth up to 10%, 23.38% between 10–25%, and 6.5% surpassing 50%. One participant stated, “Implementation

of CEFE-derived marketing methodologies resulted in a doubling of my sales, demonstrating significant impact." These data emphasize CEFE's ability to generate quantifiable economic benefits, equipping entrepreneurs with tools to excel in competitive commercial environments.

Collaborators consistently highlighted specific instances of impact: one participant secured victory in a business competition, another established a startup now employing five individuals, and numerous others transformed conceptual frameworks into profitable ventures. CEFE's emphasis on practical implementation—facilitated through programs such as the Entrepreneurship Workshop (attended by over 54% of respondents) and Development of Business Skills training (nearly 30%)—ensures that participants transition from theoretical planning to actionable outcomes. This corresponds with CEFE's objective of fostering sustainable economic progress, confirming its methodology as an effective mechanism for entrepreneurial achievement and innovation.

3. Job Creation and Economic Impact

Beyond individual outcomes, CEFE Macedonia's impact extends to the wider economic framework, facilitating employment generation and promoting sustainability. The survey indicated that over 42% of participants who own businesses increased their workforce following training, with 13.33% recruiting one employee, 24.44% hiring 2–5, and 4.44% creating over 6 new positions. This job creation is a direct result of CEFE's training interventions, as participants' enterprises—66.67% employing 1–5 individuals, 11.90% employing 6–10, and another 11.90% exceeding 20—demonstrate growth and scalability.

Collaborators assessed that nearly 50% of participants achieved quantifiable successes, such as establishing ventures that enhance local economic systems. One mentor reported, "Participants frequently employ personnel within months of completing training, indicating that CEFE cultivates not only entrepreneurs but also employers." This observation aligns with CEFE's objective of enhancing employment levels, as its programs equip individuals to function as economic contributors rather than solely as employment seekers. With 21.72% of respondents transitioning from unemployment and 6.31% securing improved positions post-training, CEFE effectively addresses career opportunity gaps, thereby amplifying its socioeconomic influence.

The broader economic implications are significant. By supporting enterprises that maintain operations beyond their initial year—a metric reflecting CEFE's emphasis on sustained viability—CEFE Macedonia enhances community resilience and economic steadiness. Its contribution to small enterprise development, evidenced by 66.67% of surveyed businesses employing 1–5 individuals, underscores its critical role within Macedonia's SME-centric economic structure.

4.Networking and Collaboration: Building an Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

CEFE Macedonia's capacity to facilitate professional networking represents a critical component, establishing an integrated entrepreneurial ecosystem that transcends conventional training environments. The survey determined that 82.38% of participants developed new professional contacts through CEFE programs, with 31.87% establishing immediate business partnerships and 60.44% identifying prospective collaborative opportunities. Collaborators

corroborated that over 60% of participants expanded their professional networks, frequently resulting in mentorship arrangements, joint ventures, and enhanced market access.

Participants evaluated these networks as highly beneficial, with 96.25% rating them as valuable (55.61% "very valuable," 40.64% "somewhat valuable"). One participant reported, "The professional connections established via CEFE provided access to previously unattainable resources, including clients, collaborators, and innovative concepts." CEFE's strategic focus on networking events, mentorship initiatives, and collaborative activities cultivates an environment conducive to knowledge exchange and innovation. Collaborators observed, "Over 60% of participants complete the program with enhanced networks that support their professional development." This interconnectedness amplifies CEFE's effectiveness, as 67.02% of participants affirmed that their acquired skills and expertise directly facilitated greater collaboration and international engagement.

By functioning as a nexus for entrepreneurs, trainers, and industry professionals, CEFE Macedonia not only delivers educational content but also fosters integration, enhancing innovation through collective interaction. This ecosystem development supports its mission of promoting regional and international cooperation, as demonstrated by its partnerships with Erasmus+ and its operational presence across more than 140 countries.

5.Participant Satisfaction and Innovation Adoption: A Resounding Endorsement

CEFE Macedonia's programs demonstrate a high level of approval, indicative of their scientific rigor and applicability. The survey documented a 78.82% satisfaction rate, with 62.56% of participants classified as "very satisfied" and 16.26% as "satisfied." A remarkable 99.50% of respondents indicated they would recommend CEFE to others, providing strong evidence of its perceived efficacy. Participants identified key strengths, including the expertise of trainers (66.02%), the emphasis on practical skill implementation (64.08%), the quality of instructional resources (49.03%), and the provision of networking opportunities (46.12%), underscoring CEFE's comprehensive methodological framework.

The adoption of innovative practices is similarly noteworthy, with 63.82% of participants integrating new strategies or solutions into their professional activities following training. Collaborators commended the methodology's interactive design, with over 85% affirming its success in linking theoretical constructs to practical application. One trainer observed, "The incorporation of gamification and simulations enhances retention, enabling immediate application of acquired knowledge." This applied orientation ensures the persistence of CEFE's impact, as 96.10% of respondents confirmed that participation in CEFE activities directly and positively influenced their professional capabilities.

These findings reinforce CEFE Macedonia's position as a frontrunner in experiential learning, facilitating not merely education but substantive professional advancement. Its capacity to promote innovation and achieve high participant satisfaction distinguishes it as an exemplar within the global landscape of entrepreneurship education.

Insights from Collaborators

The assessments from CEFE Macedonia's 30 collaborators—including trainers, mentors, guest lecturers, program coordinators, and project partners—yield a systematic confirmation of the organization's experiential learning methodology and its substantial effect on participants' development.

Impact on Participants

Collaborators consistently affirmed CEFE Macedonia's capacity to effect substantial improvements in participants, with over 85% reporting observable advancements in business, financial, and entrepreneurial competencies. "Participants demonstrate elevated strategic analysis and decision-making skills upon completion," one trainer stated, highlighting how CEFE's practical methodology addresses deficiencies in knowledge, particularly among the

40% of participants who initially possess limited business expertise. Data from collaborators indicate that approximately 70% of participants experienced career progression or enterprise expansion, with documented instances including one individual securing a €2,000 grant and another finalizing a business transaction during the training period. "CEFE facilitates transformative skill application rather than solely imparting knowledge," a mentor remarked, noting that nearly 50% of participants achieved measurable outcomes such as success in competitions or establishment of new ventures.

The acquisition of an entrepreneurial mindset was comparably significant, with 75% of participants showing increased confidence and risk tolerance as quantified by collaborator assessments. "Seventy-five percent of participants develop a problem-solving orientation that modifies their business management approach," a collaborator reported. This development is supported by CEFE's interactive methodology, which 80% of collaborators identified as a critical factor in enhancing participants' motivation and initiative. The organization's focus on practical, real-world application ensures that competencies are systematically integrated into participants' professional activities, positioning CEFE as a pivotal contributor to long-term entrepreneurial success.

Strengths of Program Delivery

CEFE Macedonia's delivery methods received favorable evaluations, with over 85% of collaborators commending the practical and interactive nature of the approach. "The integration of business simulation games enhances the learning process by making it both dynamic and retentive," one trainer noted, emphasizing the effectiveness of tools such as Micro Business Games, which over 60% of collaborators recognized for their gamified design and structured 12–15-hour implementation period. The methodology's focus on addressing authentic challenges was identified as a key strength, with a collaborator stating, "The resolution of real-world problems pertinent to the training content represents one of CEFE's most robust features." This applied orientation facilitates the immediate utilization of acquired skills, a finding supported by the 93.3% satisfaction rate (80% "very satisfied," 13.3% "satisfied") reported by collaborators concerning the program's structure and organization.

The adaptability of CEFE's training formats—customized for entrepreneurs, students, and professionals—was positively assessed by 70% of respondents, who valued its versatility across diverse participant groups. "The combination of structured content and participant engagement is optimally calibrated," one coordinator observed, proposing only minor adjustments, such as reducing session duration for younger participants, to improve accessibility. The complete absence of "dissatisfied" responses highlights CEFE's proficiency in providing high-quality, impactful educational experiences, distinguishing it from conventional training frameworks.

Professional Growth for Collaborators

Engagement with CEFE Macedonia yielded substantial benefits for the collaborators, with over 85% documenting notable professional advancement. "CEFE provided the structural basis for my career development," one trainer stated, while another reported, "Participation as a CEFE trainer has enhanced my labor market competitiveness, enabling me to leverage a skill set that increases my financial returns." Over 60% of collaborators acquired competencies in project management, entrepreneurial instruction, and interpersonal skills, while 50% expanded their professional networks within CEFE's collaborative framework. "The opportunity to exchange ideas and connect with receptive professionals is highly beneficial," a mentor remarked, aligning with the 40% who noted heightened recognition and career progression opportunities.

Professional satisfaction was affirmed by over 70% of collaborators, who derived fulfillment from facilitating training and observing participant development. "The observable satisfaction of participants following a session represents a primary indicator of success," one trainer commented, while another valued "supporting participants in achieving self-employment." This bidirectional effect—enhancing the capabilities of both participants and collaborators—demonstrates CEFE's comprehensive methodology, cultivating an integrated community focused on skill development and excellence.

A Collaborative and Supportive Team Culture

The internal operational framework of CEFE Macedonia was substantiated, with over 80% of collaborators rating teamwork and communication as "excellent" or "superior." "The team exhibits youthful energy, creativity, and consistent availability," one respondent reported, while another commended the leadership's "modest and composed management style." Over 50% emphasized the professionalism and constructive atmosphere, with external collaborators confirming effective coordination: "Operational interactions as an external partner have been consistently efficient." Recommendations for slight enhancements—such as improved task allocation (15%) or increased trainer autonomy (10%)—indicate an ongoing pursuit of optimization rather than deficiencies, reinforcing CEFE's unified and motivating organizational culture.

Future Opportunities

Collaborators identified key areas for CEFE's future development, including advanced financial management (40%), digital skills (25%), and expanded mentorship opportunities (30%), all of which complement and enhance its existing programs. Trainers expressed high confidence in CEFE's methodology and regarded their instructional capacity as one of the organization's most

valuable strengths, indicating a strong foundation for sustained impact.

Overall, findings from collaborator interviews reinforce CEFE Macedonia's role as a leading institution in entrepreneurship education. Its measurable impact on participants, innovative pedagogical approach, and supportive environment for trainers highlight the effectiveness of its methodology. CEFE's contribution to skill development and entrepreneurial success is well-documented, with collaborators affirming its continued influence in fostering practical, action-oriented learning.

Strategic Implications and Recommendations

CEFE Macedonia's decade of success is a testament to its innovative methodology and unwavering commitment to entrepreneurship. The impact assessment provides a strategic framework for further enhancing its influence, offering key recommendations for continued development:

Deepen Experiential Learning: Enhance business simulations with extended Micro Business Games and live industry challenges, ensuring participants gain even more hands-on experience. Collaborators' praise for gamification (over 60%) supports this expansion.

Strengthening Financial Empowerment: Introducing advanced financial management training and fostering partnerships with financial institutions will address the needs of the 35% of participants who report challenges in accessing funding. This initiative aligns with the 75% of participants expressing interest in financial literacy, facilitating accelerated business development.

Extending Post-Training Support: Establishing a CEFE Entrepreneurial Hub for continuous mentorship, along with a structured "From Training to Business" incubation program, will support the 70% of participants who demonstrate business growth post-training, ensuring sustained entrepreneurial progress.

Expanding Regional Accessibility: Implementing hybrid learning models and creating local training hubs will improve access for participants in rural areas, addressing the geographical barriers faced by 25% of respondents. This initiative aligns with CEFE's commitment to inclusivity.

Increasing Public Visibility: Launching a "CEFE Impact Series" featuring participant success stories and digital outreach campaigns will enhance public awareness of CEFE's contributions, responding to calls for greater recognition of its impact.

These strategic recommendations build upon CEFE's established strengths, reinforcing its role as a leading institution in innovative entrepreneurial education and development.

Conclusion

CEFE Macedonia has emerged as a key driver of entrepreneurship education, with the 2014–2024 impact assessment, conducted from September 2024 to February 2025, providing empirical evidence of its effectiveness. This study has substantiated the profound influence of CEFE's Competency-based Economies through the Formation of Enterprises (CEFE)

methodology, reinforcing its pivotal role in fostering innovation and entrepreneurship through experiential learning. The findings confirm that CEFE's structured yet dynamic approach—incorporating action-based training, business simulations, and real-world application—has empowered over 12,000 individuals through 600+ training programs and 12,000+ consulting hours, facilitating entrepreneurial skill development, business growth, and employment generation.

The quantitative and qualitative insights drawn from this decade-long assessment reveal significant entrepreneurial advancements. Of the 206 participants surveyed, 89% reported enhanced business skills, 38% experienced income growth, and over 42% contributed to job creation—tangible indicators of CEFE's contribution to Macedonia's economic landscape. Beyond statistical improvements, participants demonstrated an increased capacity for innovation and strategic decision-making, translating training outcomes into new business ventures and expanded enterprises.

The perspectives of 30 collaborators further substantiate CEFE's methodological excellence and systemic impact. More than 85% observed significant skill improvements among participants, 70% noted career or business advancements, and 80% highlighted CEFE's role in fostering confidence, risk-taking, and innovative thinking. Additionally, CEFE's methodology has not only benefited participants but also elevated the professional growth of trainers and collaborators, with 85% reporting enhanced expertise, 60% acquiring new skills, and 70% deriving professional fulfillment from the training process. One trainer aptly summarized this dual impact: "CEFE transforms lives—and ours too."

This dual impact—empowering participants while simultaneously advancing the professional capabilities of collaborators—exemplifies CEFE Macedonia's holistic approach. By integrating experiential learning principles with structured business development frameworks, CEFE extends beyond conventional educational models. The approach, rooted in simulations, problem-solving exercises, and industry-driven challenges, ensures that learning is immediately applicable and fosters real-world business success. The program's effectiveness is reflected in its 78.82% participant satisfaction rate, 99.50% recommendation rate, and 93.3% collaborator approval of program structure, solidifying its status as a benchmark for entrepreneurship education.

Moreover, CEFE Macedonia's success transcends national borders, contributing to the broader global entrepreneurship education movement. The CEFE methodology, implemented

in over 140 countries, serves as a replicable model for sustainable economic development, demonstrating its adaptability across diverse economic and cultural contexts.

By reinforcing the strategic directions, CEFE Macedonia is positioned to further catalyze entrepreneurial success, ensuring that innovation, business creation, and economic empowerment remain at the core of its mission. Its enduring legacy as North Macedonia's leading institution for experiential entrepreneurship education underscores its critical role in shaping future generations of entrepreneurs. As the 2024–2025 impact assessment demonstrates, CEFE Macedonia is not merely equipping individuals with business skills—it is

cultivating a culture of innovation, resilience, and long-term economic sustainability.

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Empowering Marginalised Voices: Experiential Learning for Equity and Inclusion in the Italian Context

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Abstract

This study discusses how experiential learning can present an instrumental approach toward EDI in Italian higher education institutions. Guided by theoretical considerations about EDI and experiential learning, this study critically explores how experiential approaches, participatory methodologies in service learning, internships, and collaborative cross-cultural projects contribute to systematically addressing inequalities and supporting inclusive educational contexts. The Italian context, characterized by regional disparities, limited representation of underserved groups, and challenges linked to migration, is critically analyzed to underline structural barriers and opportunities for reform. This paper identifies best practices through selected case studies from Italian universities where experiential learning initiatives have enhanced intercultural competence, social responsibility, and improved educational access for diverse student populations. This study employs a comparative analysis, integrating qualitative research methods to explore how experiential learning contributes to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in Italian academia. The methodological approach involves a systematic comparative analysis of institutional practices, policies, and structural disparities across multiple higher education institutions. Data will be collected through the review of institutional documents and policies, alongside the literature review, ensuring the inclusion of marginalized voices and diverse stakeholder perspectives in assessing EDI practices and the impact of experiential learning initiatives. The primary limitation of this methodology is the restricted scope of case study selection, which may prevent a comprehensive comparison across a broader range of institutionalized documents.

Key Words: EDI principles, higher education, intersectionality, experiential learning

Introduction

Over the past few decades, higher education institutions (HEIs) have been progressively urged to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) values as essential components of their institutional, pedagogical, and civic missions. Despite being frequently used collectively, these terms have distinct yet complementary meanings. Equity refers to the act of giving everyone fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement to identify and/or eliminate barriers that have historically been used to exclude certain groups (Gillborn, 2005; Ahmed, 2012). Diversity involves the existence and acceptance of individual differences, such as those related to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, disability, and migration history

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(Gurin et al., 2002). Inclusion refers to the deliberate attempts to establish settings where everyone feels appreciated, supported, and respected (Hurtado et al., 2012). Experiential learning is presented as a promising pedagogical framework to improve EDI in higher education at the nexus of these ideas. Kolb (1984) invented experiential learning, which he defined as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience." This approach encourages context-dependent learning, critical reflection, and active learning—usually in community-based or real-world contexts. It encompasses activities like cross-cultural exchange programs, internships, service learning, and participatory action research. Experiential learning is posited by researchers to enhance students' intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006), critical awareness (Freire, 2020), and civic engagement (Eyler & Giles, 1999). It also serves as a means to democratize knowledge production and participation within institutional contexts (Mitchell, 2008). This study examines the role of experiential learning in advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) objectives within the context of Italian higher education, characterized by regional disparities, insufficient institutional support for historically marginalized groups, and evolving challenges related to migration and internationalization. Despite existing interventions to internationalize the Italian university system and adopt inclusive pedagogies, structural inequalities persist, particularly to access, representation, and participation of historically underserved groups (Bulgarelli, 2023). The provided research analyzes how experiential learning programs at the selected Italian institutions have helped to close educational gaps and create inclusive methods through a comparative case study. This study aims to uncover best practices and possible avenues for systemic change by evaluating institutional policy, pedagogical frameworks, and stakeholder attitudes. By accomplishing this, it contributes to larger discussions on the strategic role experiential techniques may play in elevating the voices of marginalized communities and creating more equitable educational systems in the face of severe structural inequality.

Contextualizing Marginalization in Italy

To comprehend how historical legacies, socio-political organizations, and intra-regional differences influence access and inclusion in the Italian higher education system, a multifaceted approach is required. In Italy, the term "marginalization" refers to a variety of interconnected problems, including socioeconomic disadvantage, racial and ethnic exclusion, gender inequality, and institutionalized discrimination against people with disabilities or immigrants. Persistent geographical disparities between the wealthy North and the underfunded South compound these difficulties by limiting social mobility and granting unequal access to education (CNVSU, 2010; Trigilia, 2016). An aristocratic model built on hierarchical structures and exclusive access has historically defined Italy's educational system, particularly within the university system. This legacy has had long-lasting effects on how universities approach inclusion and equity. Higher education in Italy has always been a tool for social reproduction rather than change, and it frequently favors students from urban, middle-class, and Northern origins (Giancola et al., 2010). Underrepresented students are still excluded due to structural disparities in academic preparedness, institutional accessibility, and social capital, even if the massification of education since the 1960s has opened the gates of educational institutions.

Higher education now faces new challenges as a result of Italy's transition from an emigration to an immigration nation in the second half of the 20th century. School dropout rates are higher in many regions of the South. Moreover, it is primarily the regions of the South that do not ensure an adequate coverage of study grants for university students (Colombo & Regini, 2016). Based on enrollment and graduation statistics for higher education, second-generation immigrants—often referred to as "new Italians"—continue to be underrepresented (Fondazione ISMU, 2023). The underrepresentation of students of migrant origin in higher education has also been caused by structural and institutional barriers, including language barriers, racialized social attitudes, the bureaucratic recognition of foreign qualifications, and a lack of targeted assistance (Ambrosini, 2013). Furthermore, racialized groups have been further marginalized by anti-immigrant discourses and exclusionary citizenship regulations (jus sanguinis), which have created a climate of national exclusion where access and belonging are contested (Caponio & Donatiello, 2017). Institutional spending and educational attainment are, nevertheless, impacted by the long-standing socioeconomic divide between the North and South of Italy. The quality of education provided and related services are directly impacted by Southern universities' persistent underfunding, brain drain, and limited infrastructure allocations (Viesti, 2016). Class-based and geographic educational marginalization is further exacerbated by these disparities, which are a reflection of larger structural disparities in the Italian labor and welfare systems (Cappellari & Lucifora, 2009). Broadly speaking, gender parity in university participation has been attained; nonetheless, vertical and horizontal segregation still exist (Panichella & Triventi, 2014). Gender non-conforming and LGBTQ+ students face institutional invisibility and a lack of focused support services, while women are still underrepresented in STEM disciplines and professorships (ISTAT, 2021; Viesti, 2018). A more straightforward approach to equity is required than single-axis explanations of marginalization provide, as an intersectional approach shows that these disparities are exacerbated when gender is joined with race, migratory history, and socioeconomic level (Crenshaw, 2013; Bilge, 2013). Despite legislative frameworks like Article 34 of the Italian Constitution providing rights for equality, there has been a significant disconnect between de jure equality and actual educational practices. The potential of Italian universities to lead revolutionary EDI projects has been hampered by institutional complacency, inadequate accountability, and a lack of comprehensive national policies to promote inclusion (MIUR[2], 2018). Furthermore, university policies typically take a restricted, compliance-focused approach to diversity, focusing more on legal compliance than on proactive measures for empowerment and inclusion (Bulgarelli, 2023). More recently, EDI and inclusive pedagogies have started to be discussed due to increased global awareness of international standards of education and the expanding internationalization of Italian universities. Additionally, EU-wide programs like Horizon Europe and the Bologna Process have put pressure on Italian institutions to support more expansive agendas for

[2] MIUR – Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca (2018). *Piano nazionale per l'inclusione*.

innovation and equity. According to this viewpoint, experiential learning can be viewed as a potent means of teaching and structuring inclusion on several levels by exposing students to real-world issues and promoting social responsibility and critical thinking.

Experiential Learning in Action: Examples from Italy

There are several potential benefits and hazards associated with applying experiential learning theory in Italian pedagogy. This chapter examines the extent to which experiential learning has been used as a generator of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), drawing on some examples from different Italian universities. The examples demonstrate how students' engagement in authentic, intercultural, and community-embedded settings can foster reflective, transformative learning and produce observable outcomes in underserved areas..

Service Learning at the University of Bologna

An excellent example of experiential learning for inclusion is the University of Bologna's The Service-Learning & Community Engagement program at the University of Bologna links scholarly research with practical social impact. Students work together with communities through regional and global projects, utilizing their expertise to tackle societal issues while cultivating civic engagement and interdisciplinary proficiencies. In addition to helping underrepresented groups, this paradigm fostered students' civic engagement, empathy, and intercultural competency (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Deardorff, 2006). In line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, initiatives like community-based labs and global programs like UNICORN promote active citizenship and give students worthwhile experiences that advance their education and civic engagement. Assessments revealed notable improvements in students' awareness of structural inequity and cultural competency, two crucial markers of inclusive education (Mitchell, 2008).

Digital Academy (DIGITA) for Inclusive Learning, University of Naples

The University of Naples Federico II started a project to establish an academy for everyone in Southern Italy, a region characterized by high levels of underfunding and social isolation. An innovative model for learning in the Italian higher education system, DIGITA Academy builds a link between theoretical knowledge and real-world experience. Through the use of a challenge-based learning methodology and a planned project-based work period with industry participants, the program develops critical abilities including creativity, problem-solving, and inter-disciplinary teamwork—all key components of experiential learning. Additionally, DIGITA Academy has a lot of promise for promoting inclusiveness and equity. Its tuition-free strategy lowers financial barriers, increasing the number of students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds who have access to high-quality instruction (Marra, 2023). By bringing together students from various academic and cultural backgrounds, the program also fosters an inclusive learning environment by encouraging the exchange of ideas and learning styles. DIGITA, which is based in Naples' historically underprivileged San Giovanni a Teduccio district, works to decentralize access to state-of-the-art digital education and career opportunities, thereby addressing structural and spatial inequalities that still exist throughout the Italian higher education system.

Participatory and Visual Research with Roma Youth in Milan

At Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Professor Oana Marcu, Participatory and Visual Research applied as a method, involved Roma youths as active co-researchers in an experiential learning-based process. The initiative placed a strong emphasis on learning via firsthand experience, introspection, and group knowledge creation, drawing on Freire's (1970) pedagogy of critical consciousness and Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle. Roma teenagers, who are frequently disenfranchised in the Italian educational system, collaborated to create instructional resources and participated in dialogue exercises with anthropology and education university students. This method created an atmosphere in which lived experience and critical thinking were valued as essential components of education. The project challenged established hierarchies and complemented larger initiatives to democratize higher education by transforming Roma adolescents from subjects to co-producers of knowledge (Fine, 2008). The learning process became more experiential and transformative as a result of the participants' ability to express complicated identities and social realities through the use of visual and narrative techniques, including collages, drawings, and storytelling.

ABR Training for Educational Research: Global Classroom Project

ABR Training for Educational Research: Global Classroom Project is an interdisciplinary international course co-founded by Drexel University and the University of Milan-Bicocca. It aims at equipping early-career scholars and PhD candidates with competence in applying Arts-Based Research methods in educational contexts. Arts-Based Research (ABR) is an approach that employs artistic methods, such as collage, dance, drawing, and assemblage, as legitimate methods of investigation in educational inquiry. By employing these methods, researchers can explore complex educational phenomena through active and reflective processes. The course is structured as an online learning laboratory, comprised of eight monthly modules, each three hours in duration. Volunteers participate in workshop and seminar activities promoting critical inquiry into philosophical positions, research topics, and interactive project planning involving ABR methods.

These instances share several similar characteristics that highlight the transformative power of experiential learning in the Italian higher education system. First and foremost, contextual sensitivity, local reality integration, and responsiveness to territorial disparities—especially those associated with the North-South divide—are essential components of effective experiential learning (Viesti, 2016). Reciprocity and co-creation are equally important principles that enhance learning by acknowledging communities as equal collaborators in the process of learning (Cook-Sather et al., 2018). Such approaches, however, need strong structural support; long-term success hinges on different levels of institutional commitment, including educational, financial, and logistical (Bamber & Hankin, 2011). Last but not least, the application of assisted critical reflection is significant because it allows participants to convert their experience into heightened critical awareness, which is a necessary component of transformational learning (Mezirow, 1991).

Methodology

Applying a qualitative research approach based on document analysis and literature evaluation, this study seeks to assess experiential learning's role in promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in the Italian higher education system. The study compares the experiential learning programs of a few chosen universities using secondary data sources, including evaluations, policy papers, academic literature, and institutional reports. The pedagogical and institutional aspects of experiential programs can be examined in detail with this method, which also prioritizes the experiences and voices of marginalized communities. A detailed examination of how experiential learning techniques are positioned within larger socio-political and regional settings is made possible by the special attention given to the intersectional challenges that underprivileged groups must overcome.

Analysis: Exploring the Influence of Experiential Learning on EDI in Italian Higher Education

It is impossible to overlook the contributions that experiential learning has made to Italian higher education, as demonstrated by the aforementioned examples and literature evaluations. One strategy that will help reduce the educational gap based on a variety of factors, including the south-north gap, is experiential learning. To evaluate the theoretical and practical effects of experiential learning on EDI objectives, the study focuses on four thematic areas within the framework of experiential learning and asks, "To what extent does experiential learning encourage EDI in the Italian higher education system?" These areas are mutual knowledge production, institutional engagement, accessibility, and transformative learning.

Accessibility: Enlarging Participation through Context-Specific Engagement

Systemic barriers were overcome in unique ways by each of the actions highlighted. For example, by focusing on learners in the South of Italy, the DIGITA Academy specifically addressed material and geographic exclusions. Similar to this, the University of Bologna's Service Learning program showed how being close to marginalized groups, such as migrants and refugees, could be used to solve real-world exclusion and provide valuable learning opportunities. It demonstrates how experiential learning may dismantle conventional obstacles to involvement in any level of education by redefining access as the capacity to participate in educational processes in a meaningful way rather than merely as access to institutions. However, in the absence of policy backing, many interventions are fragmented and pilot-centered, raising questions about durability and scalability.

Transformative Learning: From Experience to Critical Consciousness

The development of critical consciousness among participants is a recurring topic in the examples, reiterating Freire's (2020) pedagogy of the oppressed and Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning. For example, the students who participated in Bologna's Service Learning program showed high levels of cultural competency and structural awareness, two qualities that are crucial for inclusive mindsets. Similar to this, the Participatory and Visual

Research approach demonstrated how experiential participation may completely reverse power dynamics by involving Roma youth underth the guidance of Prof. Oana Marcu. The research's ability to empower participants and foster critical awareness through co-producing knowledge with a historically oppressed community suggests a shift in pedagogy from transactional learning to transformational praxis. However, the extent to which these reflective practices are woven into curricula at the institutional level is extremely variable. As several programs make substantial draws on the initiative of individual faculty or external affiliations, this means vulnerability to institutional change and lack of embeddedness in university-level strategies.

Institutional Engagement: Between Commitment and Fragmentation

The examples also demonstrate differential levels of institutional engagement with EDI-infused experiential learning. Initiatives such as the ABR Global Classroom Project have international collaboration and formal pedagogical planning, which implies growing willingness on the part of some institutions to adopt interdisciplinary and inclusive practices. However, the broader Italian higher education environment continues to envision diversity using a compliance model where intervention is often reactive as opposed to strategic (Bulgarelli, 2023). This fragmentation is an indicator of there not being a systematic national policy on EDI principles in higher education. While ambitious projects have been initiated in some universities, these are stand-alone and not systemic. The North–South disparity continues to influence the ability of institutions, with less affluent Southern institutions bearing disproportionate expenses to implement and sustain such programs.

Reciprocal Knowledge Production: Centering Underserved Voices

The collaborative and participatory nature of the projects under consideration is one of their distinguishing features, in contrast to top-down outreach strategies that seek to reestablish paternalistic relationships. Participation in creation and community legitimation are the foundation of initiatives like the Participatory and Visual Research with Roma youth and service-learning projects, which allow students to examine and interact with systematic inequalities not just intellectually but also morally and personally. Additionally, this method challenges established epistemic hierarchies in academia by transforming excluded communities from passive users of aid to active knowledge creators (Fine, 2008). Cook-Sather's (2018) "students as partners" idea is evocative of such methods, which apply this strategy to community members directly. The sustainability of such mutual models depends on continuous trust-building, ongoing funding, and the institutional willingness to give up academic control to joint ownership of knowledge. Without these, the risk is that these initiatives are only brief innovations and not lasting changes. The examples of experiential learning in Italy hold vast transformative potential in addressing EDI in higher education. Carefully designed—with structural support, critical reflexivity, and participatory methods—they can challenge entrenched inequalities, expand access, and put the historically excluded at the forefront. But these projects also testify to the precarious and uneven terrain of inclusion in Italian academia. Their impact is circumscribed by institutional fragmentation, policy fragmentation, and persistent socio-regional inequalities. To make the best use of experiential learning as an equity mechanism, Italian universities must move from isolated practice to university-level cultures

that highlight inclusion as a core academic and civic mission. This requires integrating experiential learning into curricula, generating adequate funding, and developing national systems of rewards that encourage long-term, equity-driven investment.

Conclusion: Reimagining Inclusion Through Experiential Learning in Italian Higher Education

The potential of experiential learning to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in the Italian higher education system has been critically examined in this study. The research demonstrates the transformative potential and structural limitations of experiential methods in addressing marginalization through the analysis of a few chosen institutional steps and the qualitative comparative evaluation of institutional practices.

Key Findings and Results

The examples that are presented in the study demonstrate that experiential learning is full of potential for extending inclusive higher education in Italy. At the University of Bologna, these kinds of methodologies broaden intercultural competencies and empathy by situating students within living multicultural community settings. The University of Naples Federico II shows that, supported with material and organizational facilities, experiential learning has the potential to expand access and student persistence among marginalized groups of students. At Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, co-creative and participatory practices not only facilitate collective knowledge production but also challenge dominant academic hierarchies. Similarly, the ABR Global Classroom Project demonstrates how arts-based, interdisciplinary research can foster reflective and critical inquiry while deconstructing conventional disciplinary boundaries. These initiatives reveal recurring themes, including the importance of grounding programs in the local context, the potential of co-creation and reflection to change, and the imperative requirement of long-term institutional support to ensure lasting impact.

Discussion: Structural Realities and Constraints

Even with the promise of experiential learning, this research also reveals important challenges. Most projects are still project-based and not structurally part of university curricula. Their success depends on the advocacy of individual champions or the availability of short-term funding, which is not sustainable and scalable. Regional imbalances—most notably, between institutions in the North and the South—also continue to influence the scale and quality of the opportunities offered to students. In addition, while experiential learning is a path to inclusive education, it cannot be achieved fully since it is frequently thwarted by institutional inflexibility, a lack of national-level policies, and narrow diversity defined in terms of legal requirements and not transformative change. Experiential programs will most likely be viewed as add-ons and not integral to the mission of the higher education system, unless there is transformative change at the system level.

Recommendations in the Light of That Research

In the effort to increase the success and ease the challenges noted in this research, the following is recommended to policymakers and institutions. Firstly, there is a need to institutionalize

experiential learning through a shift away from stand-alone, ad hoc, and one-off initiatives and mainstreaming such projects into inter-disciplinary and inter-departmental programs. This means creating formal systems that wed community-based learning and internships into accredited degree programs with pedagogical coherence. To this end, there is also a requirement for a national equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) policy framework for higher education that supports inclusive teaching, investing in equity programming, and encouraging evidence-based evaluation of diversity work, particularly concerning regional disparities such as the North–South divide. Inclusive relationships with the underserved groups and community-based organizations as equal partners in co-designing the curriculum could also be created. Additionally, educators, teachers, and professors must be trained and encouraged to develop inclusive experiential learning activities through staff development in critical pedagogy and cultural responsiveness. The establishment of robust monitoring and evaluation systems is necessary to measure the impact of experiential learning on underserved groups' as well as communities' and students' outcomes, and to provide feedback for ongoing program improvement and institutional accountability based on this data. Although experiential learning is not a cure-all, it provides a powerful pedagogy and ethic for advancing social justice and preventing exclusion in higher education. When supported by tangible institutional commitment and structural change, experiential pedagogies can be change agents in Italy, a country with pervasive social and institutional inequality. In addition to meeting international EDI standards, Italian universities can set the standard for inclusive, transformative learning environments that are grounded in both local context and global goals by redefining education as a co-constructed, socially engaged, and critically reflective activity.

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Teachers' Knowledge and Awareness Levels on Experiential Learning and Their Implementation Experiences: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Experiential learning is a popular approach which enhances the content engagement ability of students through practical experiences. The aim of the study was to explore teachers' perceptions on experiential learning.The study applied a phenomenological research design, which is a qualitative study design focusing on individuals' daily experiences. Data were collected from ten teachersmthrough semi-structured interviews and analyzed with content analysis based on coding. Results were categorized under three major themes: "teachers' perceptions of experiential learning," "factors influencing its implementation," and "challenges in implementations."Participants emphasized the benefits of experiential learning in the formation of long-term retention of knowledge, real-world use, and student enthusiasm. But a number of factors such as time, absence of learning materials, and unavailability of motivating students were offered as barriers in its effective implementation. Participants generally had positive attitudes toward experiential learning and saw its role in promoting engaged learning and improved conceptual understanding. Improving teaching support measures, facilitating resources access, and integrating blended pedagogies might overcome problems as suggested by this study.

Keywords: Experiential learning, Kolb's learning cycle, qualitative research,teacher practices

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Introduction

Educational approaches facilitating learning from group and personal experience are increasingly essential in modern pedagogical practice. The shift from passive reception of knowledge to active construction of knowledge reflects the evolving needs of education in the 21st century (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). Experiential learning here offers an interactive approach to deep, meaningful learning through engaging students in actual experiences and reflective thought.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) is one of the important perspectives on this approach, defining learning as a cycle of repeated activities with four stages that feed back into one another: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). This learning cycle emphasizes the process of transforming experience into knowledge that is essential to cognitive and emotional growth. Kolb and Kolb (2005) argue that learning is best when students are free to engage in all phases of the experiential cycle and their own learning styles are supported.

Experiential learning encourages the application of theoretical principles to everyday life, increasing learner engagement, comprehension, and retention (Guo et al., 2016). Learners are encouraged to take increased responsibility for learning, acting as active participants rather than passive learners in the process (Beard & Wilson, 2018). Such autonomy leads to the development of self-directed learning skills, critical thinking, and knowledge transfer across environments.

In addition to enhancing individual students' learning accomplishments, experiential learning also supports the success of essential 21st-century skills such as problem-solving, communication, teamwork, leadership, and adaptability (Kay & LeSage, 2009; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). By encouraging students to integrate disparate forms of knowledge—cognitive, affective, and behavioral—experiential learning supports holistic learning development (Moon, 2004).

Experiential learning has been found in recent studies to be highly effective across an incredibly wide spectrum of fields, such as STEM education, health science, teacher training, and the social sciences (Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Prince & Felder, 2006; Yardley, Teunissen, & Dornan, 2012). The fact that it is so widely applicable underscores its versatility as a teaching instrument well capable of creating deep contextually based knowledge and long-term skill set development.

However, while much of the literature focuses on student outcomes, there remains a relative lack of research on the perspectives of teachers who implement experiential learning in diverse educational contexts. The processes by which teachers interpret, adapt, and apply experiential learning principles—often in the face of institutional constraints, curricular rigidity, and limited resources—are still underexplored (McCarthy, 2010; Zepke & Leach, 2010). Understanding teachers' experiences can provide valuable insights into the practical challenges and innovations that shape the implementation of experiential learning in real classrooms.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the views of 10 teachers from different disciplines working at the same secondary school regarding experiential learning. Specifically, it investigates how these educators conceptualize experiential learning, the strategies they employ

to integrate it into their practice, and the challenges they encounter during implementation. In doing so, this research seeks to contribute to both theoretical and practical understandings of experiential learning from the educator's perspective.

Methodology

This study is designed in accordance with the phenomenological design. Phenomenological research design is a qualitative approach aimed at helping us understand, describe and locate a universal essence of a phenomenon through exploring the lived experiences of individuals experiencing this phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Under this qualitative research methodology, you will examine subjective accounts from the participants with an intention to discover the meanings those participants give to their experiences (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the opinions of teachers on experiential learning is investigated as a phenomenon.

A maximum variation sampling method was used to select 10 volunteer teachers from different levels of seniority and departments within the same high school. Maximum variation sampling is a type of purposive sampling used in qualitative research. Researchers deliberately select individuals or cases that are significantly different from each other to understand various aspects of the study topic. The primary aim of this method is to provide a broad perspective by identifying overarching themes, patterns, or commonalities related to the subject (Patton, 2015).

For privacy and confidentiality, each participant was assigned a code such as P1, P2, and so on. A table was maintained that listed their code, seniority, and department. careful selection and organizational process ensured a diverse and manageable group of participants for the study.

Ten teachers voluntarily participated in the study, with an equal distribution of 5 males and 5 females. Each teacher belongs to a different field. It is noted that five of these fields are in the social sciences, while the other five are in quantitative disciplines. Their years of service range from 19 to 32 years.

The data was obtained through a semi-structured interview form. The views of two subject-matter experts in the field of curriculum development and measurement and evaluation were received for the preparation of the interview form after the literature reviews. The interview form included five questions to determine the views of the participants about experiential learning. Interviews were lasted for 30-35 minutes and recorded. After the transcription, voice recordings were written, submitted to the participants for checking and participants' approvals were received.

Data was analysed through content analysis based on coding. Participants' statements received during the interviews were quoted directly and the quotations were interpreted comprehensively. Two different experts in educational sciences were conducted the coding process and monitor compliance between the views were provided.

In this study, content analysis coding was performed by two researchers independently and the 92 % match rate of the themes created at the conclusion of the coding was the measure of high internal consistency. The coding notes based on the contents of the interview forms kept in the format of transcript records were preserved to allow for the verifiability of the research. The

trustworthiness of the study was provided by giving the control of the interview transcripts to the participants and referencing the examples directly to the participants' words without changing anything at the data interpretation phase.

Findings

Codes reached as a result of the inductive content analysis were collected under the themes of "teachers' perception of experiential learning", "factors influencing the implementation of experiential learning", "challenges in implementing experiential learning". Codes and themes are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Codes and Themes Reached Through Content Analysis

Themes	Codes
Teachers' perception of experiential learning	Long Term Knowledge Retention
	Holistic Learning Process
	Experience-based Learning Process
Factors influencing the implementation of experiential learning	Real-Life Connection in Learning
	Flexibility in learning process
Challenges in Implementing Experiential Learning	Prerequisite Knowledge Requirement
	Difficulty in ensuring student motivation
	Lack of learning materials
	Time Constraints

Codes under the theme "Teachers' perception of experiential learning" were listed as long term knowledge retention, holistic learning process, experience-based learning process, real-life connection in learning.

P1: *"... our subject naturally involves learning through experience and practice as part of its regular teaching process. I believe that experiential learning is both appropriate and beneficial.*

P2 *"..."I find it extremely meaningful for students to learn through experience and observation in terms of their own personal experiences. I believe that learning through lived experiences is more permanent than merely hearing words."*

P4 "…"*I believe that experience is one of the most important methods. Learning by doing and experiencing is crucial for knowledge retention and for students to fully grasp concepts*." P8 *"..."The teacher says, 'You gave this example,' or 'We talked about this.' They remember it later—they recall both the example and the event more easily. It moves beyond rote memorization. Since it is part of their experience, it becomes easier to remember."*

P6” … " *We used to tell students essentially in formulaic manners previously. But with more experience that I have gained, I have been applying this approach for the past 6-7 years now. The biggest difference is that previously we used to rely more on condensed knowledge to make conclusions. While that approach too yielded success, subsequently I realized that when the students returned from university and got graduated, the knowledge was not so permanent. When learning is applied to daily life and learners are instructed by doing, the learning is more lasting. I have found that when past students return from university and we discuss, they usually refer to the examples that I provided. They always tell me, 'Teacher, you taught us this, and now we are going through it in university like this.' Feeling that this is better for longer learning, I continue doing it*."

P7 “…*We use graphics and 3D models, and we showcase interactive videos with the opening and closing, and the movement of these models on the board… This varies with the topic. We cannot always implement these activities with certain topics… There is no specific evaluation criterion, but through students' answers, it is evident that they learn more effectively. But nowadays I don't conduct formal tests*.”

P10 “… *Of course, we make the students apply the content we teach straight away. We can divide the lesson into two: in the first, there are some students who learn by direct instruction or sometimes by discovery, and in the second, they practice what they have learned. ... We can say that almost every lesson is conducted this way. ... Of course, there is a general pre-prepared schedule. Since we only teach one grade level per class, we prepare at the start and finish of the week on a next-week preparation basis. Having decided on this plan, we implement it in all classes throughout the week. ...The evaluation aspect is actually easier for us because we give a problem and instruct students to solve it by application. If they can solve it, then we have achieved the learning objective. If not, we provide them with assistance and reinforcement so they can arrive at the intended learning outcome*.”

As it is seen, experiential learning is useful to the learning process. Teachers emphasized that when the students are engaged in practical activities and actual applications, they can better grasp the topics and remember things better. Instructors also indicated that experiential learning increases higher orders of engagement, promotes critical thinking, and allows for the development of transferable skills such as collaboration, problem-solving, and self-direction. These results agree with prior research that emphasizes the transformative impact of experiential approaches on cognitive and affective domains of learning. These supportive comments from instructors provide valuable feedback on the pragmatic worth of experiential learning and increase its effectiveness as an effective pedagogical instrument across many fields.

Codes under the theme “Factors influencing the implementation of experiential learning” were listed as flexibility in learning process and prerequisite knowledge requirement.

P1 “…*Actually, it depends on the nature of the topic… We can observe its use based on the topic, such as with an interview or a map. In the new Maarif model, there are already various studies about this topic. Its classroom usability sometimes becomes inconvenient, but if we must specify it to an interval, it would not be more than twice or four times a year…I plan it. There are some*

examples on the web, but it also depends on the personality of the students, the class size, and the age of students we are dealing with … When creating questions or organizing the activity, we do anticipate. And yet, based on the responses given or how the activity itself is performed, we do improvise and adapt as well."

P3 "… *First, I make the list of activities and review them to see which are best suited to the mood of the class or the lesson. I select activities that involve more student participation and discussion. I prefer the activities where the teacher is less involved and the instructor is more of a guide. I also modify the format or try to incorporate real-life situations. There are small adjustments along the way."*

P8 "… *I integrate it into every topic that can be connected to daily life. However, I can't always relate every topic. But for those that have a clear connection to real life and for which I know relevant examples, I discuss them with the students*."

P5 *"... Since it is not a formal or structured process, I do not follow a method like keeping a record, documenting results, or preparing a report. Instead, it remains with me as an experience or personal learning*."

P6 "… *Participation of the students is very crucial to me. It is not so much about grades. Their participation and interest are most valued. If a student is interested, if they choose what I am doing or what we are discussing over a conversation with their friend, then for me, it is a success."*

As argued from the feedback of the participants, experiential learning-based activities are extensively integrated into real contexts, and students are able to make connections between what happens in class and everyday experiences. Teachers reported that they preplan their lessons through consideration of subject matter content and the particular dynamics of their classes, including student interests, readiness levels, and learning styles. This approach not only optimizes authenticity and relevance to learning but also involves students more, encouraging them to learn. By adapting experience to the specific needs of the learner as well as the specifics of the setting, educators strive to maximize the educational benefit from these events. This type of integration of intention and curriculum as well as experience practice is amenable to the central principles of experiential learning theory that emphasize contextual, student-centered education.

Codes under the theme "Challenges in Implementing Experiential Learning" were determined as a difficulty in ensuring student motivation, lack of learning materials, time constraints.

P1 *"... Yes, of course. Sometimes, it can be difficult to motivate the students. Additionally, time is not always sufficient."*

P2 "… *We are faced with challenges because, in this type of hands-on exercise, we do not necessarily have pre-prepared materials available. Therefore, it is time-consuming. You, as an educator, first need to think about the topic and prepare something accordingly. But if pre-prepared materials were available, it would be quicker and easier— not for the students, but for the teacher. For the students, however, it is beneficial in every way."*

P4 *"... It is a challenging field because it addresses spiritual matters, which can lead to conflicts, and motivation may be needed."*

P9 *"... i can't use it because we don't have a laboratory environment."*

P10 *"... The issue is typically where the students obtain some kind of problem; they simply think, automatically, that there is something wrong with the computer system, as if it is a reflex—why I do not know, but that is the way they feel. So, they believe the problem must be with their computer. That is a tremendous amount of attention. Looking around here, we have approximately 30 computers, and we try to address each problem independently."*

P6 *"... No doubt there are issues. For example, not everything on the web is true. A student will learn something incorrect on the web and come to class that way. I don't simply shoot these mistakes down by telling them, 'That is incorrect,' but it is far more difficult to unlearn misinformation in a student's mind than it is to learn something in the first place… It's for that reason that misinformation is our biggest challenge. I usually direct students to read something beforehand before coming to class. They mainly browse the internet for this reason, but very often, what they find turns out to be misleading. It takes me time to set things straight, and I lose time and energy."*

According to the participants' comments, it is safe to say that teachers faced several challenges when implementing experiential learning in their classrooms. These challenges ranged from less time and insufficient resources to students' aspects such as student motivation and difficulty in reflective processes. Moreover, teachers highlighted the need for institutional support, well-prepared teaching materials, and professional development to allow them to integrate experiential methods into the curriculum effectively. These results are critical, as they document pragmatics of classroom situations and offer helpful recommendations for optimizing future utilization of experiential learning. It is therefore critical that educational policymakers, curriculum planners, and school managers take such remarks seriously in order to promote the effective, extended, and equitable application of experiential learning across different schooling environments.

Results, Discussion and Suggestions

This study discovers that teachers were positively inclined towards experiential learning and view it as a rich instructional approach for broadening students' understanding, committing knowledge to memory, and establishing the ability to apply concepts in practical settings. All participants repeated that experiential learning enables learners to break out of rote memorization and actively engage in the process of learning, which concurs with Kolb's (1984) argument that learning is made meaningful when it comes out from concrete experiences and reflective analysis. Similarly, Dewey (1938) argued that learning from experience enhances engagement and long-term recall, and that teaching needs to be informed by real, student-driven activities. Additionally, the views of the participants reflect the sociocultural nature of learning as postulated by Vygotsky (1978), who emphasized the pivotal role of social participation and interaction in the construction of knowledge.

Despite these encouraging perspectives, several challenges emerged that affect the consistent implementation of experiential learning. Teachers reported that the approach demands significant flexibility and adaptability in lesson planning, particularly to parallel with student needs, classroom dynamics, and subject relevance. This supports Moon's (2004) argument that experiential learning requires careful design, sensitivity to learner differences, and contextual awareness. Participants also stated that experiential learning cannot succeed in isolation; rather, it must be supported by adequate resources, time, and institutional commitment. Motivation issues among students, lack of prerequisite knowledge, and inconsistencies in engagement were frequently mentioned obstacles, emphasizing the importance of fostering supportive learning environments and ensuring learners are prepared for active participation.

Lacking and inaccessible learning materials was another critical problem that emerged through the participants. Educators highlighted the need for structured materials—such as interactive activities, online materials, and subject-based experiential learning guides—dedicated towards reducing the planning load and making the method more feasible in real classroom settings. These findings are similar to the studies of Hmelo-Silver (2004), who advances a shortage of resources as the primary limitation to the effectiveness of experiential learning models. Furthermore, disinformation online was introduced as a growing challenge, where teachers reported learners' uncritical acceptance of information provided online. This confirms Kirschner and van Merriënboer's (2013) conclusions, which prioritize equipping students with digital competence and critical thinking to manage information-rich settings in a responsible manner.

Participants also emphasized the importance of professional development opportunities to support teachers in effectively implementing experiential learning. Training workshops, reflective practice seminars, and peer collaboration were seen as essential mechanisms for building teachers' capacity to design and deliver experiential activities across different subject areas. Schools must prioritize such initiatives to empower educators with the tools and confidence needed to adapt experiential methods to varied instructional contexts. Moreover, limitations in infrastructure—such as the absence of laboratories or designated experiential learning spaces—were reported as significant barriers, particularly in science and technology-oriented disciplines. In agreement with Yardley, Teunissen, and Dornan (2012), the study underscores that experiential learning thrives in environments that support experimentation, exploration, and hands-on practice.

Time constraints were also mentioned as a major obstacle. Teachers are often under pressure to deliver curriculum content within tight time limits, with little room left for the iterative process that experiential learning demands. Dewey (1938) emphasized the importance of giving students time to explore, reflect, and revise—principles difficult to maintain in tightly scheduled school timetables. To ease this issue, institutions can incorporate flexible scheduling practices, blended learning components, and project-based assignments that extend beyond the classroom so that students can become more engaged in experiential processes without compromising curriculum coverage.

In conclusion, while experiential learning is widely acknowledged by educators as a transformative approach that promotes meaningful, active, and authentic learning experiences, its successful implementation depends on various structural, pedagogical, and contextual factors. This study contributes to the body of knowledge by illustrating teachers' direct experiences, perceptions, and difficulties regarding experiential learning in a real-world school setting. The findings indicate a strong need for increased institutional support, targeted teacher training, improved resource availability, and curricular flexibility. Addressing these factors is vital not only for integrating experiential learning more effectively but also for equipping learners with the skills, mindset, and adaptability required in the 21st century.

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Determination of Experiential Learning Styles of Health Vocational School Students

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Abstract

Aim: This study was conducted to determine the experiential learning styles of students enrolled in a vocational school of health services.

Method: This descriptive study was conducted between 1 January 2025 and 1 March 2025 with 180 students. The Descriptive Characteristics Form and Kolb Learning Style Inventory-III were used for data collection. The research data were analysed using descriptive statistics and the chi-square method.

Results: The mean age of the students participating in the study was 20.69±3.28 (17-53) years. It was determined that 73.3% of the students were female, 97.2% were single, and 62.8% were studying in the First Aid and Emergency Care Program. It was determined that 37.7% of participants had a Converging learning style, 18.3% had an Assimilating learning style, 26.2% had a Diverging learning style, and 17.8% had an Accommodating learning style. No statistically significant difference was found between the participants' descriptive characteristics and their learning styles ($p>0.05$).

Conclusion and Recommendation: According to students' Kolb learning styles, the convergent dimension is more prominent than the others. It is recommended that studies be conducted with these student groups by implementing educational programmes suitable for experiential learning styles and that the study be carried out with different populations and larger sample groups.

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Introduction

Scientific studies reveal that learning styles are one of the most important components of the teaching-learning process and an effective factor in explaining learners' attitudes, expectations and success (Evin Gencel, 2016). In order to increase the quality of teaching and to raise students' academic success to higher levels, it is emphasized that teaching should be carried out according to students' learning styles (Çaycı and Ünal, 2007).

The Experiential Learning Model defines the process in which students move from memorizing the lesson to critical thinking, discuss and include data to help them make decisions (Evin, Gencel, Erdoğan, 2021; Kolb and Kolb, 2021). In Kolb's learning model, individuals' learning styles are in the form of a cycle, and the learning style inventory determines where individuals are in this cycle (Kolb and Kolb, 2005). Kolb's learning theory provides educators with a framework when designing courses. It has been reported that this has a positive contribution to learning outcomes (Abdulwahed and Nagy, 2013).

It has been reported that students who take the course with the experiential model exhibit significantly more positive attitudes than students who take the course with the traditional model (Pugsley and Clayton, 2003, Garcia et al., 2020). Today, students in Generation Y and Z prefer technology-based learning and more interaction in the classroom, as opposed to traditional teaching (Tan, Yue, and Fu, 2017). Positive results are reported in developing behavior and attitude, especially in applied departments such as health, where behavior and attitude development are important.

This research aims to determine the experiential learning styles of students at the School of Health Professions.

Research Questions

- What are the participants' experiential learning styles?

- Is there a meaningful relationship between the participants' introductory characteristics and their experiential learning levels?

Methodology

Type of Research

This research was conducted descriptively to determine the learning styles of Health Vocational School students.

Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of students enrolled in the 1st and 2nd years of the Health Vocational School at Başkent University between 1 January 2025 and 1 March 2025. No sample selection was made for the study, and it was completed with 180 undergraduate students who were present at the school at the time of the study and agreed to participate.

Data Collection Tools

The Descriptive Characteristics Form and Kolb Learning Style Inventory-III were used for data collection. The Descriptive Characteristics Form included nine questions aimed at determining participants' sociodemographic and descriptive characteristics (age, gender, department, class, longest place of residence, mother and father's education level, etc.).

Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory-III; Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory was developed by Kolb in 1971, and its latest version, Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory-III, was introduced in 1999. The Turkish reliability and validity of Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory-III was established by Gencel (2006). The scale consists of 12 items and assesses four styles: 'Diverging', 'Converging', "Absorbing" and 'Accommodating'. The four options in each item are scored from 1 to 4. The lowest score obtained from the scale is 12, and the highest score is 48. After this scoring, composite scores are calculated. Composite scores are obtained as Abstract Conceptualisation (A.C.)-Concrete Experience (C.E.) and Active Experience (A.E.)-Reflective Observation (R.O.), and the scores obtained as a result of this process range from -36 to +36. Positive scores obtained with A.C-C.E indicate abstract learning, while negative scores indicate concrete learning; similarly, scores obtained with A.E-R.O indicate active or reflective learning (Evin Gencel, 2007). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the learning style dimensions of the inventory has been reported to range between 0.71 and 0.80.

Implementation of the Study

For the implementation of the study, data collection forms prepared using Google Forms were sent to participants and completed. The time taken by participants to complete the data collection tools ranged from approximately 5 to 10 minutes.

Data Analysis and Confidentiality

IBM SPSS 26 (IBM Corp., Armonk, New York, USA) statistical package software was used to evaluate the data. Frequency (f), number, percentage, mean, and standard deviation analyses were used for descriptive statistics. The relationship between the participants' descriptive characteristics and Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory was tested using chi-square analysis. Statistical significance was accepted at $p<0.05$.

Ethical Dimension of the Research

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Board of University (decision dated 27 December 2024 and numbered E-94123790-605-421541) in order to conduct the research. Participants' consent was obtained by ticking the informed consent form included in the survey link. Throughout the research process, adherence to the principles of the Helsinki Declaration was ensured.

Results

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants

Features		n	%
Gender	Female	132	73.3
	Male	48	267
Marital Status	Single	175	97.2
	Married	5	2.8
Department/Program	First and Emergency Aid	113	62.8
	Other	67	37.2
Class	1st grade	89	49.4
	2nd grade	91	50.6
Mother Education	High school and below	158	87.8
	University and above	22	12.2
Father Education	High school and below	153	85.0
	University and above	27	15.0
Longest lived in	Rural	7	3.9
	Centre	173	96.1
Sources of Access to Information	Internet	165	91.7
	Other	15	8.3
Age ($\bar{X}$±SD)		20.69±3.28 (17-53)	

$\bar{X}$=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, n=Number, %=Percentage

The average age of the students participating in the study was 20.69±3.28 (17-53) years. It was determined that 73.3% of the students were female, 97.2% were single, and 62.8% were studying in the First Aid and Emergency Care Programme. Furthermore, 50.6% of the students are in their second year, and 87.8% of the mothers and 85.0% of the fathers have an educational level of high school or below. In addition, 96.1% of the students live in the city centre and 91.6% access information via the internet (Table 1).

Table 2. Distribution of participants according to kolb's learning style

Features	n	%
Converging	68	37.7
Assimilating	33	18.3
Diverging	47	26.2
Accomodating	32	17.8

n=Number, %=Percentage

The distribution of participants according to Kolb's Learning Style is shown in Table 2. It was determined that 37.7% of participants had a Converging learning style, 18.3% had an Assimilating learning style, 26.2% had a Diverging learning style, and 17.8% had an Accommodating learning style.

Table 3. Evaluation of participants' descriptive characteristics according to Kolb's learning styles

Gender		**Converging**	**Assimilating**	**Diverging**	**Accomodating**	**Total**	**Test/p value**
Female	n	50	29	29	24	132	
	%	37.8	22.0	22.0	18.2	100	
Male	n	18	4	18	8	48	X^2=6.868, p=0.076
	%	37.5	8.3	37.5	16.7	100	
Marital Status							
Single	n	67	33	45	30	175	
	%	38.3	18.9	25.7	17.1	100	X^2=2.902, p=0.317
Married	n	1	0	2	2	5	
	%	20.0	0	40.0	40.0	100	
Department/Program							
First and Emergency Aid	n	45	18	29	21	113	
	%	39.8	15.9	25.7	18.6	100	
Other	n	23	15	18	11	67	X^2=1.428, p=0.699
	%	34.4	22.3	26.5	16.4	100	
Class							
1st grade	n	39	13	21	16	89	
	%	43.8	14.7	23.6	17.9	100	
2nd grade	n	29	20	26	16	91	X^2=3.466, p=0.325
	%	31.9	21.9	28.6	17.6	100	
Mother Education							
High school and below	n	58	30	44	26	158	
	%	36.7	19.0	27.9	16.4	100	X^2=3.395, p=0.317
University and above	n	10	3	3	6	22	
	%	45.5	13.6	13.6	27.3	100	
Father Education							
High school and below	n	53	29	40	31	153	
	%	34.6	19.0	26.1	20.3	100	X^2=6.488, p=0.085
University and above	n	15	4	7	1	27	
	%	55.5	14.8	26.0	3.7	100	

Longest lived in							
Rural	n	2	2	1	2	7	X^2=1.809, p=0.645
	%	28.6	28.6	14.2	28.6	100	
Centre	n	66	31	46	30	173	
	%	38.1	18.0	26.6	17.3	100	
Sources of Access to Information							
Internet	n	61	31	43	30	165	X^2=0.635, p=0.929
	%	37.0	18.7	26.1	18.2	100	
Other	n	7	2	4	2	15	
	%	46.4	13.4	26.8	13.4	100	

n=Number, %=Percentage, X^2=Chi-square, $p<0.05$ significant

There was no statistically significant difference between the demographic characteristics of the associate degree program students who participated in the study and their learning styles (converging, assimilating, diverging , accomodating) ($p>0.05$) (Table 3).

Discussion

This study investigated the level of experiential learning styles among students enrolled in a two-year Health Services Vocational School and the factors influencing them. The study showed that students had a higher Converging learning style compared to others. A review of the literature revealed that in a study by Ibrahimoglu and colleagues (2013) examining the relationship between personality traits and learning styles in 421 undergraduate students, students were found to have the highest Converging learning style (Ibrahimoglu et al., 2013). In contrast to our research findings, another study conducted by Kiliç (2022) on History Department students in Türkiye determined that nearly half of them possessed assimilating learning styles (Kiliç, 2022). Our research findings show similarities and differences with other studies in the literature. It is thought that the source of the difference may stem from the characteristics of the population of the sample participating in the research.

The study found no significant relationship between students' descriptive characteristics and learning styles (convergent, assimilative, divergent, accommodative). In a literature review, Çelenk and Lehimler (2019) investigated the learning styles of individuals in music education and, similar to our research findings, found no relationship between learning styles and gender, age, department, or class level (Çelenk and Lehimler, 2019). In a study conducted by Hastürk and Özdemir (2021) on pre-school teacher candidates, it was determined that learning styles did not differ according to class level and gender (Hastürk and Özdemir, 2021). Coşkun and Demirtaş's (2015) study determined that middle school students' learning styles in mathematics did not show a significant difference based on gender (Coşkun and Demirtaş, 2015). Another study conducted by Alemdağ and colleagues (2016) also concluded that learning styles did not vary according to class status (Alemdağ et al., 2016). Our research findings are similar to the results of other studies in the literature.

Conclusion

According to students' Kolb learning styles, the convergent dimension is more prominent than the others. This suggests that students with this style tend to learn more effectively through a combination of thinking and doing. It is recommended that studies be conducted with these student groups, implementing training programs suitable for the experiential learning style and that the study be carried out with different populations and larger sample groups

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The Role of Foreign Language Education in Achieving Aspirations as Part of the Experiential Learning Model

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Abstract

According to Kolb's Experiential Learning Model (1984), learning is a continuous process driven by social interactions that contribute to knowledge construction. Given their interactive nature, language courses rely on student engagement to enhance linguistic proficiency. In the context of foreign language learning, the primary objective of these courses is to develop students' language skills through meaningful and interactive experiences. Moreover, proficiency in a foreign language can expand students' opportunities to achieve their aspirations while also fostering new ones. In this regard, learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) plays a crucial role by providing a structured learning environment where aspirations can be gradually cultivated through both individual and collaborative activities. Furthermore, learning experiences in EFL classes may align with students' existing aspirations, thereby motivating them to set higher goals for the future. These activities also contribute significantly to broadening students' perspectives by exposing them to the aspirations and cultural viewpoints of others.

Keywords: Experiential Learning Model, English as a Foreign Language, Aspiration.

Introduction

Aspirations play a central role in students' personal and academic development, shaping their motivations, goals, and behaviors throughout the learning process. In the context of foreign language education, fostering students' aspirations is particularly important, as language learning not only requires sustained effort and practice but also aligns with broader personal and professional ambitions. Despite widespread recognition of their significance, the concept of aspirations has been defined and interpreted in diverse ways across sociological, psychological, and educational research. Scholars have conceptualized aspirations both as abstract values and long-term hopes, and as motivational forces shaped by social roles and personal reflections, offering valuable insights into how students establish and pursue their goals. Furthermore, experiences are an integral part of life and play a critical role in learning. Consequently, it is essential for both learners and educators to consider students' aspirations in language learning by incorporating personal experiences. In this context, examining the potential of integrating Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Model into English language instruction is particularly valuable for cultivating and shaping students' aspirations. By linking experiential learning cycles with purposeful language learning activities, it becomes possible to demonstrate how students

can actively engage in the learning process, reflect on their progress, and transform their ideals into concrete, achievable outcomes.

1. Definitions of the Concept of Aspiration Across Disciplines

Although there is a widely held belief in the positive effects of having aspirations among young individuals, the precise meaning of the term aspiration has not been clearly or consistently defined by researchers. Before examining the role of English as a foreign language in fostering students' aspirations within the framework of Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Model, it is first necessary to explore the core definitions of the concept as developed across different disciplines related to education. In one of the most recent studies, Nabil Khattab (2015) defines aspirations from a sociological perspective as the abstract values held by individuals, independent of the social realities that surround them. According to this definition, aspirations encompass long-term hopes and dreams that are formed without considering the feasibility of achieving them under real-life conditions. Consequently, they often appear as distant or nearly unattainable goals—such as becoming a world-renowned doctor or a member of a famous band. From this perspective, the idea of having a strong and long-term goal aligns closely with the definition of aspiration in the Oxford English Dictionary (2025), which describes it as "to have a fixed desire, longing, or ambition for something currently beyond one's reach; to seek to attain, to pant, long."

Since the concepts of desire and ambition are closely related to motivation, it is also essential to consider the psychological definitions of aspiration. John William Atkinson (1964) was among the first to discuss individual aspirations as part of the human drive for achievement. According to Atkinson, individuals shape their behaviors based on their tendencies either to achieve success or to avoid failure. Consequently, aspirations function as a motivational force that encourages people to modify their behaviors in pursuit of their desired goals. In contrast, Daniel Katz and Robert Louis Kahn (1966) approached the issue from a more social perspective, emphasizing the influence of societal factors on behavioral change. They argued that, as members of society, individuals are guided by social expectations, which lead them to adopt specific roles accompanied by corresponding responsibilities and tasks. For example, a man may shape his behavior according to his parents' expectations as a son, his employer's expectations as an employee, his wife's expectations as a husband, and his children's expectations as a father. These multiple, and sometimes conflicting, social roles and expectations can create psychological pressure, causing the individual to either lose sight of his personal aspirations or reshape them to make them more realistic and attainable.

More recent psychological researchers, Tim Kasser and Richard M. Ryan (1993), defined aspirations as being more closely related to individuals' beliefs and goals. From this perspective, individuals assess their initial aspirations and either prioritize or eliminate some of them based on their personal significance and perceived attainability. The most crucial element in this process of selection is identifying the aspirations that satisfy the individual's basic psychological needs, often by setting aside purely personal or material desires. At the beginning of the 21st century, the prominent sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (2004, 2006) also emphasized the importance of social relations in the formation and shaping of individual desires. According to Bourdieu

(2006), societies assign specific roles to each gender, roles that are further reinforced through social systems and materials, including educational resources such as textbooks. For instance, visuals that depict domestic work as the responsibility of women encourage girls to internalize these gendered roles, which in turn influences and potentially reshapes their future aspirations.

In Polish pedagogy, Andrzej Janowski (1977) conducted comparative research on the aspirations of Polish and British youth in the 1970s. His studies revealed that young people tend to shape their aspirations according to gender roles and family expectations, which evolve over time as they mature. As a result, young individuals often pursue education paths aligned with the expectations of those around them and with prevailing social realities—factors that can limit their aspirations. Even when they possess high ideals, real-life conditions may compel them to lower these ideals, making them more attainable. In contrast, during the 1980s, Tadeusz Lewowicki (1987) defined aspirations in a more idealistic manner, describing them as "ambitions, plans, intentions, and desires for something, and pursuits to achieve something." Through this definition, Lewowicki (1987) highlights the long-term and deeply personal nature of aspirations, which exist independently of the external realities emphasized by Janowski (1977). From this idealistic perspective, students form self-conceived visions of their future that shape their choices, decisions, and actions throughout their educational journey.

In summary, the concept of aspirations is multifaceted, encompassing sociological, psychological, and educational dimensions. While some definitions emphasize long-term hopes and abstract values independent of real-world constraints, others highlight the motivational and social factors that shape individuals' goals and behaviors. Research across different contexts demonstrates that aspirations are influenced by personal beliefs, societal expectations, gender roles, and family pressures, yet they also retain an idealistic and deeply personal dimension. Understanding these diverse perspectives provides a crucial foundation for exploring how aspirations can be nurtured and developed in educational settings, particularly in the context of foreign language learning, where aligning personal goals with practical learning experiences like in Kolb's (1984) model can significantly enhance both motivation and achievement.

2. David Kolb's Experiential Learning Model

David Allen Kolb and Ron Fry (1975) first developed the Experiential Learning Model (ELM) in the 1970s, originally designed for management education. The model conceptualizes learning as a cyclical or spiral process consisting of four interconnected stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In essence, individuals begin by engaging in direct experiences with the target content or skills, followed by observing and reflecting on these experiences—both their own and those of others. Through this process of reflection, learners form abstract concepts or generalizations, which they then test through further experience to evaluate and refine their understanding. These stages are continuously repeated, allowing learners to build deeper knowledge and adapt their learning to different contexts.

In 1984, David Kolb further developed his theory by introducing a model that focused on individual learning preferences. In his Learning Style Inventory (LSI), Kolb conceptualized

learning not as a fixed outcome but as a continuous process grounded in experience. According to this model, individuals actively engage with their environment through experimentation and observation, which are then followed by reflection. The formation of abstract concepts is closely linked to concrete experiences, enabling learners to construct both personal and social knowledge. Kolb's theory identifies four distinct learning styles, each derived from the four-stage learning cycle of his Experiential Learning Model. The Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984) represents a continuum of four active stages in the learning process: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

1. Concrete Experience (Feeling): Learners engage directly in experiences that allow them to understand the world and others by being attentive and responsive to people's feelings and emotions.

2. Reflective Observation (Watching): Learners carefully observe situations and events before forming judgments, aiming to interpret experiences from multiple perspectives and uncover diverse meanings.

3. Abstract Conceptualization (Thinking): Following observation, learners analyze their experiences and construct logical concepts or theoretical frameworks to explain what they have observed.

4. Active Experimentation (Doing): Learners apply the concepts and theories they have developed to real situations, actively influencing people and events to test and refine their understanding.

Although these four stages appear to follow a sequential order, learners do not necessarily begin from the first step each time. Depending on their needs and the surrounding circumstances, individuals should remain actively engaged in the learning process through thinking, feeling, watching, and doing. For example, during experiential learning, learners observe what is happening around them while also engaging their emotions. To construct their own conceptual understandings, they must observe carefully and think critically, which is then followed by applying their ideas in practice—often through a process of experimentation that evokes additional emotional responses. More concretely, learners might participate in group activities (concrete experience) where they act as active users of knowledge in imaginative or innovative scenarios, reflecting the diverging learning style. At the same time, they observe their peers (reflective observation) to make inferences about underlying rules, models, or theories (abstract conceptualization) through assimilating. These newly formed ideas are then applied in practice (active experimentation) as learners consider potential real-life problems and devise possible solutions. This ongoing process of trial and error enables learners to adapt and discover improved solutions for changing circumstances—a process known as discovery learning.

3.Proposal to Integrate Kolb's Experiential Learning Model into Language Teaching to Cultivate Aspirations

In the background of the language learning process, students may have various motivations or reasons for developing their language skills, which make them aspirational learners. Similar to

goal setting, aspirational individuals may hold either short-term aspirations (e.g., improving language proficiency in high school to achieve higher grades) or long-term aspirations (e.g., obtaining employment in an international sector where communication in a foreign language is essential). This suggests that students envision an ideal point they wish to reach—either during or after their formal education—through achieving greater proficiency in a foreign language. One of the most common short-term aspirations among students is attaining high grades in their language courses. However, language teachers can play a key role in broadening these aspirations by introducing alternative and more meaningful goals. For instance, teachers might inform students about international exchange programs or study-abroad opportunities, which can motivate them to become more actively engaged in language learning activities. Such guidance encourages students to set smaller, achievable learning objectives within their foreign language courses (e.g., studying more intensively to improve speaking skills), ultimately supporting their pursuit of higher, long-term goals.

In the process of creating and shaping aspirations, following the steps of Kolb's Experiential Learning Model in foreign language classes can be highly beneficial. In this approach, abstract conceptualization often serves as the initial step, as language lessons typically begin with instructions and guidance. The teacher can explain the objectives of the activity and encourage students to reflect on the requirements of the assigned tasks (converging), setting the stage for active engagement. At this point, learners need to focus on both the content and the procedural steps of the task, which aligns with the model's active experimentation stage. For example, a teacher might assign students to participate in a role-play simulating a cultural integration meeting. Each student could be assigned a specific role, such as a representative of a different nation, requiring them to research, plan, and prepare materials in both written and spoken forms. This process of thinking, researching, and preparing encourages students to actively use the foreign language, applying new vocabulary and grammar structures in meaningful contexts. Additionally, anticipating potential questions from other participants promotes further brainstorming and critical thinking. During this stage, the teacher observes students' preparation and provides guidance, such as suggesting key points or headings to include in their presentations, ensuring that students remain focused and engaged throughout the learning process.

As part of the accommodating process, students are encouraged to engage in the activity through their emotions and personal experiences. At this stage, when completing the assigned tasks, learners are expected to pay close attention to their language use to ensure that their presentations are comprehensible to others. Students actively apply the target language by giving oral presentations, sharing written materials, or responding to audience questions. During the activity, they may also experience a range of emotions—such as stress, anxiety, or relief—which reflects the concrete experience stage of Kolb's model and simulates the natural atmosphere of using a foreign language in real-life contexts. The primary objectives of this stage include selecting appropriate vocabulary, employing alternative grammatical structures, and effectively conveying the intended message to listeners. Teachers evaluate these outcomes, providing feedback that

supports both linguistic development and reflective learning, helping students refine their skills and build confidence in using the foreign language.

In this multi-group activity, students also observe the performances of their peers, providing an opportunity to notice different approaches to language use. To actively engage the audience, teachers can assign students to take notes on their classmates' presentations and prepare focused questions (reflective observation). Such purpose-driven tasks increase curiosity about others' performances while simultaneously enhancing listening and comprehension skills in the target language. Moreover, while observing peers, students may become aware of emotions, such as pride or embarrassment, that they themselves have not personally experienced (diverging). At this stage, having students complete a self-reflection form can be particularly valuable, as it encourages them to identify both their linguistic and personal strengths, as well as areas requiring improvement. As a result, students may generate a list of short-term goals or aspirations related to language proficiency and personal development, supporting their progress toward greater competence. Additionally, the questions and feedback provided by observing peers can help presenters categorize and prioritize these aspirations (assimilating), reinforcing both self-awareness and targeted growth in the foreign language learning process.

After completing the initial presentation session, teachers can assign a follow-up task that encourages students to incorporate both their self-reflections and the feedback from their peers. In this new activity, learners are prompted to think more critically and pay closer attention to areas that require improvement. For instance, as a follow-up to the cultural integration meeting role-play, students might participate in a role-play simulating an international parliament. While each student continues to represent the same country, the task now requires a more professional and formal approach. This involves conducting additional research to deepen their understanding of the country and expanding their vocabulary to accurately convey this information. Due to the formal nature of the activity, students must carefully select appropriate grammatical structures and vocabulary when presenting and asking questions. During this performance stage, learners have the opportunity to compare their current skills with previous performances, allowing them to observe tangible improvement in their language proficiency. This experience can inspire students to set higher aspirations for their future language learning and broaden their perception of the potential uses of the target language, encouraging them to think beyond the limits they had previously considered.

In language teaching, it is essential to create a learning environment that motivates students to engage actively in the learning process. By implementing sample activities based on Kolb's Experiential Learning Model, teachers can encourage learners to become not only more productive but also more communicative through group work and collaborative tasks. The process of giving and receiving feedback further provides valuable opportunities for using the target foreign language. Additionally, exposure to peers' language use allows students to notice and adopt new grammar structures and vocabulary, contributing to their overall linguistic development. Regarding aspirations, exploring their future goals and reflecting on the details of these ambitions provides an important starting point for shaping them. Sharing ideas with peers

allows students to refine or adjust their original aspirations while maintaining their core intentions. Moreover, they may identify new aspirations they had not previously considered. Discussing the specifics of their goals, comparing them with others, and recognizing commonalities can make aspirations feel more realistic and attainable. By maintaining a focus on future ideals and consistently working toward them, students can develop greater ambition, organization, and productivity, which not only supports their language learning but also contributes to their broader personal and character development.

Before integrating Kolb's Experiential Learning Model into English courses, teachers first need to understand its potential applications and benefits. Instruction should begin with smaller, manageable tasks and gradually progress to more complex activities, allowing students to follow the steps of the model in a structured way. Additionally, teachers should guide learners in making careful observations and reflections, providing clear guidelines or evaluative questions to ensure that these observations are purposeful and task-oriented. In terms of aspirations, it is also essential for teachers to anticipate potential challenges students may face during the process of generating ideas. To address these challenges, teachers can suggest original aspirational examples, highlight possible obstacles, and propose practical strategies to overcome them. These aspirational ideas may be closely related to the language skills students aim to develop, helping them envision concrete ways to apply the target language in future contexts. For instance, students could create a list of essential skills needed to achieve success in both personal and professional life, fostering a clearer understanding of the steps required to reach their goals.

All in all, integrating Kolb's Experiential Learning Model into English language courses provides a structured yet flexible framework that actively engages students in the learning process while fostering both linguistic and personal development. By designing tasks that progress from simple to complex and guiding students through observation, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation, teachers create opportunities for meaningful practice, collaborative learning, and feedback exchange. These activities not only improve language proficiency but also encourage students to explore, refine, and expand their aspirations. Through reflection and interaction with peers, learners gain insight into their strengths, identify areas for improvement, and envision concrete ways to apply the target language in real-life contexts. This process helps students develop short-term goals, such as improving specific language skills, as well as long-term aspirations related to professional and personal success. By linking experiential learning with goal-setting, teachers can cultivate motivation, ambition, and self-awareness, supporting students in becoming more organized, confident, and proactive learners. Ultimately, Kolb's model (1984) provides a practical and dynamic approach for nurturing both competence and aspiration, allowing students to translate their ideals into achievable outcomes.

Conclusion

In today's globalized world, where English serves as a primary means of communication, it is essential for both learners and educators to take students' aspirations into account in the English learning process by incorporating their personal experiences. In this context, Kolb's Experiential Learning Model (1984) offers a valuable framework for fostering more active and reflective

learners, aligning well with the demands of the contemporary world. By introducing the model, students can become aware of its stages, reflect on their objectives, and consciously follow the steps to shape their learning activities effectively. Furthermore, focusing on smaller language components at the outset can help build students' self-confidence, motivating them to achieve full competence in English over time. Such a course design not only enhances language development but also contributes to students' overall personality growth, allowing their future aspirations to evolve in harmony with their foreign language skills.

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An Educational Game Study Based on Experiential Learning to Raise Sustainable Environmental Awareness

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Abstract

This study, which was carried out to support students' environmental awareness within the framework of experiential learning theory in education within the scope of increasing environmental problems today, was shaped around the game "Warriors of Environment", which was developed by researchers using digital tools and turned into a concrete educational game. The game was carried out with the voluntary participation of 22 secondary school students studying at a middle school in Türkiye with the approval of their parents. In this educational game, which consists of two main parts, the Maze Section and the Problem Section, the students took part in teams consisting two participants and answered the open-ended questions in the semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers after the researcers obtained expert opinion at the end of the application. In addition, observation notes were taken by the researchers during the process and the data of the study were provided. Following the specified data collection methods, the findings were analyzed with thematic analysis method and coded by the researchers after reaching a consensus. As a result of the analysis, the data were examined under six main themes: environmental awareness and consciousness, behavioral transformation, social learning, experiential and emotional learning, critical thinking and problem solving, instructional evaluation and development suggestions. As a result of the findings, it was determined that this educational game prepared on the basis of an experiential approach produced positive results in creating sustainable environmental awareness.

Keywords: Sustainability, environmental awareness, experiential learning

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Introduction

In our age, with the effect of the developing and changing environment, issues such as climatic problems, biodiversity loss, and environmental problems have become more significant and have become critical issues to be transferred to future generations through education in a solution-oriented manner (Suarlin, 2023). When viewed from the perspective of the future of the world, it is important to provide children with environmental awareness at an early age through active learning methods in order to ensure that they become responsible citizens (Nag et al., 2024). Because traditional education and teaching methods have limitations in terms of ensuring that children develop awareness and empathy for environmental problems, and for this reason, it has become necessary to make the targets adopted by the target audience using experience-based approaches. (Toshtemirova, 2024). In this context, the experiential learning theory, which considers that students learn by living and experiencing, as well as absorbing information only as passive recipients, comes to the fore (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). According to the experiential learning theory, learning takes place in a four-stage cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 2014). This cycle ensures that individuals learn by constructing and internalizing information through individual experiences during the knowledge acquisition process (Gordon, 2022). In this process, the learner is in the position of the subject and the learner experiences and applies learning actively in the process by directly experiencing the situation, reflecting and internalizing it (Kolb, 2014).

On the other hand, educational games are accepted as a learning method that allows the creation of an entertaining learning environment that is recommended by many experts and loved by learners (Li, 2021). When evaluated from this perspective, the integration of experiential learning and educational games allows both the idea of learning by doing and living and the possibility of learning to take place through interaction in a specific context (Kiili, de Freitas, Arnab & Lainema, 2012). In this direction, educational games based on experiential learning theory should be designed by considering the principles of balance between in-game elements, interaction in terms of emotional, conceptual and learning, and incentive mechanisms (Kiili et al., 2012).

In this context, the educational game that is the focus of this study is designed to raise students' awareness of environmental problems and to adopt sustainable environmental awareness. In addition, it is a model that includes two interconnected stages based on teamwork, interaction-oriented, and experiential learning. In addition, it supports multifaceted skills such as taking responsibility, decision-making, and problem-solving. In terms of game structure, it allows students to develop sensitivity towards the environment by providing an interactive environment where they encounter environmental problems and produce solutions.

In summary, this study reveals the role of the experiential learning-based game model in the development of environmental awareness, ecological literacy, and positive attitudes towards the environment.

Methodology

This study was conducted based on the case study design, one of the qualitative research methods. A case study is a method of examining one or more events, social groups or interrelated systems (Büyüköztürk, 2017). In order to determine the effects of the game on the students, observations during the application process and their opinions were analyzed as a result of their learning reactions.

Sample Group

The participant group of the study consists of 22 secondary school students studying in a public school in Türkiye. The age range of the participants is between 11 and 13. The participation of the students is based on volunteering and parental consent was obtained with a parental consent form before the application. The study process was managed by considering ethical approaches and confidentiality principles were meticulously observed. The participants took part in the study process by forming teams of 2. The teams were randomly determined by the researchers.

Data Collection Tools

Data were obtained through two different methods during the study process. During the application, the students' interactions, collaborations and decision-making processes were observed and noted by the researchers. Secondly, a semi-structured interview form was prepared in line with expert opinions and open-ended questions were asked to the participants after the application process. This interview form included open-ended questions aimed at identifying the participants' experiences regarding the process, the effects of the game on their behavior towards the environment, their perceptions about collaborative work and the points of the game that attracted their attention most during the process.

Application Process

The educational game used in the application process was designed digitally by the researchers using the Canva program. In the next step, the visuals prepared and the materials in the game were used to prepare concrete visuals of the game using a laminating device.

The game consists of two main sections: the maze section and the problem section. One student took part in each section and carried out the application in teams of two. The game starts with the student in the maze section. The maze section consists of 7 question points. As the student in the maze section progresses through the maze, he/she encounters questions aimed at increasing environmental awareness and opens a question card when they reach each question point. The answer options on the question cards include directive visuals such as “turn right, turn left”, etc. Students proceed through the maze by taking into account the directives of the option they choose. If they give an incorrect answer, the path to the next question in the maze is extended. When the student in the maze answers the relevant question and reaches the next question card section, his/her teammates in the problem section join the game. There are 7 different environmental problems in the problem section and as the student in the maze answers the questions, the student in the problem section progresses. In this section, the students identify the

elements that cause the environmental problem in the pictures they encounter and remove them from the visual. Then, they open the solution envelope containing the materials related to the solution of the environmental problem and place them in the correct sections in the pictures. For example, in the water pollution problem, they remove the materials that cause water pollution and place the "seabin" a vehicle that cleans the garbage in the sea and rivers by using vaccum system. After the student in the problem section solves the problem, the student in the maze section answers his/her question and progresses. The game continues in this way cyclically until the student in the maze section reaches the exit point and the student in the problem section solves all the environmental problems. At the end of the game, the team that completes the game in the shortest time wins the game. The visual and material explanations regarding the maze section during the game process are given in Figure 1, the visual and material explanations regarding the problem section are given in Figure 2 and the visual and material explanations regarding the application process are given in Figure 3.

Figure 1: *The Visual And Material Explanations Regarding The Maze Section*

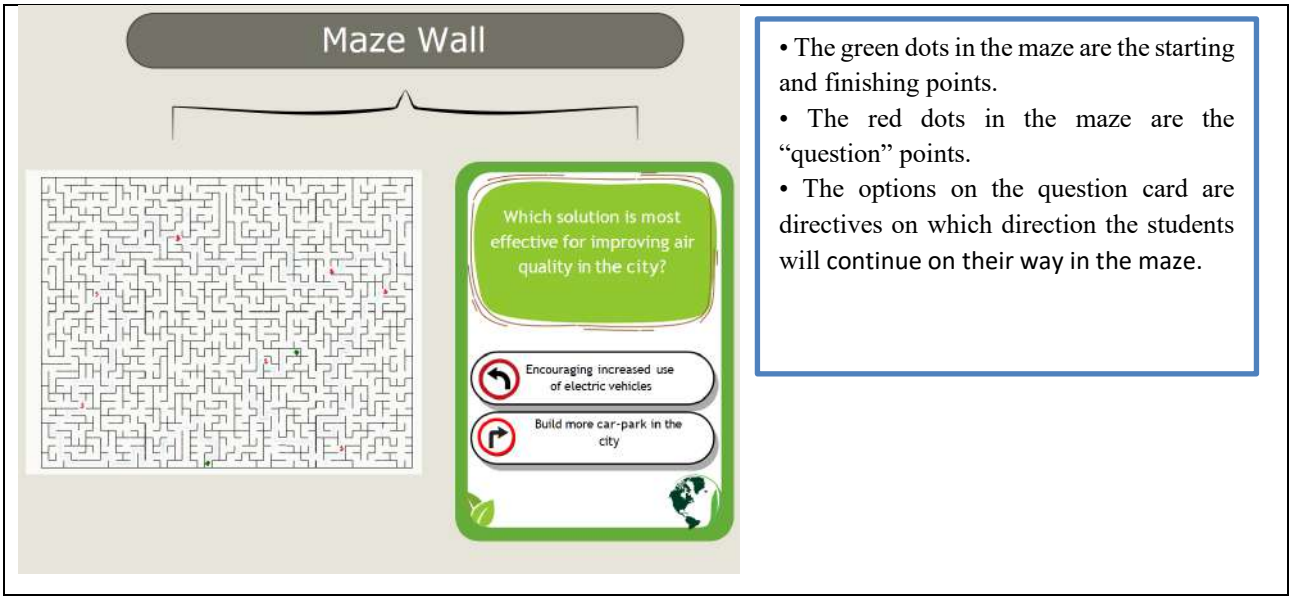


Figure 2: *The Visual And Material Explanations Regarding The Problem Section*

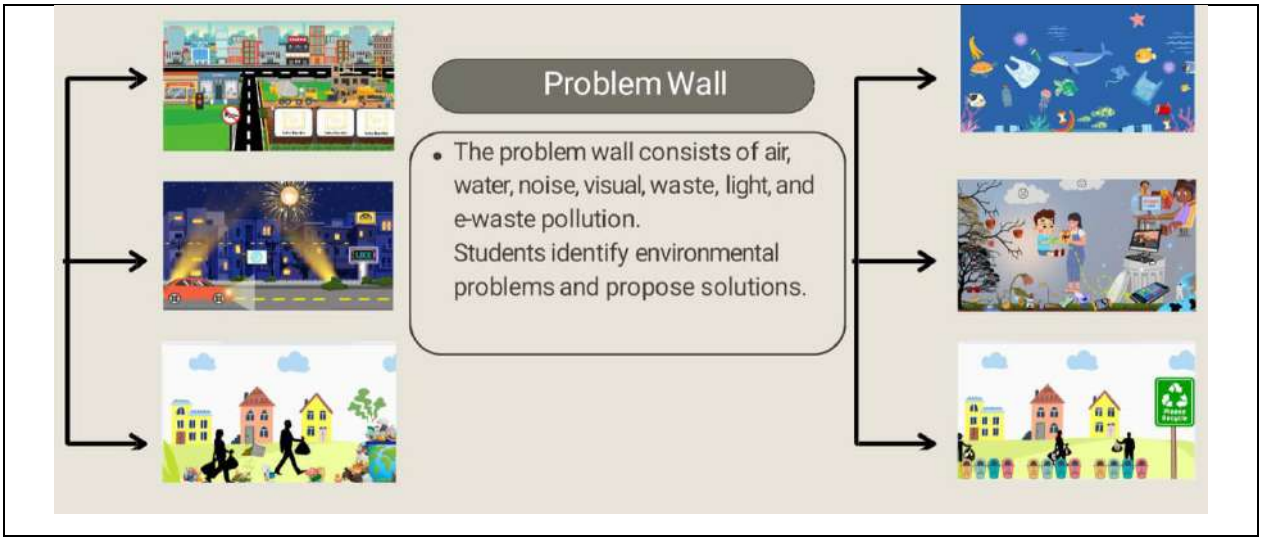
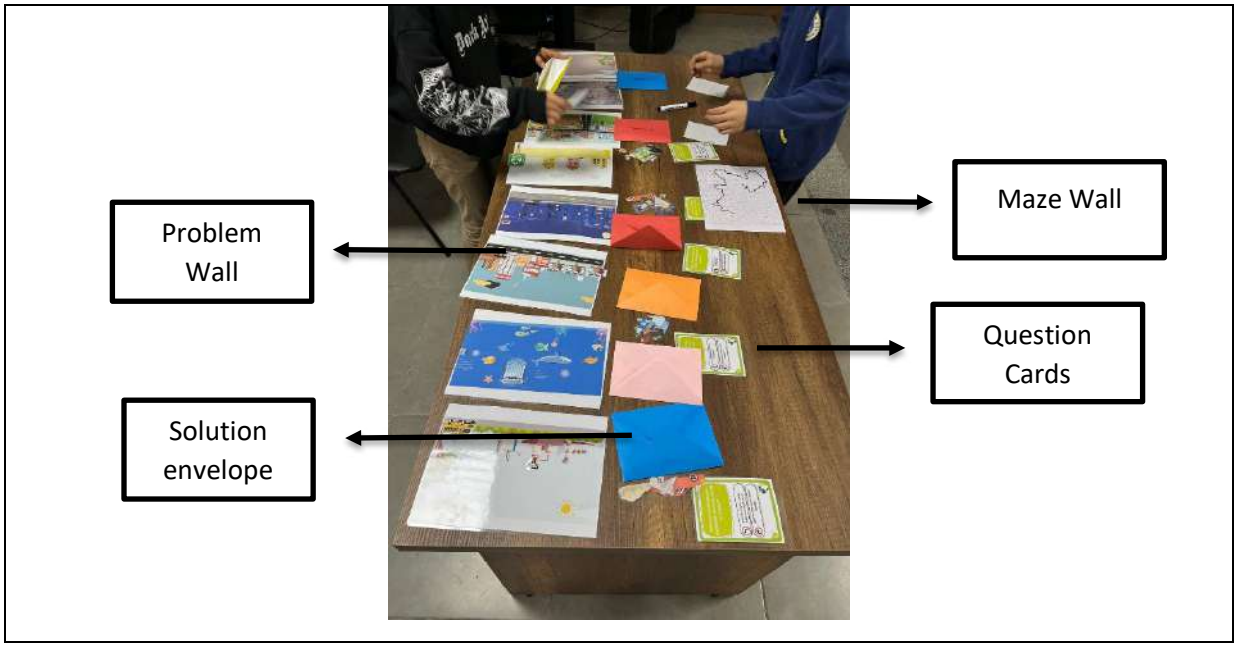


Figure 3: *The Visual And Material Explanations Regarding The Application Process*



Data Analysis

Thematic analysis method was used in the data analysis process of this study. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analysis method that allows the detection and analysis of common meaning patterns that recur in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At this point, the data obtained from observation notes and semi-structured interview form were examined under the themes of environmental awareness, behavioral transformation, social learning, experiential and emotional learning, critical thinking and problem solving, instructional evaluation and development. In the

process of coding the themes of the data, consultation was carried out among the researchers and a consensus was achieved.

Findings

Our study titled “Warriors of Environment” was implemented to increase environmental awareness of secondary school students and encourage sustainable behaviors. The findings obtained as a result of the interviews were examined with thematic analysis method and thematic codes and quotations regarding student opinions are given in Table 1.

Table 1: *Thematic Codes and Quotations Regarding Student Opinions*

Student Code	Thematic Code	Summary of Opinion	Quote
S1	Behavioral change	After the game, a desire to make changes in daily behaviors towards the environment has developed.	"I now separate the garbage and throw it away. I don't mix plastic and paper."
S2	Environmental awareness	It is seen that the game increases awareness about environmental problems.	"Thanks to the game, I understood the causes of air pollution better."
S3	Water conservation awareness	Learning has been provided specifically about water saving.	"I realized what leaving the tap running can cause through the game."
S4	Critical thinking	The ability to analyze problems and establish cause-effect relationships has developed.	"Before finding a solution to a problem, we thought about the causes of that problem together."
S5	Collaboration and teamwork	The effect of working in a group on learning has become prominent.	"If I had worked alone, I wouldn't have been able to solve it so easily. I learned a lot with my friends."
S6	Learning with fun	The game was perceived fun and interesting by the students.	"We both had fun and learned. It wasn't like a boring lesson at all."
S7	Sustainability	A change in attitude towards recycling and energy saving has been observed.	"I'm more careful to turn off the lights at home now.
S8	Activity critique	There were students who did not find the game effective enough.	"I think the game was a little boring. Real things like picking up the garbage would have been more useful."

S9	Learning with long-term success	Students emphasized the memorability of the game.	"I forget when I read it in a book, but I still remember the things in the game."
S10	Technological suggestion	Digitalization suggestions have been made.	"If we played on a tablet, we could play with more people."
S11	Emotional interaction	An emotional connection has been established with environmental problems.	"I was sad when I saw the forests being cut down. It's really bad."
S12	Modeling / observation	Students were affected by their friends' behavior.	"I saw that my friend threw the water bottle in the recycling bin. I started doing that too."

When Table 1 is analyzed, firstly, the findings obtained show that the game significantly increases the students' sensitivity to environmental problems. While the participants defined air pollution as the most important environmental problem, they also drew attention to other environmental problems such as water and light pollution. The problem-solving activities in the game enabled the students to define environmental problems and develop practical solutions for these problems. The teamwork experience developed a perception that cooperation is more effective than individual efforts.

Participants stated that they perceived the game both fun and educational; they stated that the learning process was remarkable and memorable. In addition, the students expressed their desire to learn more about environmental sustainability. Many students stated that they were willing to adopt environmentally sensitive habits in their daily lives; they expressed their intention to turn to behaviors such as using recycling bins, saving electricity, and preferring public transportation. These behavioral tendencies show that the game not only raises awareness, but also contributes to the development of environmentally sensitive attitudes and habits.

However, different opinions were also observed among some students. For example, while some participants did not perceive the game educational enough, others stated that they perceived alternative activities such as poster preparation or environmental cleaning more effective. Suggestions for improving the game included adding more questions, playing it in a physical environment, and increasing the visual elements.

The implementation process of the game, in line with the basic principles of experiential learning, allowed students to internalize environmental concepts not only at a cognitive level, but also at an emotional and behavioral level. Participants observed, experienced, and solved environmental problems, and thought about how they could transfer the information they acquired to their daily lives. At the end of this process, many students made conscious decisions to exhibit more responsible behaviors towards the environment and showed behavioral change, which is one of the basic expected outcomes of experiential learning.

On the other hand, the findings obtained as a result of the interviews were classified and summarized under six general dimensions: environmental awareness, behavioral change, social learning, emotional experience, critical thinking, and instructional evaluation and development, and the related data are given in Table 2.

Table 2 : *Summarized Themes, Sub-Themes, and Participant Codes*

Themes	**Sub-Themes**	**Explanations**	**Participant Codes**
1. Environmental Awareness and Consciousness	Air-water-light pollution awareness, sensitivity	The game helped students understand environmental issues more clearly.	S2, S3, S11
2. Behavioral Transformation	Recycling, energy saving, public transportation preference	Participants intended to increase their environmentally friendly individual behaviors.	S1, S7, S12
3. Social Learning	Teamwork, learning through observation	Students learned by being affected by the interaction within the group and the behavior of their friends.	S5, S12
4. Experiential and Emotional Learning	Learning through games, emotional reactions	The game made it possible to experience environmental themes emotionally.	S6, S9, S11
5. Critical Thinking and Problem Solving	Cause-effect relationship, alternative solution development	Students participated in the processes of analyzing environmental problems and producing solutions.	S4
6. Instructional Evaluation and Development Suggestions	Alternative activity suggestion, digitalization demand	Some students turned to different learning methods or suggested technological developments.	S8, S10

According to Table 2, the findings obtained in this study show that the "Environmental Warriors Game" is effective in increasing the environmental awareness of middle school students and strengthening their motivation for sustainable behaviors. The student opinions in Table 1 reveal that the students have a comprehensive learning experience in cognitive, emotional and behavioral areas.

It was observed that the students' awareness of environmental problems increased at the end of the game process and that they developed a desire to exhibit environmentally sensitive behaviors in their daily lives. It was determined that they gained sensitivity especially to issues such as air pollution, water waste and light pollution; and they turned to behavioral changes such as

recycling, energy saving and public transportation use. This situation reveals that the students not only acquired knowledge but also tended to transform what they learned into concrete behaviors.

It was observed that social learning processes were supported. The students reinforced their learning processes by being influenced by their teamwork experiences and the behaviors of their friends. The statements that working in a group is more effective compared to individual efforts emphasize the contribution of social interaction to learning.

It was observed that the students also developed their problem-solving and critical thinking skills during the study process. Participants analyzed environmental problems, established cause-effect relationships, and developed alternative solution suggestions. This situation shows that the game is not only a tool for transferring information, but also provides a learning environment that supports higher-level thinking skills.

The majority of participants stated that they found the game fun, interesting, and educational; this was evaluated as an element that increased the permanence of learning. It was stated that students wanted to learn more about environmental issues after the game process and were willing to increase their responsibilities towards the environment.

However, some students also criticized the educational adequacy of the game. The desire to turn to alternative activities (such as preparing posters, cleaning the environment, etc.) and suggestions that it could be played with wider participation in digital environments show that students developed a critical perspective towards the learning process.

According to the thematic analysis findings summarized in Table 2, it was determined that student opinions were gathered around six main themes. While the theme of "Environmental Awareness and Consciousness" reveals that students have a deeper understanding of environmental problems, the theme of "Behavioral Transformation" shows that the acquired knowledge is reflected in behaviors. The themes of "Social Learning" and "Experiential-Emotional Learning" point to the importance of students' learning together and emotional bonding processes. The theme of "Critical Thinking and Problem Solving" reveals that students develop a solution-oriented approach to environmental problems; while the theme of "Instructional Evaluation and Development Suggestions" emphasizes active evaluation and development tendencies towards the learning process.

In general, the findings show that game-based experiential learning methods have positive effects on students in the context of environmental education and provide permanent learning and behavioral change. In addition, development suggestions based on student feedback reveal the importance of designing learning environments in a flexible and participatory structure.

Results, Discussion and Suggestions

The “Warriors of Environment Game” based workshop conducted in this study was an effective tool in increasing the environmental literacy levels of secondary school students and internalizing sustainability concepts. The findings reveal that game-based learning has significant potential in terms of creating environmental awareness. The majority of the participating students stated that

they found the game both entertaining and educational; they emphasized that establishing an emotional bond during the learning process supports conceptual learning.

The active participation of the students in problem-solving processes in cooperation also strengthened the social learning dimension of the game. Thanks to the teamwork experience, the students understood that environmental problems should be addressed not only with individual efforts but also with a sense of social responsibility. The participants adopted environmentally friendly behaviors through observation and interaction, and it was observed that social learning was effective in this process.

The experiential learning-based structure of the game allowed the students to not only learn environmental problems at a theoretical level, but also to understand these problems by associating them with real life. Concepts such as air, water and light pollution in particular were concretized through problem scenarios in the game; students deepened their learning processes by showing emotional reactions to environmental problems.

However, it was observed that some students criticized the educational nature of the game and stated that they found alternative activities such as poster preparation and environmental cleaning more effective. This situation points to the diversity of individual learning styles and shows that game-based applications should be designed flexibly to meet different learning needs.

At the end of the study, many students stated that they were willing to exhibit environmentally sensitive behaviors in their daily lives. Behaviors such as using recycling bins, saving energy and preferring public transportation reveal that students show changes not only at the cognitive but also at the behavioral level.

In the light of these findings, various development suggestions are presented to make the game a more effective and inclusive learning tool. First of all, the content of the game can be enriched with more complex problem elements and advanced questions, supporting the participants' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. In order to increase visual and tactile interaction, materials prepared using three-dimensional printers can attract students' attention and deepen the learning experience. In addition, more permanent learning environments can be created by using concrete materials such as physical puzzles instead of limited surfaces such as lamination.

Adapting the game to a digital platform will both enable remote access and reach a wider student audience. In addition, the development of augmented reality (AR) or virtual reality (VR) supported versions can contribute to the creation of multidimensional and innovative learning environments in the field of environmental education.

Experiential learning is a student-centered learning approach that allows individuals to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes through direct experiences. In this approach, students go beyond the transfer of abstract information and learn more deeply and permanently through active participation, problem solving, collaboration, and reflection processes. According to experiential learning theory, individuals analyze their lived experiences, derive meaning from this experience, and transform this meaning into knowledge by transferring it to future situations. In this context, the “Environmental Warriors Game” allowed students to not only learn environmental issues at

a theoretical level, but also to confront and solve these problems through tasks, scenarios, and role-playing in the game. Students developed creative solutions to the environmental problems they encountered during the game, and developed their skills in taking responsibility, making decisions, and collaborating. This process paved the way for them to internalize their attitudes toward environmental issues and develop behaviors as environmentally sensitive individuals. Therefore, this game, designed in line with experiential learning principles, prevented environmental education from remaining abstract, transformed knowledge into experience, and significantly increased students' environmental awareness.

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An Analysis of Publications Using Kolb's Experiential Learning Model in Türkiye

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to review the studies conducted in Türkiye based on David Kolb's Experiential Learning Model and to systematically analyze the data obtained.

Method: This study is a systematic review. National Thesis Center, Pubmed, Google Scholar, OVID databases were scanned without time limitation and studies between 2002-2025 were reached. The keywords "Experiential Learning Model, Experiential Learning Model, David Kolb," were used in the study. The original studies conducted in Türkiye with Kolb's experiential learning model, the full text of which could be accessed, were included in the study. PRISMA principles were taken into consideration in reporting the study.

As a result of the review, 422 studies conducted in Türkiye between 2002 and 2025 were found and 214 studies were included in the systematic review. It was found that there were 111 studies in Google Scholar, 99 thesis studies in YÖKTEZ, and 4 studies in Pubmed. It was found that the studies conducted with Kolb's Experiential Learning Model were mostly in the field of social sciences. It was determined that the studies included in the study were frequently conducted with primary and secondary school students, teachers and university students.

It was determined that David Kolb's Experiential Learning Model was mostly used in the field of educational sciences. It is thought that the use of Kolb's Experiential Learning Model in the field of nursing, where theoretical and practical education is

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carried out together, may be important, so planning studies in this field will make positive contributions to nursing.

Keywords: David Kolb, Experiential Learning Model, Experiential Learning

Introduction

David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory was described as a holistic model by Kolb (1984) in 1971. Kolb refers to Wiliam James, John Dewey, Carl Gustav Jung, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Carl Rogers, Paulo Freire as the founders of the theory (Kolb & Kolb, 2017).

Kolb's learning style consists of the process of attributing meaning to an individual's concrete experiences and different learning styles that play an active role in these processes (Deveci, 2011; Orak, 2015). According to Kolb, there is no single form that meets an individual's learning style. Each individual's learning style is composed of the components of the basic learning styles of separating, assimilating, modifying and accommodating. There are different versions of Kolb's inventory developed to determine learning style.

When the logic of the theory is examined, the idea that the learning process is an experience-dependent process and that individuals learn in different ways comes to the fore (Kolb, 2000).

Experiential learning, which consists of four stages and not only known learning processes, includes the processes of transforming concrete experiences into abstract concepts, using these concepts in new applications and cognitively adapting to life with human learning. In this process, it defines two independent but mutually supportive dimensions called grasping experience and transforming experience (Kolb, 2015).

Many cultural, developmental, emotional and cognitive aspects of the individual are unique to the individual. Making the learning process efficient can only be achieved by focusing on individual differences in the learning process, this concept is referred to as learning styles (Kolb, 1981; Güven & Kürüm, 2006).

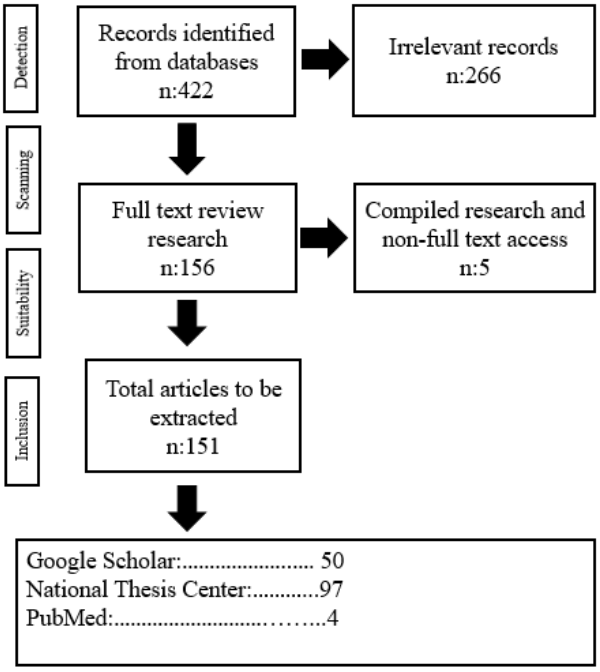
Methodology

It is important to examine the scattered studies by categorizing them under groups in order to identify deficiencies and shed light on future studies. In Türkiye, Aşkın (2006) and Orak (2015), compiled the studies on learning style and provided an overview of the literature and made suggestions to overcome the deficiencies in the literature. Systematic reviews benefit the field in terms of identifying gaps in the literature and determining the process of study. Bringing the studies together can provide an overview for those who will work on learning style, and these studies are a guide as they provide information about the research on the subject in Türkiye. Gathering the learning style studies under the same roof and providing an overview provides new information for situations such as examining other variables that affect learning style or have a relationship with learning style. Systematic reviews are the systematic and unbiased screening of original studies published in that field in accordance with specified criteria, evaluation of the validity of the studies found, and synthesizing and combining them in order to find an answer to

the research question prepared on a specific subject (Aşkın 2006; Orak 2015; Akalını & Şahin 2019).

The study population of the research consists of accessible English and Turkish researches published on David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory in the electronic environment. This study is important in terms of being a guiding study for those interested in reaching the analysis of domestic and foreign resources published on David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory in electronic media. This study involved searching the National Thesis Center, PubMed, Google Scholar, and OVID databases without time limitations. A total of 422 studies published between 2002 and 2025 were identified, and 151 studies were included in the systematic review. The "Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses statement- PRISMA", a valid and reliable guide for systematic reviews, was used to summarize the studies (www.prisma-statement.org). (Figure 1)

Table 1. Diagram for the selection of studies included in the research - PRISMA Flow Chart.



Findings

In this section, the results of the analysis and interpretations of the data obtained by using the documentary review method based on the purpose of the study are presented. The publications were analyzed in terms of the number of publications by years, type of publications, sample sizes used in the studies, areas studied with experiential learning style, research design, sample type, publication language, dominant learning styles identified, the institution represented, and the version of the inventory used.

The number of studies conducted in Türkiye between 2010 and 2020 (63.6%) was found to be high. When the types of the studies were examined, 51.7% of the studies in Türkiye in which the experiential learning inventory was used consisted of master's theses, 10.6% doctoral dissertations, and 35.8% articles. When the sample sizes used in the studies were examined, it was seen that 46.4% of the studies had a sample size between 101-500 groups and 20.5% had a sample size between 51-100 groups. 87.4% of the studies using experiential learning style were conducted in the field of education and training. It was seen that quantitative research design was most commonly (73.5%) preferred in the studies. It was determined that 58.3% of the samples of the studies were university students and 37.7% were primary and high school students. It was also determined that a significant portion of the university students were prospective teachers. The majority of the studies (90.7%) were in Turkish. In most of the studies (74.9%), a relationship was found between learning styles and the variables used. In the studies determining learning styles, it was found that the most commonly identified dominant learning style was the divergent learning style (22.2%).(Table 2).

Table 2. Results of data analysis

Characteristics	***n:151***	***%***
Number of publications by year		
Before 2005	3	2,0
Between 2006-2010	30	19,9
Between 2011-2015	45	29,8
Between 2016-2020	51	33,8
After 2021	22	14,6
Publication type		
Article	54	35,8
Master's thesis	78	51,7
Doctoral thesis	16	10,6
Qualification and specialization	3	2,0
Sample sizes used in studies		
50 and below	25	16,6
Between 51-100	31	20,5
Between 101-500	70	46,4
Between 501-1000	16	10,6
1001 and above	9	6,0
Areas studied with experiential learning style		
Education and training	132	87,4
Health	9	6,0
Architecture	4	2,6
Economy	2	1,3
Business	1	0,7

Mathematics	1	0,7
Music	1	0,7
Sports	1	0,7
Research design		
Quantitative	111	73,5
Qualitative	20	13,5
Mixed design	20	13,5
Sample type		
University student	88	58,3
Primary and high school student	57	37,7
Teacher	4	2,6
Book	1	7
Manager	1	7
Language of publication		
Turkish	137	90,7
English	14	9,3
Relationship between learning styles and the variables used		
Significant difference found	131	74,8
No significant difference with variable	34	22,5
No inference	4	2,6
Identified dominant learning styles*	n:54	%
Converger	12	22,2
Converger and Diverger	2	3,7
Converger and Assimilator	9	16,7
Converger and Accommodator	1	1,9
Diverger	9	16,7
Diverger and Accommodator	2	3,7
Assimilator	9	16,7
Assimilator and Diverger	3	5,6
Assimilator and Accommodator	2	3,7
Accommodator	5	9,3

** Only from studies indicating dominant learning style.*

Results, Discussion and Suggestions

This study specifically shows that experiential learning styles are widely used in thesis studies. It has been observed that the highest number of studies on academic achievement and learning styles in Türkiye are in the field of higher education. The research has revealed that the belief

that learning styles and academic achievement are equally important at every stage of education and training is widespread. As a result of the researches, it has been revealed that the view that learning styles and academic achievement issues are of equal importance at every stage of educational life is widespread. The experiential learning model can be used more widely in applied health fields, especially in fields such as nursing in our country.

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Urban Literacy from Experiential Learning Perspective: Reconstructing the Right to the City

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Abstract

Urban spaces are living spaces where individuals' daily life practices take place and shape their experiences of spatial and social realities through interactions. However, these interactions often keep individuals in a passive position in the flow of urban life, creating distances between individuals due to the inequalities created by the fast-paced urban environment. This study addresses the role of experiential learning in the aware and active transformation of urban individuals who, by nature, are in a continuous cycle of experience despite the routine flow of daily life. It is argued that urban life, as an infinite space of experience, serves as a pivotal instrument for transforming experience into emotion and knowledge, thereby addressing the issue of passive urban participation. The study is founded on three distinct theoretical underpinnings. Firstly, Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy offers a theoretical framework for understanding individuals' critical awareness of their environment. Secondly, Henri Lefebvre's concept of the right to the city underscores the imperative for reclaiming urban spaces as a collective right. Integrating these two theories, Kolb's experiential learning approach emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge through experience, reflection, conceptualization, and active experimentation to address both awareness and rights-based approaches to urban spaces. Consequently, it is regarded as a significant instrument for analyzing urban literacy. The objective of this study is to assess the transformative capacity of experiential learning in fostering urban literacy. Specifically, the study seeks to examine how individuals' daily interactions with the city contribute to their understanding of spatial inequalities and their propensity to claim the right to the city.

Keywords: experiential learning, right to the city, spatial inequalities, urban literacy, urban sociology

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1. Introduction

Compared to the early and mid phases of modern urbanization, the contemporary period has witnessed an extraordinary acceleration of this process. Urbanization transforms urban spaces not only as infrastructures and buildings but also—often on a large scale—culturally, socially, economically, politically, and ecologically, constructing the urban environment as a complex learning setting. Grounded in the idea that the city functions as a domain of lifelong experience, this study aims to situate individuals not merely as users of urban space but as subjects who interpret this experience as a learning process, thereby drawing them into an active and critical literacy framework—urban literacy. Urban literacy refers to the diverse and context-dependent literacy practices that occur within urban settings—understood not merely as reading and writing skills, but as socially and culturally embedded ways of using texts, meanings, and communication in the lived experiences of city dwellers (Rogers, 2001; Street, 2001; Kell, 2001).

This study links urban literacy to understanding the city's multi-identity, multicultural, and multidimensional nature, while also emphasizing awareness of inequalities and the empowerment of active civic participation. Accordingly, it proposes experiential practices that enable city dwellers to observe, analyse and transform urban space as a site of concrete experience. These practices range from the use of public spaces to participation in local city council meetings. At the same time, this framework positions urban experience as a source of learning and fosters awareness related to the notion of the right to the city, articulated by Lefebvre.

2. From Critical Pedagogy to Experiential Urban Learning

Our study is grounded in three theoretical foundations. The first is Paulo Freire's conception of critical pedagogy, which is considered one of the central pillars of urban literacy. Freire emphasizes that education should move away from passive structures and rote-based understandings, defining it instead as a dialogical, awareness-raising, and transformative process (Freire, 2000). When applied to the urban context, this approach enables individuals living in the city to critically reflect on the seemingly random experiences that occur within the flow of everyday life and to transform these experiences into collective, solidarity-based action. Such an experiential process reinforces urban literacy through the stages of observation, conceptualization, and action.

The second theoretical pillar of our study is Henri Lefebvre's notion of the right to the city. The city is a social space collectively produced and continually reshaped through its use value; therefore, the right to speak and decide over the city is a collective right belonging to all urban dwellers (Lefebvre, 1968; Harvey, 2008; Marcuse, 2009). In the literature, the concept of the right to the city is used to refer to access to collective urban consumption and opportunities, the non-restriction of access to public spaces, the assurance of representation, and participation in decision-making processes. When access to public urban spaces is restricted or unequally distributed, the outcome is not only social inequality but also a weakening of democracy and representation (Soja, 2010). In this respect, urban literacy becomes one of the essential foundations for building a strong advocacy framework for the rights foregrounded by the concept of the right to the city.

The third theoretical root is David Kolb's (1984) experiential learning approach. This approach operates through a cycle consisting of four core stages—concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation—and is directly and inherently related to the act of learning itself. In the context of urban literacy, this cycle provides a functional roadmap for transforming the lived experience of urban life into knowledge and action. The nature of experiential learning thus nourishes both the right-to-the-city perspective and critical pedagogy, creating a consistent and robust foundation for urban literacy while enabling the everyday experiences of city dwellers to be transformed into active practice rather than disappearing within the accelerated flow of the city.

Taken together, these three theoretical frameworks position urban literacy as a form of experiential learning that supports both awareness and rights-based participation, and as an expression of participatory citizenship.

Viewed as a site of lifelong learning, the city—and urban literacy as the recognition of this learning—aligns closely with the principles of "learning to do" and "learning to live together" articulated in UNESCO's *Learning: The Treasure Within* (1996). These principles associate multicultural coexistence, conflict resolution, the common good, and inclusivity in urban space with educational processes. According to Kolb (1984), learning is a cyclical process in which individuals transform the experiences they acquire through their lives into knowledge and action. This perspective suggests that the city itself can be understood as a dynamic setting that enables learning through lived experiences. This holistic approach demonstrates that urban life can be conceptualized not only through its physical components but also as a learning space embedded in social and cultural dimensions. Jarvis (2009) similarly emphasizes that learning occurs continuously not only in formal environments but also through individuals' everyday lives, communities, and interactions within the city. This understanding makes it possible to interpret urban literacy as a societal reflection of lifelong learning. Dynamics such as spatial justice, housing, representation, and cultural diversity observed in the city can be transformed into learning objectives. In this regard, activities such as mapping spatial inequalities at the neighbourhood scale, analysing the structural context of housing policies, observing forms of representation in public space, and designing practices aimed at preserving cultural heritage and collective memory can be viewed as experiential learning practices that directly contribute to urban literacy.

Furthermore, contemporary urban studies, which highlight that the city is more than an administrative settlement or a population-based designation, show that urban literacy gains meaning not only through knowing but also through participating and transforming. Accordingly, contemporary urban theory conceptualizes the individual not only as someone who interprets the city but also as an actor who becomes an agent of urban change. However, this relationship is reciprocal: while cities shape individuals, individuals—though not immediately in the short term—shape the city over time through collective urban memory. Hölscher and Frantzeskaki (2021), in their examination of urban transformations, emphasize that "experiential, collaborative, and place-based governance approaches strengthen the capacity of local communities to participate in and steer urban transformation processes by integrating situated

local knowledge." Such studies demonstrate that urban learning is not confined to individuals' immediate environments but also generates forms of collective action. Thus, accessibility to participation becomes one of the strongest levers of urban transformation, and this accessibility plays a decisive role in enabling transformative change within the city (Schuur et al., 2024). In this sense, the quality and inclusiveness of participation become key indicators of the transformative power of urban literacy.

The intertwined processes of knowing, participating, and transforming provide meaning both to urban literacy and to the individuals who enact it. Edward Soja's (2010) spatial justice framework argues that inequalities are produced through space and that justice must therefore be achieved through spatial interventions. Through the activities developed in this study (e.g., storytelling, urban walks, accessibility assessments, photo-citizenship), everyday learning practices are examined as mechanisms that intersect directly with spatial justice, thereby offering ways to generate both data and legitimate grounds for right-to-the-city claims.

Our study discusses a conceptual model designed to strengthen urban literacy in the Turkish context, structured along the theoretical lines outlined above. This model consists of four core components, each aligned with the four stages of Kolb's experiential learning cycle, and proposes a pedagogical roadmap grounded in concrete activities. Activities such as neighbourhood walks, accessibility audits in public space, participatory design workshops, and urban policy simulations encompass both everyday life and long-term urban processes. The model consists of four main components: (i) knowledge acquisition (understanding how the city operates), (ii) awareness (recognizing equality and structural relations), (iii) critical thinking (questioning policies and dynamics), and (iv) participation (engaging in decision-making and collective production). Each component corresponds to the stages of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active engagement, both holistically and distinctly. The alignment of these stages is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Comparative model of Kolb and Delors

Eventually, this study positions urban literacy at the intersection of experiential learning and the right-to-the-city framework. By bringing together the transformative dimension of Freirean critical pedagogy, Lefebvre's conception of collective rights, and Kolb's experiential learning

cycle, the study instrumentalizes urban literacy as a means for cultivating a form of urban life in which individuals act deliberately rather than being carried along by the relentless flow of everyday routines. One of the central aims of this article is to develop a learning design capable of transforming the daily experiences of urban residents into knowledge and rights-based action, thereby supporting a city in which inhabitants can engage actively, consciously, and responsibly with their environment.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a conceptual and design-based qualitative approach. Rather than relying on field data or measurement instruments, the research process is structured around an interpretive synthesis of the literature on urban literacy, lifelong learning, and experiential learning. In order to map the dispersed literature across three conceptual axes and propose a practice-oriented conceptual model, a qualitative design was employed that combines an exploratory scoping review with a conceptual synthesis approach (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Tricco et al., 2018). The study aims to reconceptualize urban literacy as a form of experiential learning that connects individuals with the spatial, social, and cultural dimensions of the city. Consequently, conducting a scoping review emerged as one of the essential methodological needs of the study. Scoping reviews are particularly suitable for mapping the nature of evidence and identifying gaps in developing fields (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Within this framework, theoretical sources were systematically analyzed, and core principles that could guide the design of learning activities based on urban experience were identified. The study is situated at the intersection of theoretical exploration and practical design, aiming not to produce empirical findings but to develop an educational perspective.

3.2. Purpose and Significance of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to interpret the concept of urban literacy through the lens of experiential learning and highlight the potential of urban spaces as sites of lifelong learning. The research seeks to demonstrate how learning grounded in urban experience can enhance dimensions of awareness, participation, and transformative action. The significance of the study lies in extending the educational meaning of urban literacy beyond cognitive knowledge. By embedding learning within the experiential context of urban life, the study offers an alternative framework that integrates UNESCO's principles of learning to do and learning to live together (UNESCO, 1996).

3.3. Development Process of the Activities

The activities developed within the scope of this study were designed based on Kolb's experiential learning cycle. Kolb (1984) describes the experiential learning cycle as a process in which concrete experiences are transformed into abstract concepts, and these concepts are then used in acquiring new experiences. The cycle is constituted by linking concrete experience and abstract conceptualization to the dimension of grasping experience, and reflective observation and active experimentation to the dimension of transforming experience (Gencel, 2020). The design process focused on developing tasks that support exploration, reflection, and collaborative

meaning-making. Through interactive route-based activities, reflective observation tasks, and context-based problem-solving exercises, participants were encouraged to reinterpret the city as a dynamic learning environment. In addition, AI were utilized while designing the applications in this study.

4. The Multidimensional Framework of Urban Literacy

Urban literacy is approached as a multidimensional learning domain that enables individuals to understand the city not only at a cognitive level but also to comprehend its physical, social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental layers through experience, participation, and transformation.

4.1. Physical/Spatial Dimension

A settlement is fundamentally an administrative unit formed on a piece of land that promises to meet housing needs and related requirements in an organized and systematic manner. Therefore, the structure of the city is initially shaped upon a physical environment. In this context, this dimension encompasses the ability to read the urban fabric, construct maps and routes, use transportation systems effectively, and understand the distinction between public and private space. Tekeli (2011) notes that the readability of the city is strengthened by the spatial relationships individuals establish through their daily life practices. As the most suitable layer for producing concrete experience, this dimension directly activates the concrete experience–reflective observation stages of Kolb's cycle through walk-based observations and urban walking routes (Serbulo, 2022; Elwood, 2004).

4.2. Social Dimension

The city, as a place where its inhabitants are shaped and positioned in various segments, is an arena for class-based and spatial segregation, migration flows, the mobility of disadvantaged groups, and power struggles among different social groups. The social dimension focuses on all these dynamics. Erkip (2003) emphasizes that public space becomes a stage where socio-economic inequalities are rendered visible. In this framework, participatory methods such as photovoice and storytelling deepen critical awareness by making individuals' urban experiences visible (Wang & Burris, 1997; Serbulo, 2022).

4.3. Cultural Dimension

By its very nature, the city both produces its own culture and is continuously exposed to cultures that reshape it by responding to ongoing demands. In this sense, the city is inherently multicultural and a setting for intercultural learning. It constitutes a structure that is more than the sum of cultures and significantly more complex. This dimension focuses on interpreting urban identity, cultural heritage, and the multilayered meanings of representations. According to Geniş (2012), urban identity is reproduced not only through historical symbols but also through everyday life practices. Through the critical reading of representations, this dimension deepens the abstract conceptualization stage (Serbulo, 2022).

4.4. Economical Dimension

This dimension addresses themes such as the functioning of the urban economy, housing markets, dwelling, and the spatial distribution of labor. Spatial inequalities are direct outcomes of economic restructuring processes (Eraydın, 2006). The visibility of housing and accessibility issues supports the transition from abstract conceptualization to active experimentation in Kolb's cycle (Brown & Kyttä, 2014; Serbulo, 2022).

4.5. Political Dimension

Local governance, participation in decision-making processes, and learning the right to the city (right to the city) lie at the center of this dimension. Participatory governance processes thus establish the institutional ground for cultivating an awareness of the right to the city (Bal, 2019). City council simulations and urban policy discussions create direct opportunities for active experimentation (Harvey, 2008; Serbulo, 2022).

4.6. Environmental Dimension

Urban ecology, environmental justice, and climate adaptation themes address the relationship between nature and the city alongside underlying economic-political processes. Within the environmental dimension—one of the core components of urban literacy—environmental justice emphasizes the fair distribution of environmental resources and the societal costs of environmental problems across different segments of society (Güler & Turan, 2020). Accordingly, the environmental dimension is situated at the intersection of justice in the distribution of urban resources, sustainable development policies, and participatory decision-making processes. At the same time, this dimension is essential for the sustainability of the other dimensions of the city. In this regard, the development of environmental awareness, engagement in ecologically sensitive decision-making processes, and the assumption of responsibility as part of the urban ecosystem strengthen the holistic nature of urban literacy.

Ultimately, this multidimensional framework aims not only to enable individuals to recognize the city but also to learn through acts of participation and transformation. Kolb's (1984) four-stage cycle transforms urban experience into a pedagogy of urban literacy. Learning by doing and learning to live together are essential for fostering cooperation, participation, and mutual understanding across diverse communities (UNESCO, 1996). Such learning practices occupy a particularly critical place in urban environments where individuals exist in stratified social formations.

This approach encourages viewing urban literacy not merely as a cognitive competence but as a way of life that encompasses social solidarity and participatory citizenship. Urban transformation toward sustainability requires the integration of not only technological innovations but also processes of social learning and civic participation (Mahendra, Seto et al., 2019). In this sense, the central role of interaction in sustainable urban policies becomes a defining urban condition. Moreover, cities have increasingly become laboratories where social innovation and environmental governance intersect—sites of learning, experimentation, and co-production (Wolfram, Frantzeskaki et al., 2016). Thus, cities are conceptualized as living experiential environments. Urban literacy invites citizens to perceive, interpret, and act upon the city as a

shared collective text (Serbulo, 2022). The city emerges as an object to be read—one that strengthens the connection between learning and action.

This holistic approach transforms the experiences of individuals living in cities into knowledge, awareness, and action, positioning urban literacy as a pedagogical tool for both personal and collective transformation.

5. Experiential Learning Based Activities for Urban Literacy

This section presents eight original activity designs that integrate urban literacy with the principles of experiential learning. The activities were developed to enable individuals to transform their urban experiences into knowledge, awareness, and collective action. Each activity is structured in alignment with the four stages of Kolb's experiential learning cycle; concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active engagement. In this way, urban life becomes a learning process in which individuals not only observe the city but also actively reinterpret it.

These experiential learning–based designs reposition urban literacy from being merely a capacity to "know" the city toward forms of "participation" and "transformation." The processes of awareness and subjectivation emphasized in Freire's critical pedagogy, the principle of collective ownership embedded in Lefebvre's notion of the right to the city, and UNESCO's modules of learning to do and learning to live together constitute the theoretical foundations of these activities. Within this framework, each activity is constructed as a learning cycle that enables urban residents to progress through stages of awareness, empathy, participation, and action.

5.1. Urban Exploration Walks

Figure 2. Urban Exploration Walks Plan

This activity introduces the city to participants as a learning environment. Participants begin walking along a predetermined route, and the entire path functions as a space of concrete experience. Throughout the walk, the urban fabric, graffiti, signs, architecture, and social representations are interpreted through attention, sensory engagement, and direct observation.

During this process, participants take notes and photographs of buildings, public spaces, cultural structures, natural surroundings, and everyday mobilities along the route. The city reveals itself to participants as a continuously changing collective narrative shaped by everyone's contributions (Serbulo, 2022). This engagement enables individuals to learn the city through both physical experience (being in and moving through the city) and analytical reflection (interpreting the social and aesthetic meanings of their observations). Thus, in alignment with UNESCO's principle of learning by doing, the practice of reading the city becomes an active process. The facilitator concludes the activity by synthesizing common themes emerging from participants' experiences and highlighting how core urban literacy skills -observation, inquiry, and engagement- have been strengthened through the process.

5.2. Public Space Mapping & Accessibility Audit

Figure 3. Public Space Mapping & Accessibility Audit Plan

The public space mapping and accessibility assessment activity is a method of urban literacy that examines the inclusiveness and accessibility of urban spaces within the complex environment shaped by transportation infrastructures and service systems. This activity directs participants to visit public spaces -such as parks, bus stops, squares, and marketplaces- in order to understand and critically examine these environments firsthand. These visits include specific observation points, which are outlined in an implementation guide based on the Principles of Universal Design developed by Ronald Mace and his colleagues (Mace et al., 1991). The data collected within this activity can be analyzed through individual or group debrief sessions, and can also be visualized using digital mapping tools such as Google My Maps or ArcGIS. This process of observation and knowledge production draws upon the methodology of Participatory Geographic Information Systems (PGIS), which foregrounds active participant engagement and the co-production of local knowledge (Elwood, 2006). By evaluating not only the physical and environmental dimensions of the city but also its political aspects, this observation and mapping

activity allows participants to assess the extent to which Lefebvre's principle of the right to the city is realized within the urban environment, particularly in relation to spatial equality (Lefebvre, 1968).

5.3.Urban Storytelling: Voices of the City

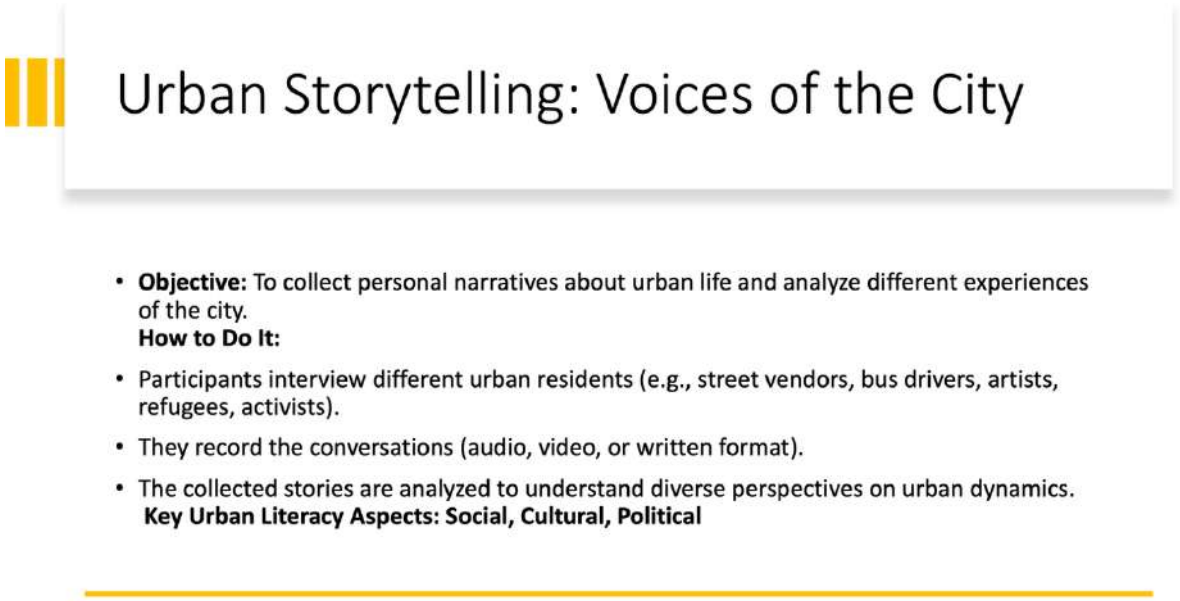

Figure 4. Urban Storytelling: Voices of the City Plan

This activity aims to reinterpret the social fabric of the city through the narratives of its residents. Participants conduct interviews with various urban inhabitants in designated areas of the city—from street vendors to local shopkeepers, from artists to people strolling or shopping, and from waste collectors to figurative public characters. They record these conversations in written, audio, or visual form using structured forms. Through the analysis of these stories, the multiple meanings of the city are mapped via its polyphonic social structure. The process encompasses all stages of the experiential learning cycle: concrete experience through interaction and interviews; reflective observation through consideration of the emotional and social meanings embedded in the narratives; abstract conceptualization by connecting emerging themes to broader urban dynamics; and finally, active experimentation by externalizing this awareness through sharing, policy suggestions, or creative production.

This activity positions the city not merely as a physical space but as a social realm continuously reconstructed through stories by bringing together the diverse experiences of its residents. In a similar vein, Amin and Thrift (2002) note that "cities are relational achievements, made through countless stories, practices, and encounters that weave the urban fabric" emphasizing that the city is a network woven through narratives, everyday interactions, and shared experiences. This perspective enables participants to conceptualize urban identity not as a singular construct but as a multilayered field of dialogue. The process of collecting, analyzing, and sharing narratives

deepens the social, cultural, and political dimensions of urban literacy while transforming individuals into active subjects who preserve and reproduce the city's living memory.

5.4. Photo Voice: The City Through My Eyes

Photo Voice: The City Through My Eyes

- **Objective:** To document and analyze urban inequalities, environmental issues, and cultural diversity through photography.
  How to Do It:
- Participants take photographs of elements that represent urban justice/injustice.
- They create a visual narrative or photo essay.
- Group discussions are held to reflect on the images and suggest possible solutions.

Key Urban Literacy Aspects: Social, Economic, Environmental

Figure 5. Photo Voice: The City Through My Eyes

The PhotoVoice activity is an urban literacy practice designed to direct participants' attention toward socio-economic and environmental inequalities or notable social conditions occurring in the city. Participants begin the activity with a concrete experience by photographing elements related to a selected theme within a defined urban area. The photographs collected are then transformed into a visual narrative. This stage enables participants to revisit and reflect upon their own experiences. Through group discussions and collaborative work, the process advances toward developing a conceptualization related to the selected theme. This phase may proceed individually or under the guidance of a facilitator or instructor.

During this activity, photography becomes more than the act of capturing an image; it becomes a tool through which participants reinterpret their urban experience. As Seydel and Huning (2022) note, "stories connect the knowledge of what happened with the understanding of why it happened and the sense of what it means to us." Through this narrative capacity, storytelling helps participants develop empathy, make sense of complex experiences, and—most importantly—inspire action (Ortiz, 2022). This visual narration strengthens urban consciousness and enables the collective questioning of environmental risks, social classes, and spatial conditions within the city, thereby enhancing the critical dimensions of urban literacy.

5.5.Participatory Urban Design Workshop

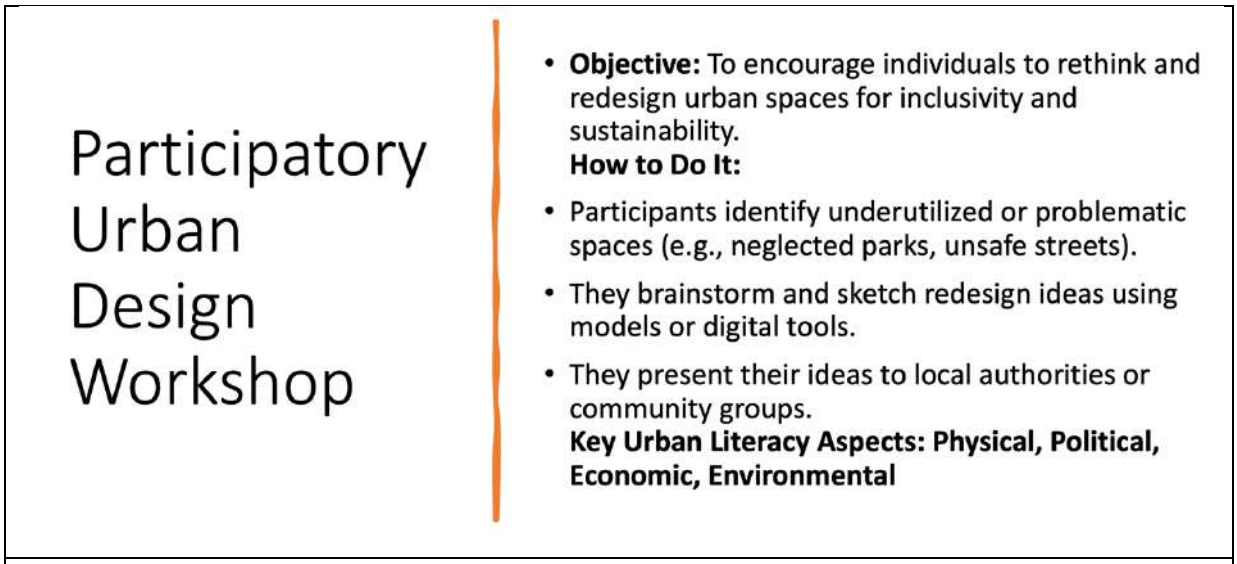

Figure 6. Participatory Urban Design Workshop

The Participatory Urban Design Workshop offers a holistic learning experience that encourages individuals to reshape the Physical, Political, Economic, and Environmental dimensions of urban life. The workshop begins with the Concrete Experience stage, in which participants identify neglected or problematic areas within the city. This is followed by Reflective Observation, where participants engage in brainstorming, sketch redesign ideas using models or digital tools, and reflect on the underlying causes of the spatial problems they observe. This creative process marks the stage of Abstract Conceptualization, during which participants transform abstract principles such as inclusivity and sustainability into design elements and analyse the structural and systemic dimensions of urban issues. This approach underscores the view that urban problems should not be addressed solely by professionals, but also by the residents who directly experience them. In other words, active participation is seen as "a process that connects citizens to governmental decision-making" (Sanoff, 2000). The workshop concludes with the Active Experimentation stage, in which participants present their ideas to local authorities, thereby giving their proposed redesigns the potential to be transformed into action and completing the experiential learning cycle.

5.6.Sustainable City Challenge

Figure 7. Sustainable City Challenge

The Sustainable City Challenge is a holistic learning experience that promotes sustainable urban living and environmentally friendly habits by enabling individuals to actively transform their own environmental footprints. The activity begins with the Concrete Experience stage, in which participants track their environmental footprint in daily urban life (waste, transportation, energy consumption). This data collection process allows individuals to directly observe their own impact and triggers the Reflective Observation stage, where the gathered information is interpreted to understand the severity of environmental issues in the city. As participants create individual or group sustainability action plans -such as zero-waste practices, urban gardening, or eco-friendly commuting- they analyze the ecological, economic, and social benefits underlying these plans, thereby engaging in Abstract Conceptualization. This participatory process aligns with the notion that "knowledge is not only something to be produced but also something to be applied and made meaningful" (UNESCO, 1996), strengthening the environmental dimension of urban literacy. Ultimately, the implementation of these plans and the documentation of their impacts constitute the Active Experimentation stage, generating tangible transformations in the urban environment based on the knowledge acquired.

5.7. Urban Policy Simulation (City Council Role-Playing Game)

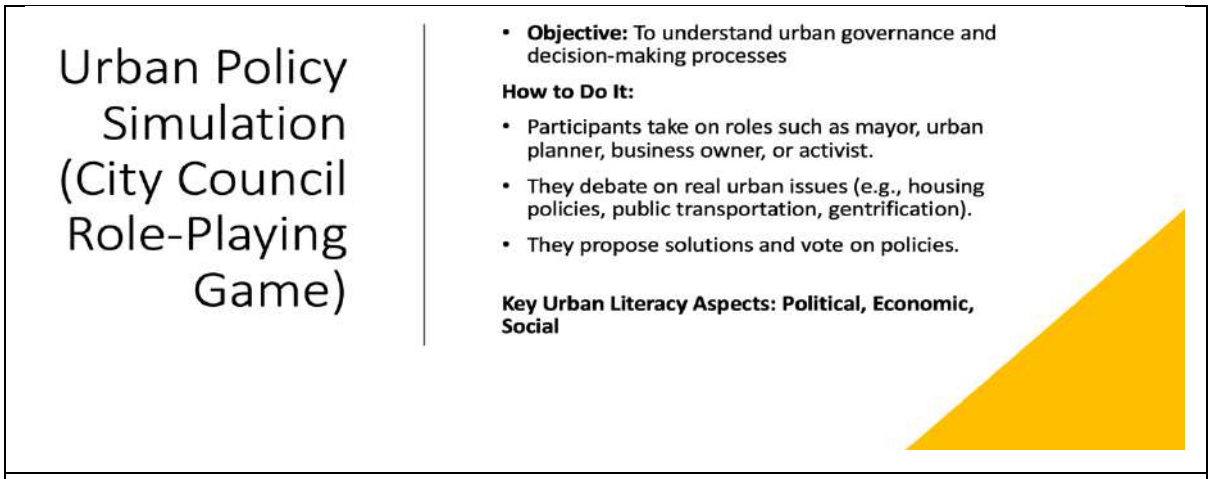

Figure 8. Urban Policy Simulation (City Council Role-Playing Game)

The Urban Policy Simulation (City Council Role-Playing Game) is a participatory approach designed to enhance political, economic, and social dimensions of urban literacy by helping participants understand urban governance and decision-making processes. The activity begins with a direct Concrete Experience, as participants assume roles such as mayor, urban planner, business owner, or activist. This role-taking allows participants to experience real urban issues (such as housing policies, public transportation, and gentrification) from the perspective of their assigned character. Through debates and structured discussions, participants then engage in Reflective Observation, analyzing the differing interests associated with each role and how these interests influence urban dynamics. This process aligns with the idea that "knowledge is not only something to be produced but also something to be applied and made meaningful" (Delors, 1996). The simulation progresses into the Abstract Conceptualization stage as participants develop policy proposals and vote on them, thereby understanding the complex logic of urban governance and how conflicting demands can be integrated.

Finally, the decision-making process and the discussion of outcomes constitute the Active Experimentation stage, where the knowledge gained is tested, applied, and transformed into action. This completes the experiential learning cycle and fosters a critical awareness of urban governance processes.

5.8.Hidden Histories Tour

Figure 9. Hidden Histories Tour

The Hidden Histories Tour transforms learning into a dynamic experience by examining the Cultural, Social, and Political layers of the city in depth. The activity directs participants to explore historical sites that contain overlooked stories such as workers' movements, women's struggles, or the lived histories of immigrant communities. Following this personal engagement, participants develop a critical perspective on existing narratives; they enter a process of deep reflection by focusing on the social and cultural meanings of the findings they have collected from the field. Such an examination forms the foundation of urban literacy, which requires individuals to make sense of communication practices and identities within the city in the context of development (Rogers, 2005).

By comparing the new information gained during the tour with existing historical narratives, participants arrive at a conceptual analysis that enables them to understand the structural mechanisms of marginalization and the cultural effects of urban policies. Finally, the sharing of the digital content produced and the initiation of public dialogue marks an active process of transformation in which the knowledge gained is tested and translated into action. By grounding learning in the principle of learning by doing (UNESCO, 1996), this method enables a multilayered and critical reading of the city and sustains the experiential cycle.

6. Results, Discussion and Suggestions

This study demonstrates the holistic effects of eight experiential learning activities designed to reconceptualize urban literacy through the framework of the experiential learning cycle, enhancing individuals' capacity to transform their urban experiences into knowledge, awareness, and action. The activities significantly strengthened participants' abilities to read the physical

fabric of the city, question social structures, interpret cultural representations, recognize economic inequalities, engage in political processes, and analyze environmental issues.

For example, Urban Exploration Walks enhanced participants' practice of actively reading space, while Public Space Mapping increased awareness of accessibility, inclusivity, and spatial justice. Narrative-based activities such as Urban Storytelling and Photo Voice enabled individuals to reinterpret their experiences and grasp the city's polyphonic structure. Participatory Urban Design Workshop and Urban Policy Simulation deepened political-urban awareness by increasing participants' engagement with decision-making processes, and Sustainable City Challenge became a transformative experience that directly influenced participants' environmental behaviours. Ultimately, the experiential learning-based approach transformed urban literacy from a cognitive competence into a participatory, critical, and rights-based urban practice.

The findings indicate that urban literacy is not merely a process of knowledge acquisition but one that gains meaning through acts of participation and transformation. This aligns directly with the study's theoretical foundations:

Freire's Dialogical Pedagogy: The study resonates with the dialogical and transformative pedagogy emphasized in Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed. This approach enabled participants to transform their urban experiences into critical awareness (conscientiza) (Freire, 2007).

Lefebvre's Right to the City: Henri Lefebvre's right to the city (droit la ville) framework strengthened individuals' awareness of spatial injustices and collective rights claims (Lefebvre, 1996). The activities demonstrated that forms of learning in the city are not only pedagogical but inherently political, confirming that urban literacy is directly linked to critical citizenship.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle: David A. Kolb's learning cycle (Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, Active Experimentation) enabled each activity to be structured as a holistic learning process extending from concrete experience to active implementation (Kolb, 1984). The alignment of all activities with the experiential cycle demonstrates that learning is not limited to observation and information acquisition but reinforces the continuum of comprehension-interpretation-action.

Activities such as the Hidden Histories Tour and Public Space Mapping revealed that urban space is simultaneously a site of learning, representation, conflict, and transformation. Thus, as reflected in the findings, urban literacy is a process that carries the potential for both personal transformation and collective awareness-building.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed for researchers and institutions that may implement the activities:

For Local Governments: The eight experiential learning activities developed in this study can be implemented by municipalities and local institutions in city workshops, youth programs, and neighborhood forums. Notably, Public Space Mapping, Urban Policy Simulation, and

Participatory Urban Design Workshop can strengthen participation in decision-making processes and enhance democratic legitimacy.

For Universities and Educational Institutions: Experiential learning-based urban literacy modules can be integrated into curricula in urban sociology, urban planning, architecture, educational sciences, and social sciences. Field-based, experience-cantered courses grounded in Kolb's cycle and UNESCO's learning principles should be expanded.

For Civil Society Organizations (CSOs): Activities such as PhotoVoice, Urban Storytelling, and Hidden Histories Tour can be incorporated into community-based advocacy initiatives, serving as tools to amplify the voices of disadvantaged groups. These methods have strong potential to increase participation among migrant communities, women, youth, and older adults.

For Policymakers: The right-to-the-city perspective should serve as a strategic framework for policies related to public space, accessibility standards, housing rights, and environmental justice. Experiential learning-based participation models offer tools that can strengthen democratic legitimacy in local policymaking.

For Researchers: This study has developed a conceptual model; however, future research can test the model's effectiveness through pilot implementations in different cities. In addition, follow-up studies are needed to assess the long-term learning outcomes of each activity type (e.g., PhotoVoice, Urban Storytelling).

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The Only Way to Learn Is Through Encounter!

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Abstract

In today's globalised and digitally connected world, people are increasingly retreating into social bubbles of like-minded individuals, avoiding engagement with those seen as 'other'. This trend, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its emphasis on isolation, poses significant challenges to social cohesion and empathy. This study investigates the role of immersive experiences at the Dialogue Hub (UK) and Istanbul Dialogue Museum (Türkiye) in fostering empathy and understanding. These initiatives are grounded in Otto Scharmer's Theory U, which highlights awareness and presence as critical to meaningful change. The study utilises a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative visitor feedback with Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis to assess both experiential and economic impact. Findings indicate that immersive formats like Dialogue in the Dark and Sign Language Cafés contribute significantly to shifting visitor perspectives and enhancing confidence in social inclusion practices. Quantitative results show that the Dialogue Hub generated £2.47 of social value for every £1 invested, while the Istanbul Dialogue Museum returned 4.07 TL per 1 TL invested. These results support the hypothesis that structured, empathetic encounters can reshape societal attitudes toward marginalised groups.

Keywords: Empathy, immersive experiences, museums, social inclusion, sign language cafés

Introduction

In a world marked by increasing social polarisation and reduced face-to-face interaction, people often form relationships only with those who share similar worldviews, values, and backgrounds. This retreat into ideological comfort zones, intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, presents significant obstacles to empathy and social integration. The International Council of Museums' (ICOM, 2022) revised definition positions museums as key players in nurturing societal understanding by prioritising inclusion, participation, and sustainability. Within this framework, museums become sites of not only cultural preservation but also social transformation. This paper explores how immersive museum experiences—particularly those created by Dialogue Hub in the UK and Istanbul Dialogue Museum in Türkiye—function as platforms for empathy-building. These institutions employ methodologies aligned with Otto Scharmer's Theory U (2009), which calls for transformative leadership through deep listening and openness. Through dialogue-based installations like Dialogue in the Dark and socially engaged practices like Sign Language Cafés,

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the museums allow visitors to step into unfamiliar perspectives and encounter difference directly. The study examines how such encounters shift perceptions and build confidence in engaging with marginalised groups, especially blind and deaf communities.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to assess the impact of immersive museum experiences on empathy development and social attitudes. The qualitative component involves collecting and analysing visitor feedback from participants in the Dialogue in the Dark exhibitions and Sign Language Café interactions. This feedback helps capture subjective experiences, emotional responses, and attitudinal shifts.

On the quantitative side, the study employs the Social Return on Investment (SROI) framework to assess the social value created by these experiences. SROI is especially appropriate as it assigns monetary value to both tangible and intangible social benefits. Stakeholders—including museum visitors, employees, and community members—were consulted to determine relevant outcomes. Data collection included surveys, interviews, and financial reports. The analysis compares the social outcomes against the investment required to implement the immersive programs, producing a cost-benefit ratio indicative of the broader social impact.

Findings

Analysis of visitor feedback indicates that participants frequently report increased empathy, heightened awareness, and improved communication confidence with marginalised groups. At the British Sign Language Café, 86% of visitors stated they felt more confident engaging with the deaf community after their experience.

The SROI results confirm these qualitative insights. At Dialogue Hub, each £1 invested resulted in £2.47 of social value. In Istanbul, the Dialogue Museum generated 4.07 TL for every 1 TL invested. The high SROI ratios demonstrate that immersive, empathy-driven programming yields substantial returns in social capital. These findings provide compelling evidence for museums as not only cultural but also social institutions with measurable community value.

Results, Discussion and Suggestions

The findings affirm that immersive experiences can be powerful tools for fostering empathy and understanding across social divides. Dialogue in the Dark challenges sighted individuals to navigate the world without vision, thereby enhancing sensitivity toward blind communities. Similarly, Sign Language Cafés invite hearing visitors into meaningful, often first-time interactions with deaf individuals, dismantling assumptions and promoting inclusion.

These interactions align closely with Scharmer's Theory U, which emphasises presence, listening, and co-creation. By engaging with individuals outside one's normative social circle in controlled, reflective environments, visitors undergo transformative shifts in awareness. The use of SROI analysis further demonstrates that these programs are not only educational but also economically justifiable.

Going forward, institutions aiming to foster social cohesion should consider incorporating similar experiential methodologies. Investment in empathy-building initiatives can yield high social returns, enhance civic engagement, and reduce social inequalities. Future research could explore long-term impacts of these encounters and expand participant demographics to include children, policymakers, and corporate stakeholders.

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EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CONGRESS

Workshops

The International Experiential Learning Congress hosted workshops delivered both in-person and online, offering participants rich opportunities for hands-on engagement, practical skill development, and collaborative exploration of experiential learning methodologies. Covering digitally enriched teaching practices, role-playing activities, outdoor strategies, and reflective pedagogies, the workshops brought together practitioners, researchers, and educators to exchange applied knowledge and co-create meaningful learning experiences. This diverse program highlighted the congress's commitment to bridging theory and practice through active participation.

Points of Connection: Unlocking Growth through Experiential Learning

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Abstract

This workshop offers a transformative journey into experiential learning through the powerful lens of the Points of Your methodology. Designed for educators, leaders, and change-makers, Points of Connection invites participants to explore how reflective and creative approaches can unlock growth on both personal and professional levels.

The core aim is to foster deep insight and practical strategies for navigating complex challenges in conflict resolution, cultural adaptation, and sustainability. Through dynamic methods—such as interactive photo cards, storytelling, guided reflection, and collaborative problem-solving—participants will actively engage in experiential processes that foster empathy, connection, and innovation.

Key themes include transforming conflict into collaboration, strengthening intercultural understanding, and aligning personal values with global sustainability goals. Participants will leave equipped with tools to inspire action, enhance team dynamics, and lead with greater clarity and purpose.

This workshop highlights the essence of experiential learning: engaging the whole self—mind, heart, and hands—to make meaning, build connection, and create lasting impact. It demonstrates how creative methodologies like Points of You® can deepen reflection, spark dialogue, and support growth across diverse sectors and learning environments.

Keywords: experiential learning, Points of You, reflection, conflict transformation, cultural adaptation, sustainability.

Introduction

In today's interconnected and rapidly evolving world, experiential learning has emerged as a crucial approach to fostering deep, transformative learning across disciplines and sectors. Rooted in constructivist and humanistic learning theories, experiential learning emphasizes active participation, reflection, and personal engagement in order to generate meaningful insights and sustained behavioral change (Kolb, 1984). This process not only enhances cognitive understanding but also strengthens emotional intelligence, adaptability, and collaboration—skills vital for navigating complex social, cultural, and organizational challenges.The workshop Points of Connection: Unlocking Growth through Experiential Learning draws on this theoretical foundation and integrates the creative methodology of Points of You®, a tool that combines imagery, storytelling, and reflective inquiry to facilitate

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perspective- shifting and personal growth. By engaging participants in hands-on, immersive exercises, the workshop aims to uncover the underlying dynamics of conflict resolution, cultural adaptation, and sustainability integration—three critical themes relevant across education, leadership, and social innovation contexts.

The purpose of this workshop is to provide participants with experiential tools and reflective practices that enhance their ability to lead with empathy, navigate diversity, and co-create sustainable solutions. By blending structured reflection with creative exploration, the workshop supports participants in translating learning into actionable strategies, thereby contributing to both personal development and systemic change in their respective environments.

Learning Objectives / Intended Outcomes

By the end of the workshop, participants will be able to:

- Use different perspective to support self-awareness, reflection, and perspective-shifting in personal and professional contexts.
- Transform conflict into collaboration by identifying and addressing hidden team dynamics and enhancing emotional intelligence.
- Reflect on cultural narratives and recognize implicit biases to strengthen empathy and adaptability in diverse environments.
- Co-create sustainable solutions by aligning personal values with broader organizational and global sustainability goals.
- Integrate experiential learning principles into their own practice through creative tools, guided reflection, and storytelling.
- Develop actionable strategies to enhance collaboration, foster resilience, and drive meaningful change within their communities or organizations.

Target Audience

This workshop is designed for professionals across sectors who are engaged in leadership, education, facilitation, coaching, social innovation, or organizational development. Ideal participants include:

- Educators and trainers seeking creative, reflective tools to enhance experiential learning practices
- Leaders and managers aiming to improve team dynamics, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution skills
- Coaches, facilitators, and HR professionals interested in deepening their capacity for perspective-shifting and personal development
- Change-makers working in multicultural or cross-sectoral environments who seek

strategies for navigating cultural adaptation

- Sustainability advocates and professionals looking to align personal values with global sustainability goals through collaborative, values-driven practices

- The workshop welcomes individuals committed to personal growth and systemic impact, and those interested in applying experiential methodologies to drive meaningful transformation within their communities and organizations.

Workshop Structure and Content *(or: Workshop Flow & Activities)*

The *Points of Connection: Unlocking Growth through Experiential Learning* workshop was designed as a structured, immersive journey combining experiential learning principles with the Points of You® methodology and cards. The session followed a multi-phase flow to support participants in reflection, dialogue, and strategic application. For each step was used different image-based cards photo for inspiration and association.

1. **Welcome and Introduction**

   Participants were welcomed into a safe, inclusive environment. The facilitator introduced the core purpose of the workshop, outlined the learning objectives, and shared the experiential approach and ground rules for engagement. For each step participants were engaged in a short, interactive activity using image-based cards, and insights were shared, accompanied with mentoring approach and conclusion by the trainer.

2. **Thematic Exploration – Conflict and Collaboration**

   Participants responded to the prompt: *"How does this image or word reflect your current approach to conflict or collaboration?"* Small-group dialogue and reflective writing followed.

3. **Cultural Adaptation – Embracing Diverse Perspectives**

   Through guided reflection, participants responded to: *"What feelings or thoughts arise when you think about adapting to new environments or cultures?"* Storytelling and structured discussion were used to foster empathy and cultural awareness.

4. **Sustainability Alignment and Values**

   Participants explored the prompt: *"What does this card reveal about your connection to sustainability and your role in fostering it?"* Collaborative brainstorming followed to connect personal values with sustainability goals and initiatives.

5. **Integration through Guided Reflection**

   Participants were guided to pause and process their experiences. Using the question *"If this card could guide your next step, what action or decision would it inspire?"*, they articulated one key takeaway or actionable strategy to implement post-workshop.

6. **Closing Circle and Collective Insight Sharing**

   The session concluded with a collective reflection: *"What story does this image tell you about the way you approach challenges in your life or work?"* Participants shared closing insights, personal reflections, and words of appreciation in a supportive group circle.

This structured flow enabled deep personal engagement while promoting practical application of experiential learning principles. The creative combination of visuals, dialogue, and self-inquiry empowered participants to translate reflection into tangible action for impact in their fields.

Materials and Tools

The Coaching Game tool part of Points of You® methodology

Participant Reflections and Feedback *(optional)*

Participant feedback highlighted the workshop as a powerful and transformative experience that blended creativity with meaningful reflection. Many expressed appreciation for the space to pause, connect, and reframe their perspectives through the Points of You® process.

The diversity of perspectives in the room was also seen as a strength. Several participants commented on how hearing others' stories fostered empathy and reminded them of the importance of cultural awareness and open dialogue. One reflection captured this well: “We don’t often take the time to really think and listen—this process invited that, and it changed how I see myself and others.”

Overall, participants valued the experiential format, the guided flow, and the actionable takeaways. Many expressed interest in applying the tools in their own workspaces, especially in leadership development, education, and team facilitation.

Conclusion

The *Points of Connection: Unlocking Growth through Experiential Learning* workshop demonstrated the power of creative, image-based methodologies to spark deep reflection, build emotional intelligence, and support practical action. By engaging participants in immersive activities rooted in the Points of You® approach, the workshop facilitated perspective-shifting, collaborative insight, and value-driven goal setting across three essential themes: conflict transformation, cultural adaptation, and sustainability.

Participants left with a renewed sense of clarity, tools to foster more meaningful connections, and actionable strategies for implementing experiential learning in their personal and professional spheres. The reflective space created during the workshop not only encouraged personal growth but also emphasized the potential of experiential methods to drive change in

organizations and communities.

Looking ahead, there is strong potential to expand this format into longer programs, cross-cultural dialogues, or sector-specific applications. The workshop stands as a testament to how experiential learning, when paired with creative facilitation tools, can unlock insight, foster connection, and inspire meaningful transformation.

References

The Coaching game, Points of You®, www.points-of-you.com

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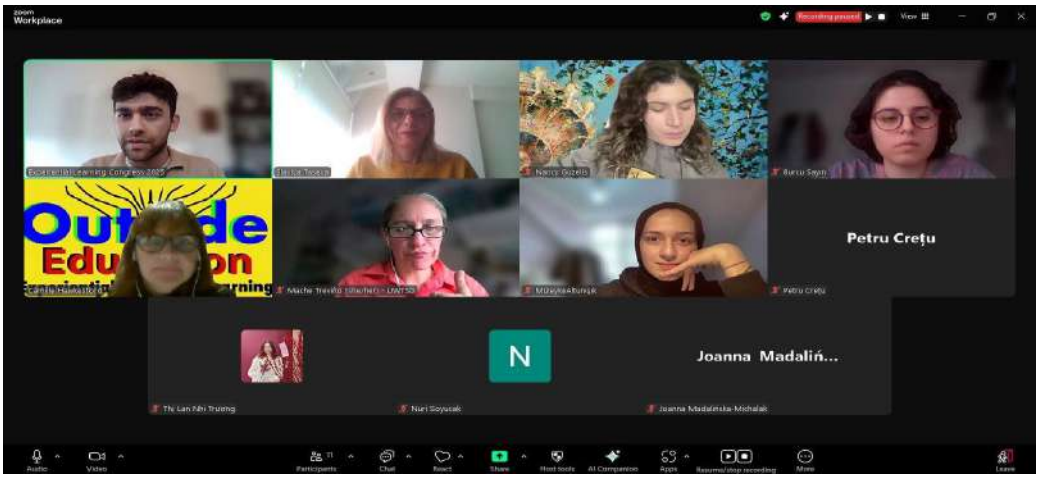
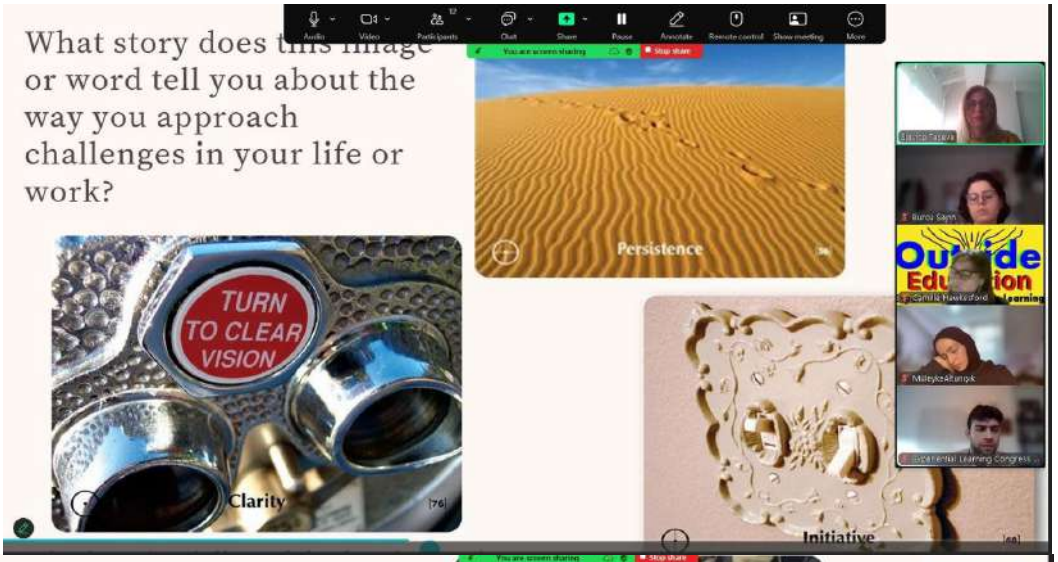
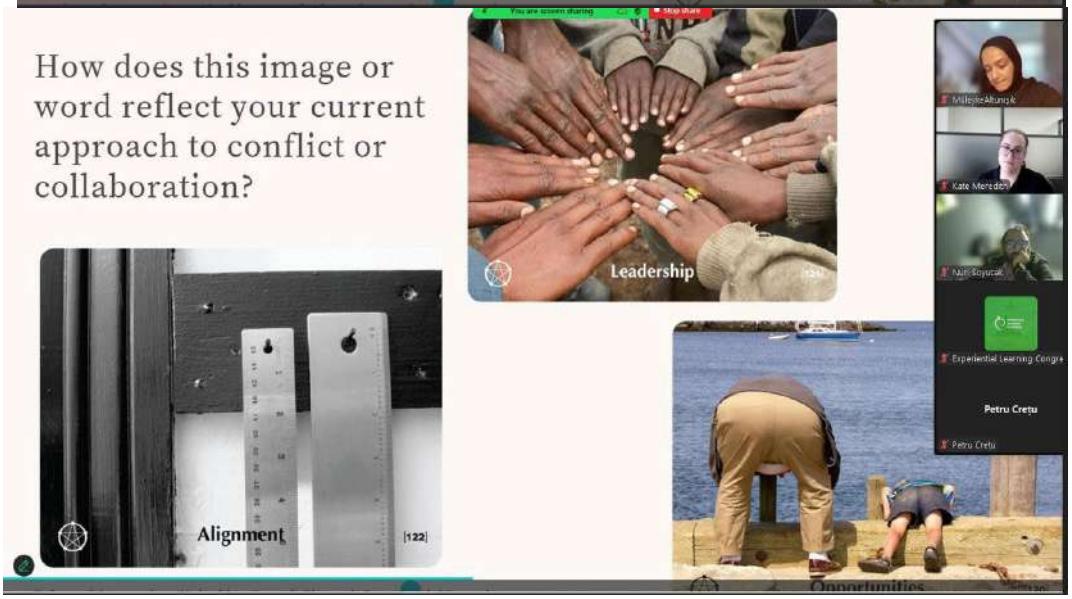
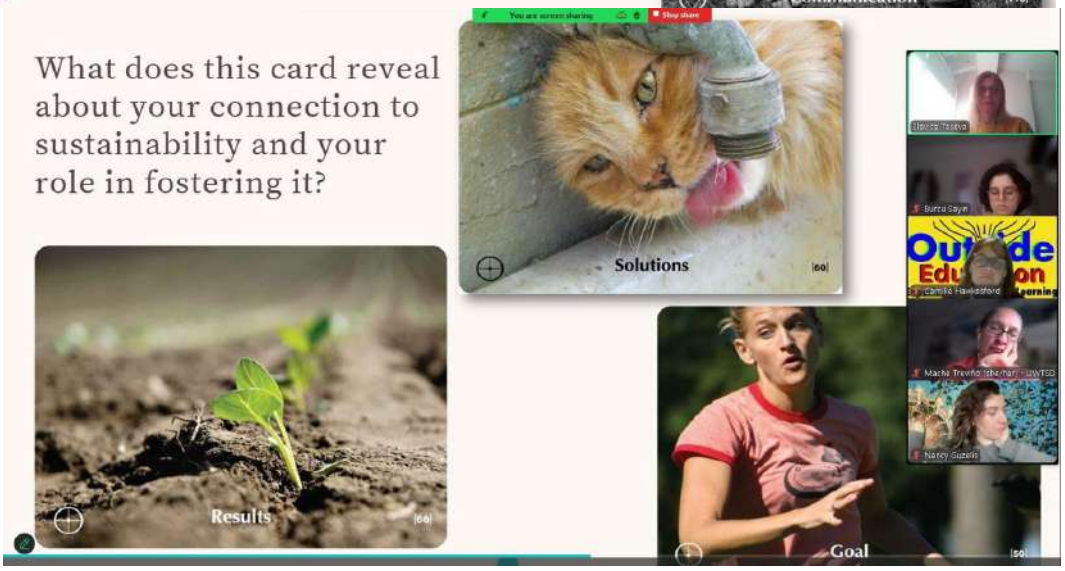
Visuals or Photos *(optional)*

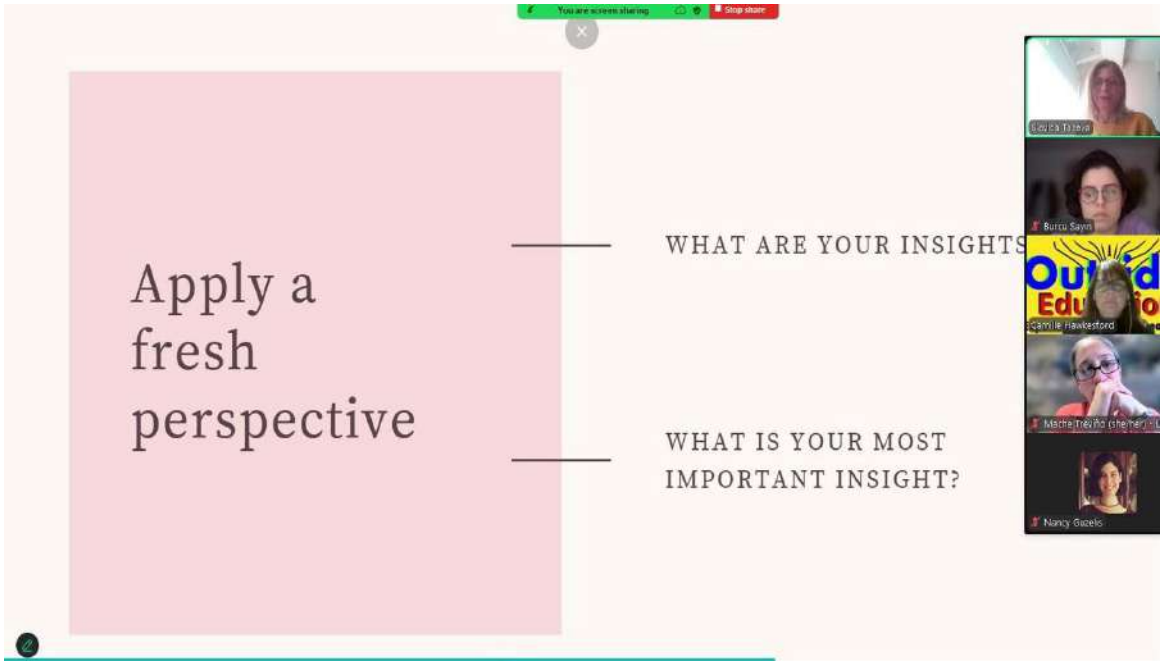







What feelings or thoughts arise when you think about adapting to new environments or cultures?
Generosity
Creativity
Communication


What does this card reveal about your connection to sustainability and your role in fostering it?
Solutions
Results
Goal


Apply a fresh perspective
WHAT ARE YOUR INSIGHTS
WHAT IS YOUR MOST IMPORTANT INSIGHT?


Slavica Taseva
COACH, TRAINER, CONSULTANT
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Rediscovery Your Inner Generalist

A playful exploration of learning flexibility

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Abstract

This 90-minute workshop invited participants to rediscover their inner generalist and explore the power of learning flexibility—our capacity to adapt, stretch, and integrate different ways of learning in a changing world. Grounded in Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, the session addressed the human tendency to over-identify with one way of learning or being—often a result of past success or role specialization—and offered a playful, practical approach to becoming more flexible.

Participants engaged with a variety of experiential methods, including full-cycle journaling, metaphor, music, and collaborative activities like the "Overplayed Strengths Awards" and "Flip the Script" challenge. Through humor, reflection, and embodied practice, learners confronted entrenchment patterns and explored conditions that support flexibility—such as tension, safe-to-fail experiments, and deep reflection.

By the end of the session, participants had designed a personalized "flexibility workout" and left with a deeper appreciation for the joy and impact of becoming more fully alive, more adaptive, and more whole.

This workshop offered not only practical tools but also an enlivening experience of experiential learning itself—dynamic, emotional, and deeply human.

Keywords: Full-Cycle; Learning Flexibility; Workout; Adaptive; Whole

Introduction

In today's increasingly complex world, the ability to adapt, shift perspectives, and engage in new ways of learning has become essential. However, many individuals become entrenched in habitual patterns of thinking and acting, often as a result of prior successes, professional roles, or unconscious tendencies. Although these patterns may have once been effective, they can become limiting in dynamic or unfamiliar contexts.

Grounded in Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), this workshop explored the concept of learning flexibility—the capacity to move fluidly through the experiential learning cycle and to engage a full range of learning styles. The workshop addressed the developmental process of moving from specialization toward integration, emphasizing that learning flexibilit is not an innate trait but a skill that can be intentionally cultivated.the purpose of the session was to assist participants in rediscovering their inner generalist and in developing a personalized learning flexibility routine to support growth, experimentation, and flourishing.

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Learning Objectives / Intended Outcomes

By the end of the session, participants were expected to:

- Understand the concept of learning flexibility and why it matters in today's context
- Reflect on their own learning preferences and patterns of entrenchment
- Experience what it feels like to step into a less familiar learning mode
- Explore conditions that support learning flexibility (e.g., tension, play, reflection)
- Begin designing their own flexibility-building routine
- Leave with practical tools and playful inspiration for continued development

Target Audience

This workshop was designed for facilitators, coaches, educators, learning designers, and curious professionals who work in complex environments and want to grow beyond habitual patterns of learning and being. It was particularly relevant for individuals interested in experiential learning, adult development, and embodied approaches to personal and professional growth.

Workshop Structure and Content *(or: Workshop Flow & Activities)*

1. Welcome & Connection

- Interactive greeting in native languages
- Introduction to Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and the concept of learning flexibility

2. Experiential Hook

- Clip from *The Sound of Music* as metaphor for nonconformity and fluidity in learning
- Group discussion on specialization and the cost of over-identification

3. The Anatomy of Entrenchment

- Explore the phenomena of Entrenchment, from Specialization, Over-identification, Transformational Crisis, leading to a call for New Ways of Being.
- Landing on the perspective that "Entrenchment" is not a crime, but an invitation for transformation.

4. Interactive Activity: Overplayed Strengths Awards

- Breakout groups created humorous "awards" for overused learning styles
- Participants wrote and shared exaggerated acceptance speeches to surface blind spots

5. Discussion: What Facilitates Flexibility?

- Participants explored the role of tension and limits; safe-to-fail experiments and deep reflection in fostering learning flexibility.
- Visuals and metaphors (e.g., butterfly emerging from chrysalis, one flying high with a net beneath; A brain witnessing itself; stuck wheel vs. open horizon)

6. Embodied Experience of Flexibility Routines

- Full-Cycle Journaling: guided journaling exercise where participants following prompts from all four modes of learning (Experiencing, Reflecting, Thinking and Acting)
- Encouragement to a friend after setback: on a Miro board, participants were asked to write to a friend who just experienced a setback. Then, they were asked to give the same encouragement to themselves. Idea – normalizing failures and holding failures with compassion.
- Digital "Wheel of Flexibility": impromptu stretch to a less visited area on the learning cycle through a simple activity.

7. Closing Reflection

- Participants were encouraged to develop their own flexibility routines.
- Shared key takeaways, personal insights, and a poetic coda: *The Path That Winds*

Materials and Tools

- Zoom + breakout rooms
- Miro Board
- Slide deck (PDF: *Learning Flexibility – Experiential Learning Congress 2025*)
- Wheel of Names (digital spinning wheel)
- Movie clip from *The Sound of Music* ("How do you solve a problem like Maria?")
- Visual metaphors (e.g., entrenchment diagram, flexibility map, butterfly transformation)
- Journaling templates or prompts (on-screen or participant-generated)

Participant Reflections and Feedback *(optional)*

Participants expressed joy, surprise, and deep resonance with the idea that "getting stuck is not a crime, but an invitation." Despite language barriers and late-night time zones, many shared that the workshop was **engaging, playful and personally relevant**.

Quotes included:

"What a great interactive, engaging and connecting workshop session it was!!! Thank you Mimi for your insights, and the space to reflect and share our own concepts of learning and how we

can grow and adapt on these. AND …. yes I got to participate until the early hours of the Australian morning 😅 and it was well worth it!"

- *Camille Hawkesford, Australia*

Conclusion

Learning flexibility is not about discarding our strengths but expanding the range of how we engage with the world. It is an invitation to move from fixed patterns toward a more integrated, adaptive way of learning and leading.

This workshop offered not just tools but an experience—blending humor, movement, reflection, and metaphor to make learning flexibility tangible.

Looking ahead, there is potential to adapt this session into a longer cohort-based format, develop reflection journals, and continue building visual tools that make flexibility visible and playful for diverse learners.

TECH-EXP: Experiencing Technology Through the Digital Wellbeing Filter

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Abstract

This workshop explores the complex relationship individuals have with technology, using experiential learning methods to foster awareness, critical reflection, and behavior change. Grounded in Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, the session provides participants with an immersive offline simulation of the overstimulating online environment. Through carefully designed activities—such as a guided grounding exercise, a peer-to-peer conversation game (EYE-Contact), and a hands-on simulation of digital overstimulation—participants are encouraged to reflect on the contrast between their actual and ideal technology use.

Key themes include digital wellbeing, mindful technology usage, information overload, and the societal and personal risks and benefits of digital engagement. The workshop guides participants through all four stages of experiential learning: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. It culminates in a self-assessment (Digital Flourishing Survey) and a personal commitment to one small change to support healthier digital habits.

Participants leave with greater self-awareness, a deeper understanding of digital wellbeing trends, and practical tools for setting healthier boundaries with technology. The workshop's relevance lies not only in its content but in its methodology—demonstrating how experiential approaches can meaningfully address complex, modern-day challenges and support transformative learning across diverse participant groups.

Keywords: digital wellbeing, mindful technology usage, information overload

Introduction

This experiential workshop was designed to deepen participants' understanding of their relationship with technology, as compared to their ideal digital habits and values. Through interactive and reflective activities, participants explored current trends and emerging risks in the realm of Digital Wellbeing. The workshop aimed to foster critical awareness, encourage the reevaluation of personal technology use, and support the development of healthier digital habits and boundaries. Grounded in Experiential Learning Theory, the session offered a dynamic and immersive learning environment where participants could both engage with and reflect on the impact of digital life on their wellbeing.

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Learning Objectives / Intended Outcomes

By the end of the workshop, participants were expected to:

- Experience an offline simulation of the online environment
- Engage in meaningful reflection on their personal relationship with technology (comparing reality versus ideal)
- Develop an understanding of the major trends and risks associated with Digital Wellbeing
- Reevaluate and reshape their thoughts, habits, and boundaries to promote more mindful technology use and enhance Digital Wellbeing
- Explore an alternative approach to learning design grounded in Experiential Learning Theory

Target Audience

The workshop was designed for participants of diverse ages, cultural backgrounds, societal roles, and occupations, all of whom use technology in some form.

Workshop Structure and Content *(or: Workshop Flow & Activities)*

The workshop followed the structure outlined below:

- **Welcome and Introduction:**

  Personal and professional introductions; overview of the workshop topic and agenda; setting expectations.

- **Grounding Activity:**

  A brief mindfulness exercise to help participants arrive fully and become present in the moment.

- **EYE-Contact Card Game:**

  A mingle-style activity involving rotating one-on-one conversations (three rounds) with questions related to online presence and digital habits.

- **Core Simulation Experience:**

  Participants engaged in a simulation designed to replicate the overstimulation of online environments within an offline setting. This included information overload through printed documents, videos, tools, methods, infographics, advertisements, erroneous QR codes, audible notifications, and music.

- **Reflective Observation:**

  Group discussion guided by reflective questions to process the simulation experience.

- **Abstract Conceptualization:**

Further group discussion with guided questions to explore key insights and link them to theoretical concepts.

- **Summary Presentation:**

  A concise overview of Digital Wellbeing, including the harms and benefits of technology, mindful technology use, healthy habits and boundaries, and current trends and risks.

- **Preparation for Active Experimentation I:**

  Participants completed the *Digital Flourishing Survey* and analyzed their feedback reports, which were sent via email during the session.

- **Preparation for Active Experimentation II:**

  Each participant committed to one specific action they would take in the following week to enhance their Digital Wellbeing.

- **Final Thoughts and Closing:**

  Closing reflections and expressions of gratitude.

Materials and Tools

Materials and Equipment Used

1. Participant Materials

Provided to support individual engagement and reflection throughout the workshop.

- **Pens and notebooks** – For personal note-taking, reflections, and recording insights during activities and discussions.

- **Printed materials and infographics** – Used during the simulation to replicate the experience of digital information overload and to convey key concepts visually.

2. Facilitation Tools

Used by the facilitator to structure and deliver the workshop effectively.

- **Flipchart papers** – For capturing group insights, visualizing concepts, and documenting discussions in real-time.
- **Markers** – For use with flipcharts and other visual documentation during group work and presentations.
- **EYE-Contact card deck** – A structured conversation tool used to facilitate peer-to-peer interaction and reflection on online presence and digital habits.

Technical Equipment

Enabled the simulation experience and delivery of digital content.

- **Laptop** – Used for managing digital content, presentations, and survey administration.
- **Projector** – For visual presentations and supporting theoretical content delivery.
- **Speaker** – Provided audio elements in the simulation to replicate the auditory overstimulation often experienced in digital environments.

Conclusion

The workshop successfully raised participants' awareness of their digital habits and encouraged critical reflection on the gap between their current and ideal relationship with technology. Through experiential methods and guided discussion, participants gained valuable insights into the risks and opportunities of digital life, while also discovering practical tools and strategies to support more mindful tech use. Many expressed gratitude for the space to explore this topic in a hands-on, non-judgmental way and left with a renewed sense of agency over their digital wellbeing.

While this workshop was designed as a standalone experience, its impact is intended to continue beyond the session—through participants' individual commitments and ongoing reflection. No formal follow-up or further sessions are currently planned, but the hope is that the awareness and actions sparked here will inspire sustained personal growth and perhaps ripple outward into participants' communities and professional environments.

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Title: “Re-Engaging Learners and Revitalising Teaching: AI Tools and the Global Teacher Crisis.”

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Abstract

This paper explores the intertwined challenges of student disengagement and the global teacher shortage, drawing on workshop experiences that integrate creative pedagogy and artificial intelligence (AI) tools. The purpose of the study was to identify how digital innovations can support teacher efficiency and increase classroom engagement amid the professional crisis in education. The methodology consisted of an interactive professional development workshop for educators that included multimedia prompts, collaborative discussions, and hands-on activities using tools such as Nearpod, Gamma AI, and Brisk AI. These platforms were selected to demonstrate applications of AI for interactive lesson design, automated feedback, and creative presentation building. Key findings indicate that educators recognise the dual necessity of technology and human creativity to sustain engagement and professional motivation. UNESCO projections showing a need for 44 million teachers by 2030, and U.S. statistics revealing high attrition rates, underscore the urgency of innovation in teaching. Integrating AI tools within a framework of experiential, reflective pedagogy allows teachers to reclaim time for relational learning and creative practice.

Keywords: Teaching profession, student engagement, artificial intelligence, Nearpod, experiential learning

Introduction

The global teaching profession is at a critical turning point. Reports by UNESCO (2025) forecast a shortage of approximately 44 million teachers worldwide by 2030, threatening the sustainability of quality education systems. In the United States alone, recent data show that 35 % of teachers are considering leaving the profession within a year and that 62 % would not recommend teaching to their children (Devlin Peck, 2025). Such statistics reflect deep-rooted structural and motivational challenges affecting educators’ engagement and well-being. Teacher burnout, low remuneration, and lack of creative autonomy are contributing to what has been described as a “crisis of the teaching profession” (UNESCO, 2024).

Simultaneously, student disengagement has become a global concern, with many classrooms struggling to sustain motivation and participation. According to Sir Ken Robinson (2017), education should be understood as a fundamentally creative process, yet excessive standardisation and testing constrain both teachers and students. These rigid frameworks hinder curiosity, problem-solving, and emotional investment—key ingredients of effective learning.

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The purpose of this study is to explore how innovative technologies and AI-driven tools can enhance engagement while alleviating some of the burdens that contribute to teacher attrition. The workshop examined three digital resources—Nearpod, Gamma AI, and Brisk AI—as catalysts for interactive, creative, and time-efficient learning environments.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative, experiential learning approach through a two-hour professional workshop attended by educators from international and local educational institutions. The sample consisted of 12 teachers with varied experience levels, representing humanities, languages, and STEM disciplines. The research design was non-experimental but participatory, involving reflection and application phases based on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle.

Participants began by analysing humorous teaching memes to stimulate open discussion about shared classroom challenges. This icebreaker established a collegial environment for honest reflection. The workshop then transitioned to examining global data on teacher shortages and student disengagement, including UNESCO (2025) and U.S. Department of Education (2023) sources.

Three AI tools were introduced:

- **Nearpod AI Create**, for generating interactive lessons and quizzes (Tepler, 2025).
- **Brisk AI**, for streamlining grading and personalised feedback (Brisk Teaching, 2025).
- **Gamma AI**, for rapidly designing engaging multimedia presentations (Write A Catalyst, 2025).

Educators worked in pairs to redesign one existing classroom activity using these tools and presented their outputs for peer feedback. Post-session reflections were collected through open-ended questionnaires and group discussion notes.

Findings

Analysis of participant reflections revealed several key insights. First, the majority of teachers perceived AI tools as valuable aids to improve classroom engagement, particularly when used to diversify tasks and personalise learning. Nearpod and Gamma AI were seen as the most effective for promoting interactivity, while Brisk AI was valued for reducing grading time, allowing more focus on individual student feedback.

Second, many participants reported that integrating these tools rekindled their enthusiasm for lesson planning. Teachers appreciated how automation could handle repetitive tasks, giving

them freedom for creativity—a finding consistent with the view that "technology should amplify human capacity rather than replace it" (Stevens, 2024).

Third, some educators expressed initial anxiety about AI replacing teachers. However, discussion clarified that AI is best viewed as a *co-teacher*—a supportive assistant that can process data efficiently while educators focus on empathy, dialogue, and critical thinking. Participants concluded that effective engagement still depends primarily on relational, human teaching.

Results, Discussion and Suggestions

The results reinforce the interconnectedness between teacher motivation, student engagement, and systemic innovation. The profession's declining attractiveness, documented by UNESCO (2024, 2025) and U.S. Department of Education (2023), underscores the urgency for reform. The workshop outcomes suggest that educators are eager to embrace innovation when it is practical, ethical, and aligned with humanistic values.

In discussion, findings aligned with Robinson's (2017) argument that teachers thrive when creativity is central to their professional identity. Digital tools such as Nearpod, Gamma AI, and Brisk AI exemplify how automation and interactivity can support, rather than stifle, this creativity. Still, equitable access, digital literacy, and professional training remain barriers in some contexts.

The study suggests three recommendations:

1. **Embed digital-pedagogy training** into teacher professional development to improve competence and confidence.

2. **Adopt AI tools strategically**, focusing on engagement and feedback rather than replacing instructional design.

3. **Strengthen teacher agency**, ensuring educators co-design innovation policies within their schools.

When implemented thoughtfully, such practices could transform the current teacher crisis into an opportunity for professional renewal and deeper student engagement.

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IMPRESSIONS OF THE CONGRESS

REFLECTIONS








IMPRESSIONS OF THE CONGRESS

REFLECTIONS

"We aim to organize a non-traditional event. Many people from different sectors, different countries. It has really big potential to further collaboration."

IMPRESSIONS OF THE CONGRESS

REFLECTIONS

We can reconnect with ourself with the capacity to reflect, then to conceptualize, and then to implement it after.

IMPRESSIONS OF THE CONGRESS

REFLECTIONS

When we come together we not only acknowledge one another but we also enrich our understanding of the work that we are doing.

IMPRESSIONS OF THE CONGRESS

REFLECTIONS

We reinforce the relationships between public sector, academics, youth workers, people working at the grassroot level, and corporate or private sector.

IMPRESSIONS OF THE CONGRESS

REFLECTIONS

We have developed this capacity to design learning experiences that are impactful, meaningful, and touching people on a personal level.

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