

## INCORPORATING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN THE STUDY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

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### Abstract

*Experiential learning implies that learning happens through different experiences; either physical or emotional/mental. Experience acquired in the teaching learning process itself is not effective unless that experience is being reflected upon. This paper attempts to analyse the effectiveness of implementing experiential learning into routine English language classes of senior secondary level of CBSE. Experiential learning purposes to stimulate language and literature classes by trying to use appealing teaching approaches. The basis of experiential learning is the activity itself through which a person gains new experiences. Students feel more comfortable with their classmates and therefore team work or group work are advantageous as the children learn by interacting with their peers as well as their teachers. The teacher must be able to fill out the gap between the students' current ability and their potential ability with peer or mentor guidance. English Literature is all about life and different life experiences. It's easy for teachers to probe experiential learning through thought provoking and creative techniques. Students can compare their experiences with their characters in the book and experience a life that is of others and to reflect upon the experiences attained. It promotes interdisciplinary learning.*

**Keywords:** *Experiential Learning, Sociodrama, Reflection, Learning by doing, Critical Analysis.*

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***“Learning is experience. Everything else is just information” -Albert Einstein.***

Experiential learning is not a brand-new theory in Education as there is a famous age-old Chinese proverb that “I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I do and I understand”. The importance of experience in learning was focused more earlier and there came a paradigm shift from experience to reflection upon the experience gained through teaching learning process. The very word ‘experiential’ directly hints at experience. Experiential learning implies that learning happens through different experiences; either physical or emotional/mental. Experience acquired in the teaching learning process itself is not effective unless that

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experience is being reflected upon. There is a notion among educators that experiential learning can be effectively implemented in science subjects rather than subjects like English literature.

This paper attempts to analyse the effectiveness of implementing experiential learning into routine English language classes of senior secondary level of CBSE. However, children between the age of 16 to 18 are on the verge of adulthood and they refuse to consider themselves as children. Their adultlike logic is restricted to cognition of concrete reality. They need to have fun and feel comfortable in classrooms. Therefore, the choice of activities has to be carefully selected. Too complex activities should not be given since it tends to fail the efforts. On the other hand, too trivial tasks will make them bored. Moreover, the teacher should be sensitive to their temperaments and adjust the learning process as per their interests. The basis of experiential learning is the activity itself through which a person gains new experiences. Students feel more comfortable with their classmates and therefore team work or group work are advantageous as the children learn by interacting with their peers as well as their teachers.

Let's unpack the term 'Experiential learning' in a detailed way. It can be defined as learning through experiences. Learning is defined as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience." (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). Grasping experience refers to the process of taking in information, and transforming experience is how individuals interpret and act on that information". (Alice Y. Kolb ,7) According to Alice Kolb and David Kolb, Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) was created to provide an intellectual foundation for the practice of experiential learning responding to John Dewey's call for a theory of experience to guide educational innovation. It is a synthesis of the works of those great scholars who gave experience a central role in their theories of human learning and development. We have come to call them the "foundational scholars of experiential learning": William James, John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Carl Jung, Mary Parker Follett, Carl Rogers, and Paulo Freire.

Experiential learning purposes to stimulate language and literature classes by trying to use appealing teaching approaches. The teacher must be able to fill out the gap between the students' current ability and their potential ability with peer or mentor guidance is exactly what Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) refers to. According to Billings,

"The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) was a key construct in Lev Vygotsky's theory of learning and development. The Zone of Proximal Development is defined as

the space between what a learner can do without assistance and what a learner can do with adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. In the case of English language learners (ELLs)/Multilingual learners (MLLs), the immense potential that they bring to our classrooms is comprised of their intellectual, linguistic, and creative strengths that are waiting to be built upon. Educators must provide students appropriate learning experiences and support to help them realize their potential development.”

The gap must be filled with experiential learning. Experience by itself is, only the first step in the learning process and the experience must be followed by the vital step of reflection. Experiential learning is based on the ideals of active and reflective learning, building on previous learning experiences and requiring the personal involvement of the learner. As mentioned earlier, it also necessitates teachers to take on a diverse part in the classroom than the traditional teacher. In the classroom they have to become facilitators, guides, and helpers.

Employing experiential learning in language learning requires bringing the real life and authentic experience in the classroom. The world around us is quite different for each child in the classroom. Let's look at how experiential learning can be implemented in The Chapter, “The Third Level” written by Jack Finney. The short story is about time travelling and the insecurities that one faces in today's world. As a mentor, the teacher can bring experiential learning by asking students to think about time travelling and asked them to go back to a certain time period in our history. The students were asked to write what they experienced or encountered during that particular time period. Students came with many wonderful imaginative narratives. For example, one student wrote about the period of partition of India. He travelled to the period where he witnessed communal riots and narrated the horrors of partition. In his narrative, he describes that he met a woman and her young child hiding inside a concrete cylinder. The horror-stricken woman was holding bloodstained clothes of her husband and weeping. He tries to console them and suddenly rioters catch them and tries to kill them. He tries to save them and he falls down and when he opened his eyes, he realises that he returned to the present time. Here, the learning happened through the reflection upon the experience of partition of our country. In this, the student is able to connect with the history of our country and he develop creative and imaginative writing style. Moreover, through this activity students can reflect upon the past of our country and come up with different viewpoints.

We can introduce different techniques as a part of experiential learning like sociodrama. Sociodrama offers a simulation for life situations. Apart from role play, sociodrama provides a

challenging situation through which they have to analyse the assigned character role. This technique of experiential learning could be incorporated in the chapter, “Mother’s Day” by J.B Priestley. Students can be given a situation in which a mother asks her daughter to help her in house chores but the daughter ignores and refused to help. Ask the student to imagine to be the mother and she has to react to this situation. Different situation in connection with the play, “Mother’s Day” will be given to children and ask them to react to the imaginary situation provided. Later the teacher can help them to de-role their characters and ask them to react if they have to face such situation in real life. Let the students to reflect upon and analyse their real life reaction and the reaction they enacted. Through this the students will be able to understand the issues raised in the play, “Mother’s Day”.

Students can be involved in writing and illustrating their own versions of classic fairy tales or factual narratives. For example, in the poem, “My Mother at Sixty Six”, Kamala Das illustrates the deep relation with her mother. Students can easily relate with their own experience of their relationship with their mothers. They can easily empathise with the author through narratives about the warmth of relation with their mothers. The same can be adopted in “A Photograph” by Shirley Toulson. In senior school classes, drama or video projects can help adolescents to feel more comfortable with oral production tasks and to learn teamwork skills. “The Laburnum Top” by Ted Hughes throws light upon life through two imageries; a laburnum tree and a goldfinch. Students can easily perform the roles of the tree and the bird which helps to comprehend the poem easily. Likewise, students can be given an activity of meditation as a starter activity for the poem, “Keeping Quiet” by Pablo Neruda. In “Deep Water” by William Douglas, students can be given an activity to hold their breath till they feel their lungs to burst; to relate the experience of the author. They will be asked to write about their own fears and insecurities so that they can realise their strengths and weaknesses. Students can participate in community-based projects or form job or book clubs to assist each other with social and cultural information. This can be useful when they learn about the lives of slum children as well as the plight of children indulged in Child labour associated with “The Lost Spring: Stories of Stolen Childhood” by Anees Jung. Students can also work in small teams to design, research, and present lessons on important issues dealing with everything from coping in the new culture to writing a research paper and power-point presentations on their field of study. This can be implemented while teaching the chapter “Address” by Margo Minca and “Summer of the beautiful White Horse by William Saroyan. Research about Holocaust and Armenian genocide

will help the students to put themselves in the shoes of protagonists in their stories which makes students to reflect upon the experiences of the characters effectively.

Experiential learning is basically “experiencing by reflecting”. English Literature is all about life and different life experiences. It’s easy for teachers to probe experiential learning through thought provoking and creative techniques. Students can compare their experiences with their characters in the book and experience a life that is of others and to reflect upon the experiences attained. Simply through experiential learning, students are living another life which sometimes is relatable or different or indifferent to them. It offers opportunities for students to take initiatives and engage emotionally, socially, creatively and physically. To conclude, through experiential learning, students can benefit from different experiences and it strengthens the idea of multidisciplinary approach. It’s easy to incorporate experiential learning in the study of English literature. There is a plethora of approaches of experiential learning that could be employed in making learning of English Literature effective.

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