

ASPECTS OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING ACHIEVED DURING THE PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE STAGE

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Abstract. *Experiential learning has been the object of numerous studies over the course of time. One of the fundamental ideas that lay the foundations for this concept consists in the idea that experiencing new situations and transferring the knowledge thus obtained to new learning situations is a more efficient learning method than receiving information or applying information in artificial settings. One important particularity of experiential learning achieved during the pedagogical practice stage consists in the fact that it takes place exactly in the professional field where the future graduates are going to work. In this respect, the present paper describes an example of the use of the experiential strategy by students enrolled in the psycho-pedagogical module who make their pedagogical practice in a placement school.*

Key words: *experiential learning, pedagogical practice, placement school, experiential strategy*

INTRODUCTION

Experiential learning has been the object of many studies in the course of time. One of the grounded reasons for this is that experiential learning is the process through which knowledge is created via direct experience, that is to say "learning from experience" (ITIN, C. M., 1999). Similarly, Aristotel stated: "*The things we need to learn before doing them, we learn while doing them*" (BYNUM, W. F., PORTER, R., 2005).

Experiential learning focuses on the individual process of learning, unlike experiential education, which covers a wider area of education. *Experiential education* contains aspects like the teacher-student relation, but also larger subjects, such as the structure and objectives of education (ITIN, C. M., 1999). EZECHIL, LILIANA (2008) mentions that in experiential education, the trainer brings the trainees into the situation where they need to directly confront the reality which they must understand and which they act upon. To apply these principles in the pedagogical practice means to bring the students into the professional environment where they are going to work, thus allowing them to practice various types of professional behaviour, being in direct contact with the processes and phenomena they are studying. By training students through the direct experimentation of professional behaviour, teachers stimulate them to reflect on learning contents, to develop their knowledge and abilities, to clarify certain ideas and values. On the other hand, *experiential learning* is a concept that focuses on the individual who is learning, rather than on the relationship that is established between a trainer and the trainee. Such learning is achieved by performing what John Dewey stated at the beginning of the 20th Century when he coined the well-known expression "learn by doing".

PREDESCU, MIHAI (2006) in "*Strategii educaționale centrate pe elev [Student-centred educational strategies]*" defines experiential learning as "*a teaching strategy based on the idea that the maximum profit in learning is obtained by experimenting new situations and on the*

transfer of knowledge thus obtained to new learning situations". Moreover, experimenting different situations is a more efficient way of learning than receiving information or applying it in artificial settings. Therefore, when performing pedagogical practice activities, it would be ideal for the mentor in the application school as well as the pedagogical practice coordinator in the university to opt for an experiential type of professional formation, by facilitating direct experiences, by encouraging students to learn by acting/doing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The experiential learning theory was conceptualized by David A. Kolb in 1984, who offered a vision on the process of learning that was fundamentally different from the traditional theories that placed the individual in the passive state of information receptor. Starting from Kolb's experiential learning model, known as Experiential Learning Cycle, EXETER, D. J. (2001) describes the existence of four stages:

1. *The experiential stage* – the concrete, active stage in which the student is exposed to a learning experience;
2. *The reflexive stage* – reviewing stage – in which the student observes the consequences of one's actions and analyses the learning experience;
3. *The concluding stage*– a stage of conceptualization of the experience, based on the observation of common elements with other similar experiences;
4. *The planning stage*– an active stage, of planning and experimenting new experiences.

The four-step model of experiential learning is illustrated in the figure below.

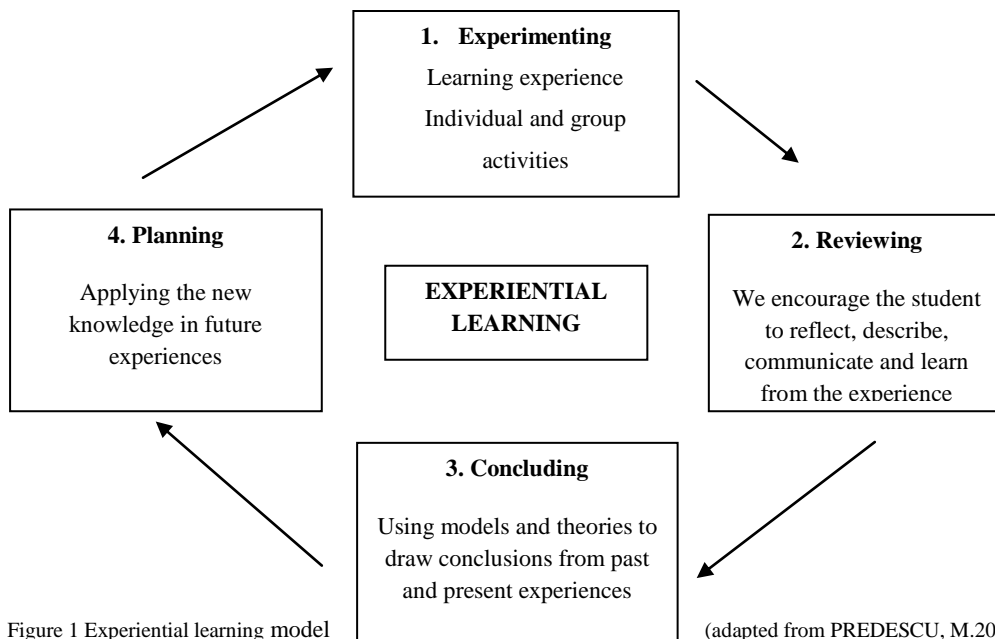


Figure 1 Experiential learning model

(adapted from PREDESCU, M.2006)

Analysing the model described above, we notice the existence of three indispensable elements:

- The learning experience;
- The period for reflection;
- The period for planning new experiences starting from the newly-learned data.

In what follows we will exemplify, by describing an experiential strategy used during the pedagogical practice stage that took place at BUASVM “RegeleMihai I al României” from Timișoara during the first semester of the 2018-2019 academic year. The third year students of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine were involved in the making of this study.

The aim of the action plan suggested by the experiential strategy used during the teaching practice stage was to enhance the students’ ability to observe their own professional approach, to analyse them and to assign personal senses and meanings in order to improve them. In this type of situation, students are stimulated to put time and effort into preparing different actions that are specific for the teaching profession, they are encouraged to reflect on the way these actions are to be performed as well as on their own behaviour as practitioners.

The experiential strategy applied involved the following stages, according to Kolb’s model:

1. *The experiential stage*: the students perform teaching activities using role play.

Role play is one of the active formation methods, being considered a very valuable coaching instrument. The method consists in simulating functions, roles, relations, activities, phenomena, conditionings, behaviours, etc. that are specific for the educational system and process. From the perspective of the teaching practice that is mediated by a mentor, role play is complementary to the trainee’s unmediated intervention in class. It is useful for reaching a variety of aims related to professional and personal development.

2. *The reflexive stage*: the students are encouraged to analyse the way in which they dealt with their teaching activity, to critically assess to what degree they respected the scenario of the teaching activity and the didactic strategy as well.

3. *The concluding stage*: the students are encouraged to explore new ways of teaching, to search for other interactive didactic strategies in the bibliography.

4. *The planning stage*: the students will plan the teaching of a lesson in the application school.

CONCLUSIONS

An important particularity of experiential learning during the teaching practice stage is that it takes place exactly in the professional field where the students are going to integrate as teachers after they graduate. With this in mind, a number of authors highlight the relevance of making the students understand how important it is for them to integrate into practical work situations, where they can establish operational correlations between academic learning and actual professional practices, through work-integrated learning (ATCHISON, M., POLLOCK, S., REEDERS, E., & RIZZETTI, J., 1999; BOUD, D., SOLOMON, N., & SYMES, C., 2001) or through experiential learning (KOLB, D., 1984).

By getting students involved in direct experimentation of professional behaviour, teachers stimulate them to reflect on the contents of learning, to develop some abilities and to see some ideas and values clearer.

The opinion of GOWING & MCGREGOR AND TAYLOR (1997) is that, by being placed in the professional environment, students:

- get a number of opportunities to test the theories they have learned, by putting them into practice;

- are introduced into the culture of the organized school setting;
- are involved in relevant professional situations.

Some of the competencies developed through experiential strategies are the following:

- self-knowledge;
- critical thinking;
- organization;
- planning and
- monitoring.

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