



# Expanded Learning Opportunities: Experiential Learning

EC485

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GUIDE

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## Lesson Goal

Children and youth in out-of-school settings reach their full potential as a result of positive youth/adult interactions, purposeful learning experiences, and safe environments.

### Nebraska School-Age and Youth Development Core Competencies

*Core Knowledge Area: Growth and Development*

- **1.5** Recognizes that youth learn and develop through experience.
- **1.8** Is aware of how youth learn and communicate with peers and adults.

*Core Knowledge Area: Learning*

- **1.2** Recognizes there is research regarding youth development and learning.
- **1.4** Recognizes the importance of youth input in creating a learning environment.

## Learner Objectives

*After completing this lesson, you will:*

- identify experiential learning techniques.
- provide purposeful and directed teaching.
- have engaged and energetic youth ready to learn.

## >> Introduction

Youth learn in a variety of ways. As adults working with youth, we need to identify youths' learning preferences, and design curriculum and materials that maximize learning.

There are several ways to evaluate youths' understanding and intake of subject material. One way to teach and involve youth in the learning process is to use "Experiential Learning". Experiential Learning is defined as "the process whereby knowledge is created through transformation of experience," according to Baker, Jensen & Kolb (2002). This learning process may be referred to as "Learning by Doing," in which youth are actively engaged in the learning process.

## >> Experiential Learning

Learning by Doing is a timeless teaching method. The avenues to use Experiential Learning can be in multiple settings, from youth organizations to traditional classrooms. The challenges of Experiential Learning are designing the environment and having youth who are open and engaged in the learning process.

*According the National 4-H Experiential Learning Fact Sheet, this type of learning occurs when:*

- youth are involved in an activity.
- youth reflect critically.
- youth determine what was useful and important to remember.



- youth use the information gained in a future activity.

*As an educator, you can support the learning by:*

- providing opportunities in which youth are intellectually stimulated and challenged.
- helping youth design real projects that make a difference to others.
- creating experiences with youth that relate to real life situations (Essential Elements of 4-H Youth Development Programs, National 4-H Council).

### Steps in Experiential Learning

Experiential Learning may be summarized in a five-step process, which is also called the Experiential Learning Model (Pfeiffer and Jones, 1983).

The steps are: **1.) Experience**, **2.) Share**, **3.) Process**, **4.) Generalize**, and **5.) Apply** (Figure 1). In education and learning, it is easy to focus on the experience. It is recommended to spend as much time on the Share, Process, Generalize and Apply as the Experience. Even though there are five steps, it is important to recognize and understand that Experiential Learning is a continuous flow. Depending on the amount of time for a project or lesson, youth may want to go back to the experience to improve or change what they did based on the information they learned from their own experience as well as others. The following provides more details for each step.

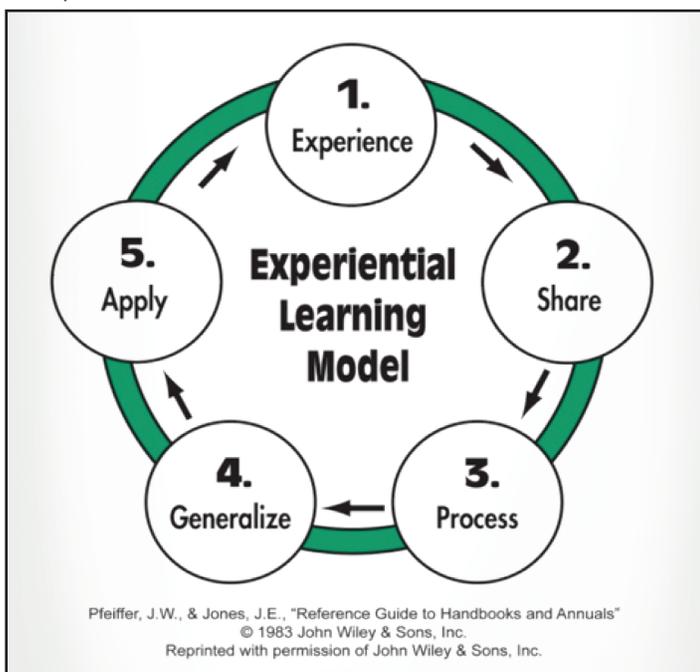


Figure 1. Experiential Learning Model

#### >> Step 1: Experience

The first step is to ensure youth are successful with the experience. Youth must have the background information and foundation to feel confident in making decisions and completing the experience.

Youth should complete the experience with minimal instruction. The experience may be done in a variety of avenues, including service learning projects, science subject material, or applied subject matter, such as nutrition or horticulture.

Another key aspect in guiding youth through the experience is not to give them the answers. Answering youths' questions with another question allows them to think, process, and dig deeper into their own answers. Youth may struggle with this format at the beginning, but it develops their problem-solving and critical-thinking skills.

#### >> Step 2: Share

In the second step, youth describe the experience and share their reaction. This is when they state just what was done or in other words, "just the facts."

Sometimes youth complete an experience or activity and have no idea what they just did. By sharing they are able to state back to the educator what just occurred.

*Possible questions to ask the youth are:*

- What did you do?
- What did you do to plan your project/experiment?
- Tell me about your favorite part of working on the project.
- Tell me about your least favorite part of working on the project.
- What surprised you?
- What was easiest?

#### >> Step 3: Process

As youth process the experience, they identify common themes and discover what was most important about the project. The goal is to have youth think broader and/or deeper about why the project was completed. During the process is when we ask questions to get the youth to come to identify or discover the skill or knowledge gained.

Possible questions for guiding the youth through processing are:

- What did you learn about yourself?
- How did you make your decisions?
- What steps did you take?
- How did others help you?
- What would you do if \_\_\_\_\_?
- What problems did you run into? How did you handle them?
- What was the most challenging part of the project? Why?
- What did you learn from this project that you didn't know before?
- Why does it matter that you did this project?
- What did you learn through sharing with others?

#### >> Step 4: Generalize

In this step, youth look at the bigger picture and relate the activity or project to their everyday life. It may take a while for the youth to digest what they just completed and think about why it is important on a larger scale.

This is a great time for teamwork and small group discussions. Conversations between youth can stimulate learning and create a comfortable sharing environment before reporting back to the larger group.

Possible questions to stimulate generalization are:

- What key points have you learned?
- What similar experiences have you had throughout this project/activity?
- Where have you faced similar challenges in your life?
- Where might this situation occur in the future?
- Why is it important to have plenty of information before making decisions?
- What did you learn about your own skills in communicating with others?

#### >> Step 5: Apply

The final step is to apply. During this step, youth are to show that they have gained new knowledge and also practice what they have learned. Youth may share how they will use the experience or skills gained in other parts of their lives.

Questions to help guide youth include:

- What did the project mean to your everyday life?
- Why was this project important to your life?
- How will you act differently in the future as a result of this experience?
- How can you use these skills or knowledge in different situations?

#### Summary

Experiential Learning can occur when educators are purposeful in directing the youth experience and take time to reflect on what was learned. Through the steps of Experience, Share, Process, Generalize, and Apply, youth are able to enhance and be engaged through their own learning.

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