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**EXPERIENTIAL PEDAGOGY IN AXIOLOGICAL APPROACH**

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*Abstract*

Down the ages, many philosophers, teachers and psychologists have focused their attention on the act of education, with all its implications, and on the concept of pedagogy. Along with defining this concept and with establishing its object of study, specialists sought to identify the most efficient ways of achieving the instructive-educative process (how the teaching, learning and assessment should be realised, which would be the most efficient learning methods for the student). Experiential pedagogy is placing in the center the pupil with his needs, aspirations and desires, participating actively in the construction of knowledge. This type of pedagogy highlights that the pupil learns better if he builds knowledge and fix it better if he understands the knowledge and if he is an active participant. Experiential pedagogy is based, as its name tells, on experience, developing its importance within the education. This type of pedagogy is, as Carl Rogers stated, person-centred pedagogy and whose aim is to acquire, share and process the experiences, to pick up the ideas and to adapt to other similar situations. Experiential pedagogy is in close relationship with another key concept: experiential learning. The latter requires active participation of pupils within some structured activities, in order to initiate the learning process. In the context of experiential learning, participants learn from and through practical experience. As a conclusion, we can state that in axiological approach, experiential pedagogy promotes the following values: the pupil-centred educational process, the knowledge building, the pupils activation, the experiential learning.

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## **1. Introduction**

For a long time it was considered that teaching and assessment are specific to the teacher, while the act of learning is characteristic to the pupil. If teaching was reduced to the transmission of knowledge, the student had the task to memorise and reproduce them later. That vision, however, was not satisfactory and therefore it was concluded that the act of learning is not about memorizing, moreover, it involves the active participation of the student - the latter is responsible for acquiring and processing new information, but also his own training and development. That's why learning styles led to the emergence of numerous varieties, at teacher's elbow, in order to create favourable conditions to the learning process, and of the student's, upon the responsibility of learning falls.

Considering all these aspects, we wonder what are the most effective ways of learning, to facilitate understanding, which involves the student and which correspond to his needs of knowledge, affective and psychomotoric. In our opinion, experiential pedagogy holds the answer. Having as the object of study the experiential type of educational process, in the centre of this kind of pedagogy lies the student with his experiences. Learning is its specific, and his experiences are the basis of the discovery of new knowledge, influencing its holistic development.

## **2. Problem Statement**

If we compare the pedagogic triangle made by Jean Houssaye (Natua Trabon, 2016) with components: knowledge, pupil, teacher - with experiential pedagogy, we add the concept of experience; there is a need to emphasize the fact that the information is not stand-alone item than in relation to experience, because they are formed on the basis of experience, through its introversion by the student.

Starting from the premise of being based on the experience of the child and in response to his needs (cognitive, affective, social, motrics), pupil participation, consciously and actively, ensures success in learning.

## **3. Research Questions**

What is the role of experiential pedagogy? What does the experiential learning mean? Why is experiential learning important? What is the relationship between teacher and child in experiential learning vision? What is the impact of experiential learning programs on the child?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the vision of experiential pedagogy, the relationship between teacher and child in experiential learning and the impact of experiential learning programs on the pupils.

## **5. Research Methods**

This theoretical work is based on specialized books and articles. These books and electronic sources have been used because they aim at defining the concepts of experiential pedagogy and experiential learning and show the importance of experiential learning activities in child development.

## **6. Findings**

### **6.1. Particularities of experiential pedagogy**

#### **6.1.1. Definition and terminology sphere**

Etymologically, the term „pedagogy” originates from the Greek words „taxonomy, pais, paidos”, which means „child” and „agoge”, meaning „driving”, the meaning of this term is to lead the evolution, the progress of the child. For Émile Durkheim (Natua Trabon, 2016), is at the same time, theory and practice: a theory for studying education systems and processes, with a view to the assessment of values, and a practice because it directs action of the educator. According to Cucuș, pedagogy studies the essence and features of the educational phenomenon, the purpose and tasks of education, its value and limitations, the content, principles, methods and forms of developing the paideutic processes (Cucuș, 2006). Currently, pedagogy is regarded as the science which studies, conceptualize, explains, examines and presents in descriptive and normative terms the essence and features of the educational phenomenon (organized and conducted for the purpose of formation and modeling human personality, according to the educational ideals), the goals of education and its major tasks, the value and the limits of education, instructive-educative contents, pedagogical principles, educational strategies, methods, forms of organisation and conduct of educational processes (Bocoș, & Jucan, 2017).

In our opinion, experiential pedagogy is the pedagogical science which studies, explains, structures, systematizes and enhances the learning experiences of individuals, for the purpose of training and development of human personality, in accordance with the educational ideal. If the overall objective is shaping the personality of pupils, we may specify as the specific objective the facilitation of understanding and optimization of the learning process through the active involvement of the pupil.

The learning experience, as a basic element in the experiential pedagogy, is defined as the personalized manner of learning situation introversion, the personal experience generated by a learning situation, feeling that it can be set as objective in the amendments to the cognitive, affective or psychomotoric structures (Bocoș, 2016). At the base of learning experience we find both aspects of the knowledge structures and the needs, interests and aspirations of students; experiential pedagogy draws attention to the fact that it is important not only what we learn (knowledge), but also how we learn.

#### **6.1.2. Axiological dimension of experiential pedagogy**

Experiential pedagogy targets, at the micro level, assumption of learning situation responsibility by the pupil. The teacher guides the pupil and puts him in different learning situations, so the student is the one that builds his knowledge. In addition to the idea of being responsible for the result obtained, it aims at giving a sense to the new ideas obtained – so that the student could see their need and applicability (they will be the basis for future ideas).

Conrad and Hedin (Pruneau & Lapointe, 2002, para. 1) have interviewed 4000 students enrolled at 33 experiential learning programs to know the impact of these programs. Researchers have identified positive outcomes on both the psychological development of students (growing self-esteem and interest for school, autonomy and moral reasoning), and social and intellectual development of participants (the feeling of responsibility and social competence, more optimistic attitude, desire for social involvement, the feeling that they learned more, a better problem-solving capacity). Experiential pedagogy encourages

the development of someone in all aspects (psychic, socio-emotional and attitudinal), therefore it aims to increase self-confidence and the formation and development of better skills of networking with each other. It is considered that the pleasure generated by real experiences increases the motivation of pupils and reduce stress and social barriers. This kind of pedagogy encourages assumption of risk and errors that may occur in the act of learning. It also aims at developing the spirit of initiative, responsibility and critical thinking. However, the specific tasks of experiential pedagogy requires more preparation time, because it is desirable that each participant can learn independently.

Experiential pedagogy stimulates the student, being an active participant in his own training process, it allows to discover himself (to identify the skills and abilities, to know the limits and to try to overcome them) and it empowers him, while encouraging to find solutions to their own problem-situations.

### **6.1.3. Experiential pedagogy in the context of Romanian education and at european level**

Based on learning through experience, experiential pedagogy is not too common in the romanian education system. The activities and programs of experiential pedagogy are conducted outside of schools, in nature as a rule, by a staff-prepared for that purpose. Although researches show that they have a positive impact on the pupils, they remain more or less detached from the traditional activities. Activities proposed by these specialized institutions aimed at people of different ages, not limited to the school period. Outward Bound Romania organizes a program for teachers across the country, called the „Academy of Experiences” (two sessions in 2017). This program is an outdoor training in experiential pedagogy adapted to teachers and it aimed at developing methodological palette of teachers, along with awareness of efficiency of the game and holistic activities. The „Academy of Experiences” aims at introducing participants into experiential learning methods and efficiency (Outward Bound România, 2018).

Regarding the activity in the classroom, teachers prefer to conduct common teaching activities, so that the student is not trained in his own education and training through the experience. Experiential pedagogy involves designing, organizing and conducting activities that require a longer period of preparation, more time, more varied teaching materials, sometimes even greater responsibility of the teachers (for activities outside the lecture halls).

At European level, there are schools based on experiential pedagogy. In Germany Salem International College (college for an extra charge) is an educational institution being founded by Kurt Hahn, a pioneer of experiential education. This college is bilingual, with activities taking place in English and German. Because this school teaches international students, the emphasis is put on internationalism. Students are prepared for both of the examination: German Baccalaureate and International Baccalaureate. Within this school it is emphasized the holistic development of the pupil, so he might be prepared for further studies at the University, regardless of the chosen speciality.

We note that in educational systems in Europe there are schools based on the principles of experiential pedagogy. In our country this would be more difficult, primarily because of the costs. Secondly, it is important to have continuity between undergraduate educational system and University. In the countries on the continent where such schools function, there are registered students from all over the

world and there is an evaluation system recognized outside the country too, which doesn't fold on our education systems. Despite the fact that our education system is not at the level of those from abroad, experiential pedagogy is also accessible in our country. We believe that the systematic conduct of some experiential type activities would optimize the instructive-educational process, would increase pupils' motivation for learning, would increase pupils' confidence in their own forces and would provide the chance to succeed more often in learning.

## **6.2. Experiential learning, a premise for quality**

The theory of experiential learning has a different approach on the process of learning compared to classical theories of education, where pupils are regarded as passive receivers of information. Within experiential learning, a very important role belongs to the active participation of learners, their involvement in the act of learning.

If the behaviorists theories consider learning process as a behavioural response to the action taken on the pupil, such as stimulus-response, or trial and error, and cognitivist theories aim at assimilating abstract symbols and working with these, experiential learning emphasise, as its name tells, the major importance of experience within the learning process. This type of learning presents an integrative vision of learning, which valorizes the experience, perception, knowledge and behaviour.

Confucius said "Tell me and I'll forget. Show me and I'll remember. Involve me and I'll understand!". Analyzing this Chinese proverb, we can highlight the overwhelming role of the experience in learning. According to statistics, we remember: 20% of what we hear, 30% of what we see and 90% of what we do. Involvement, active participation of the child thus becomes the key to understanding and the way to knowledge.

In experiential learning, the teacher's role is to guide the child, ensuring an active dialogue between them. In the process of learning there are valorize personal experiences and personal development, learning being organized around them.

In order to have a successful activity, it is necessary to create a warm atmosphere, charged emotionally and safe. The atmosphere created from the beginning of the learning process influences positively or negatively the success of the work carried out. In the light of the fact that previous experiences of the child underlie the future ones, evolutionary, the learning process must be conducted according to the child's experience, his values, ideas, feelings and attitudes.

Another defining aspect of experiential learning is experiential freedom. This requires the free manifestation of the child, i.e. its recognition as it is. He is not bound to change his ideas and attitudes to avoid his assessment after certain rules.

To the teacher belongs the responsibility, besides ensuring the psychosocial safe climate, to demonstrate in his relationship with the child, empathy, trust, respect, tolerance, so that the child should have the opportunity to discover himself with confidence.

### **6.2.1. Conceptual details**

As indicated by the name, experiential learning is based on experience. The term “experience” comes from the Latin “experiential”, which derives from the verb “experiri” and means “to make attempts, to make someone try”.

Experiential learning presents an relatively recently approach of the learning process, with John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Kurt Hahn, Jean Piaget, David Kolb as predecessors. If to Piaget learning is a permanent adaptation, to Kolb learning is the process wherewith knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.

Along the time, there were used different terms to name the process of learning through experience. John Dewey spoke about „learning by doing”, while Wolfe and Byrne (Gentry, 1990) have used the concept of „experience-based learning”. Learning by trial and error attempts to explain inductive learning processes. AACSB International-the Association of Business Advanced Academic Schools used the term of „applied experiential learning”, combining learning from real-life situations with the application of concepts, ideas and theories of interactive environment. AACSB has defined „applied experiential learning” as interactive approach of a curriculum concerning business (other than the interactions between teacher and student), characterized by variability and questionable character. Rogers (Gentry, 1990) has defined the essence of experiential learning as follows: a quality of personal involvement – the person as she is in affective and cognitive aspect – within the learning process. From this definition, Hoover (Gentry, 1990) has expressed his opinion, stating that experiential learning involves more than cognitive learning, aspect emphasized by the education management. In addition to Rogers's affection, Hoover highlighted behavioral learning. Later, Hoover and Whitehead offered a new definition of „experiential learning” concept: experiential learning exists when the responsible participant processes knowledge from cognitive, affective and behavioral view, skills and / or attitudes into a learning situation, characterized by a high level of active involvement. Starting from Hoover's definitions, features of this type of learning have emerged, such as participatory aspect and being in contact with the environment; these defining terms attempt to combine the learning process with the content of learning and emphasize the ways in which it is achieved (not only what is learned is important, but how this process is done).

Experiential learning process involves, after Kolb (Vlaicu-Popa, 2009), transactions between person and environment. This relationship aimed at double meaning of the term „experience”: a personal meaning, which refers to the inner state of the person and a objective sense that is related to the external environment. Experience is a game of interaction between the internal and external conditions, as Dewey said. If Dewey defines experience as an interaction, Kolb manifests a preference for the term „transaction”, highlighting exchanges carried out between the internal and external conditions - they affect each other.

### **6.2.2. Experiential learning in contemporaneity – multidimensional analysis**

At present, the educational programs that are based on experiential learning are attracting more and more followers. Firstly this is because of active and attractive character of the proposed activities.

Viewed as complementary academic knowledge, they regard changes changes in the whole personality - knowledge, attitudes, behaviours.

The proposed learning activities are designed to facilitate practical experience and reflection on them. Supporters of this type of learning highlight the importance of opening up to the new and of changing the individual, given that the proposed activities come to meet its needs (knowledge, emotional, psychomotric). Therefore, the person involved in the act of learning is the person who carries out the assessment (notes progress and records successes).

In experiential learning, the teacher has the role of optimizing the act of learning, creating the necessary conditions for a good conducting of the activity. The teacher does not only transmit knowledge, but becomes a facilitator in changing old ideas in line with new ones. He provides the resources needed for the pupil, shares opinions, empathizes with him, guides him when he encounters difficulties.

In our country, operates two programs set up by Kurt Hahn: Outward Bound and The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award (established with the help of HRH Prince Philip and John Hunt).

Outward Bound Romania was founded in 1993 as a member of the world Organization Outward Bound International and it is an organization that plans and carries out outdoor activities. It aims to help persons to discover and develop their potential through challenging experiences carried out in nature, and demanding both physically and mentally and emotionally. Relying on what its founder stated – „We are better than we think, and if someone would make us to realize this, we never settle for less.”, the organization encourages participants to accept and resolve challenging tasks, to overcome personal limits, because „it's in them more than they think,” as Kurt Hahn said (James, 2000). Outward Bound Romania is gaining more and more supporters due to the diversity of the target groups; Thus, the organization has programs for schools (pupils aged between 7 and 18 years, the proposed activities taking place on the levels of age), for companies, for adults (between 18 and 30 years of age and for teachers) and for families. Because the activities aimed at both educational aspect, and recreation, they are greatly appreciated (in more than 20 years of existence, about 30,000 young people have participated in the programs proposed).

The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Romania is a personal development program, targeting young people aged 14-24. In Romania, this program was introduced in 1991 by Sister Agnes in the Roman-Catholic Parish of Motru, and was carried out at the local level by 2011. Starting this year, the program was extended and implemented in several cities in the country . From June 2013, the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Romania is supported by His Royal Highness Princess Margaret of Romania. This program focuses on the personal development of the young person, each of them having the task to set goals and activities according to the chosen level (Bronze, Silver, Gold) and with the help of a Leader Award. Each of the three levels contains four sections (Personal Skills, Physical Activities, Volunteering, Adventure); to complete the Gold level, there is also the Residential Project section. Although it is a program much wider than those proposed by Outward Bound, it has a fairly high number of participants per time period (more than 2,000 young people have participated since 2013), which indicates the inclination of young people towards this kind of activities (The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award România, 2017).

Because it aims at developing the individual as a person, experiential learning activities are designed to help the person in the process of self-discovery. Taking into account that they correspond to the needs of the person, it increase the motivation and active involvement, new strategies and creative potential are being developed.

As we have seen, at present, experiential learning activities take place outside the Romanian education system. Experiential learning programs are complementary to traditional didactic activities, but we believe that such activities can be successfully integrated and implemented in the children/ pupils' school program at different levels of education. Of course, this kind of activities can not be carried out daily (the programs of each educational subject are required to be fully covered and school time is limited, experiential learning activities require a lot of time and preparation from the teacher), but they can take place systematically, with the whole class, especially where the topic encourages this (there are subjects whose understanding and learning are facilitated through this type of activity). Considering that the experiential type activities involve exit from daily routine, participants will be more than happy to join in. Adding the fact that it has many benefits in the holistic development of the participating pupil, we support the planning, organization and conducting of experiential learning activities at all levels of education, of course adapted to age and individual peculiarities.

## 7. Conclusion

Experiential pedagogy has many benefits on the pupil: targets his active participation, develops autonomy, increases confidence and self-esteem, encourages a positive attitude, increases the sense of responsibility, it occurs more pregnant the desire for social involvement, increases learning motivation and desire for knowledge. With all these advantages, teachers don't often opt for experiential learning. Among its disadvantages we identify its longer time period for preparing the activity (even if the act of learning is the responsibility of the pupil, the teacher is the one who guides him and offers support in difficult moments).

Even though the preparation and conduct of some experiential type activities imply more time, effort and involvement from the teacher, we recommend to carry them at all educational levels, sistematically, taking into account the characteristics of the age and personal needs of pupils. The success of learning changes pupil's perception on it, results being observed not only in the cognitive sphere, but also in the socio-emotional, behavioural and attitudinal one.

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