

What is Experiential Education?

Tell me and I will forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me and I will understand. ~Chinese Proverb

Defining the work we do, the values we hold and the principles that guide us is part of the experience of being a life-long learner and an active member of the Association for Experiential Education. We invite our members, educators and practitioners to engage in the ongoing conversation about what defines experiential education. **To begin the conversation, AEE offers the following:**

Experiential education is a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills and clarify values.

Am I an Experiential Educator? Experiential educators include teachers, camp counselors, corporate team builders, therapists, challenge course practitioners, environmental educators, guides, instructors, coaches, mental health professionals . . . and the list goes on. An experiential educator is anyone who teaches through direct experience.

The principles¹ of experiential education practice are:

0. Experiential learning occurs when carefully chosen experiences are supported by reflection, critical analysis and synthesis.
0. Experiences are structured to require the learner² to take initiative, make decisions and be accountable for results.
0. Throughout the experiential learning process, the learner is actively engaged in posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative, and constructing meaning.
0. Learners are engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially, soulfully and/or physically. This involvement produces a perception that the learning task is authentic.
0. The results of the learning are personal and form the basis for future experience and learning.
0. Relationships are developed and nurtured: learner to self, learner to others and learner to the world at large.

- . The educator³ and learner may experience success, failure, adventure, risk-taking and uncertainty, because the outcomes of experience cannot totally be predicted.
- 0. Opportunities are nurtured for learners and educators to explore and examine their own values.
- 0. The educator's primary roles include setting suitable experiences, posing problems, setting boundaries, supporting learners, insuring physical and emotional safety, and facilitating the learning process.
- 0. The educator recognizes and encourages spontaneous opportunities for learning.
- 0. Educators strive to be aware of their biases, judgments and pre-conceptions, and how these influence the learner.
- 0. The design of the learning experience includes the possibility to learn from natural consequences, mistakes and successes.
 - 1) The priority or order in which each professional places these principles may vary.
 - 2) There is no single term that encompasses all the roles of the participant within experiential education. Therefore, the term "learner" is meant to include student, client, trainee, participant, etc.
 - 3) There is no single term that encompasses all the roles of the professional within experiential education. Therefore, the term "educator" is meant to include therapist, facilitator, teacher, trainer, practitioner, counselor, etc.