

THE GLOBAL JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES

A Peer Reviewed International Journal

Editors

Dr. Mitul Trivedi

Dr. R. Ganesan

Dr. S. Gandhimathi

Special Issue
Conference Proceedings

EMERGING APPROACHES AND METHODS IN
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (EAMELT)

Jointly organised by :
Kongu Engineering College, Perundurai
The Global Association of English Studies
All India Network of English Teachers

An official Journal of

**GLOBAL
ASSOCIATION OF
ENGLISH
STUDIES**

CONNECT | COLLABORATE | CONTRIBUTE

It's a Linguanation Publication

Volume II, Issue 1,
February 2016

Promoting Experiential Learning As Active Learning In English Language Classroom

C. Masilamani

Assistant Professor
Department of English,
Karunya University
Coimbatore, **INDIA.**

Dr. J. Sundaesingh

Professor & Head
Department of English
Karunya University
Coimbatore, **INDIA.**

Abstract

Active learning shifts the focus from the teacher and her delivery of course content to the student and his active engagement with the material. Through active learning techniques and modeling by the teacher, students shed the traditional role as passive receptors and learn and practise how to apprehend knowledge and skills and use them meaningfully. Experiential learning, or active learning, interactive learning, or “learning by doing” has resulted in positive outcomes. Most experts agree that when students take an active role in the learning process the student's learning is optimized (Smart & Csapo, 2007). ELT defines learning 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). The experiential learning model is a cyclical process of learning experiences. For effective learning to transpire, the learner must go through the entire cycle. The four stage learning model depicts two polar opposite dimensions of grasping experience– concrete experience (CE) and abstract conceptualization (AC), and two polar opposite dimensions of transforming experience – reflective observation (RO) and active experimentation (AE). Experiential learning is a process of constructing knowledge that involves a creative tension among the four learning abilities. The learner must continually choose which set of learning abilities to use in a specific learning situation.

Introduction

Active learning shifts the focus from the teacher and her delivery of course content to the student and his active engagement with the material. Through active learning techniques and modeling by the teacher, students shed the traditional role as passive receptors and learn and practice how to apprehend knowledge and skills and use them meaningfully. Experiential learning, or active learning, interactive learning, or “learning by doing” has resulted in positive outcomes. Most experts agree that when students take an active role in the learning process the student’s learning is optimized (Smart & Csapo, 2007). ELT defines learning 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). The experiential learning model is a cyclical process of learning experiences. For effective learning to transpire, the learner must go through the entire cycle. The four stage learning model depicts two polar opposite dimensions of grasping experience – concrete experience (CE) and abstract conceptualization (AC), and two polar opposite dimensions of transforming experience – reflective observation (RO) and active experimentation (AE). Experiential learning is a process of constructing knowledge that involves a creative tension among the four learning abilities. The learner must continually choose which set of learning abilities to use in a specific learning situation.

Best Practices in Experiential Learning

"Experiential learning occurs when individuals engage in some activity, reflect upon the activity critically, derive some useful insight from the analysis and incorporate the result through a change in understanding and/or behaviour" (deVilder, pp. 1-3). Wurdinger (2005) found that his students absorbed the reading more easily when he introduced some direct experiences first. "This approach proved to be much more effective," he wrote. "When students began reading and discussing the books during the latter part of the semester, they were lively and excited. 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". Experiential learning is more motivating to students than traditional lecture methods. "Educators may try to force students to learn by threatening them with quizzes and tests, or they might try to 'sugarcoat' a lesson by offering external rewards, but when students are given freedom to design their own experiences, they have a tendency to take more ownership in their learning. This often presents a situation where motivation becomes intrinsic" (Wurdinger, p. 18). "To help curb apathetic attitudes toward learning, educators should use a learning process that begins with problems and questions to

be solved instead of a learning process that begins with information to be remembered" (Wurdinger, p. 51).

Experiential learning can also be defined by the qualities it imparts on its learners. Successful experiential learners have a willingness to reorder or alter their conception of a topic. They can reason for themselves and are able to successfully explain their position. They have clarity of purpose with tasks they undertake, and the self-management skills necessary to work successfully both alone and in a group. Experiential learners are aware of the "rules" governing their discipline or mode of operation, but are also open-minded, and able to work with people with different views. Finally, experiential learners are in control of their voice—they can identify the role of emotion in their learning, as well as reflect on how they have come to their new knowledge (Moon, 2004, p. 163).

Active learning approaches, especially experiential and co-operative learning, provide excellent opportunities for differentiation. Indeed, one could argue that all learner-centred strategies, by definition, facilitate differentiation. This approach involves engaging learners in an authentic, first hand experience that allows them to make discoveries and experiment, construct meaning and develop understanding. It is sometimes referred to more loosely as 'learning by doing' or 'active learning'. Experiential learning is based on a constructivist theory of learning. The learner develops a model of how the world works by relating new knowledge to existing knowledge. The theory explains how mistakes lead to learning. Mistakes arise when we encounter a new experience that does not fit with previous experience. This makes us check and refine our understanding. The result is deep learning, rather than the shallow learning that results when we learn by rote. Experiential learning leads to affective (feeling), as well as cognitive (thinking) learning. It can be a powerful approach for developing empathy and changing attitudes.

Active Learning Strategies

The educational procedure of implementing a wide range of activities that involve students in meaningful things *and* thinking about the things that they are doing is referred to as the use of active learning strategies (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Prince, 2004). Active learning strategies are essential for enhancing student learning. In a meta-analysis of research on active learning strategies, Prince (2004) reported the following benefits:

- ❖ Significantly improves short-term and long-term recall of information
- ❖ Significantly improves student academic performance
- ❖ Increases conceptual understandings (twice as much as compared to a traditional course)
- ❖ Improves retention in academic programs
- ❖ Increases student attention
- ❖ Promotes student engagement
- ❖ Addresses students' misconceptions
- ❖ Develops enhanced critical thinking skills
- ❖ Improves students' self-esteem
- ❖ Improves interpersonal relationships
- ❖ Improves teamwork skills

When creating or selecting teaching strategies and learning activities in language diverse classrooms, teachers should consider four language domains(Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004)

1. Reading: students are able to comprehend written or printed material/information, such as letters, numbers, figures, and signs.
2. Writing: students are able to communicate information in written or printed words.
3. Listening: students are able to actively comprehend oral language from a variety of speakers.
4. Speaking: students are able say words, talk, express ideas, and converse in a variety of settings.

There are many active teaching strategies and learning activities that can be effectively used in a language diverse health education classroom. This chapter section names, describes, and gives examples of several active teaching strategies and learning activities that can support many health education learning objectives. The activities are listed in alphabetical order. Each activity includes a brief description and example. When necessary, teachers are encouraged to adjust and modify these activities to better meet specific student needs and their targeted student learning objectives (Bergs, 2005).

Designing Classroom Activities

In experiential classrooms, “students can process real-life scenarios, experiment with new behaviors, and receive feedback in a safe environment. Experiential learning assignments help students relate

theory to practice and analyze real-life situations in light of course material”(Lewis & Williams, 1994, p. 8).

To help structure classroom activities, Wurdinger suggests Dewey’s “pattern of inquiry.” The reason this pattern of inquiry is so effective is that “thinking occurs not only after an experience, but also throughout the entire experience.” The pattern begins with a student’s inquiry into a problem. The student then develops a plan to address the problem, tests their plan against reality, and then applies what they’ve learned to create a solution. The experiential component of this model is the application of knowledge (2005, p. 8).

When implementing an activity using the pattern of inquiry, remember that the activity should be student-centered. The activity should be hands-on, and require the students to solve a problem that is relevant to their lives. Student interest is critical—students must be able to design their activity, not feel that it has been assigned to them: “Projects are more meaningful than tests because students must think, plan, and execute their ideas to produce something from their own creativity” (Wurdinger, 2005, p. 13). According to Wurdinger, there are some key things to keep in mind when implementing classroom activities:

1. The importance of being able to make mistakes: Students are accustomed to being penalized for making mistakes. Instructors in an experiential classroom must work hard to overcome the stigma attached to mistakes by actively celebrating them as opportunities for learning. “Allowing students to make mistakes may also lead to a situation where they retain more information because it is a more challenging learning process” (2005, p. 9).

2. The importance of personal relevance: Discover what the students are interested in, and then select the appropriate problems. “When interest is internal, as opposed to being forced, students become both emotionally and intellectually invested in the learning process” (2005, p. 18).

3. The importance of students understanding why they are doing something: If the student cannot see the reason behind their project, or do not see why they are involved, they may not learn anything at all.

4. The importance of matching students with appropriate activities: In experiential learning, the means are as important as the ends, therefore it is of utmost importance that students stay engaged throughout the whole process. “Not enough challenge may result in boredom, and too much challenge may result in frustration”—in both cases, engagement will drop and learning will cease (2005, p. 19).

5. The importance of students reflecting on their experience: This step is tied to the previous one—reflection, along with driving questions from the instructor, will help students maintain interest, learn successfully, and complete their tasks.

6. The importance of the instructor delegating authority to the students: In experiential learning, the instructor serves as a guide and a resource to students, rather than as a leader. “This does not mean teachers withdraw from power by denouncing their authority... Instead, the teacher needs to use the respect and position they enjoy at the onset of class to promote student empowerment” (Warren, 1995, p. 250).

The following activities can be promoted to develop experiential learning as active learning.

Brainstorming is a simple strategy designed to draw out numerous, creative, original, imaginative, innovative, resourceful, and inventive ideas. These may be responses to health-related open-ended questions, issues, or problems. Teachers should encourage all students to participate. In language diverse classrooms, some students may feel more comfortable responding as part of a small team of students. Because the intent of brainstorming is to solicit lots of ideas, no students should be criticized for their idea(s). Sometimes it helps to set an appropriate target number of ideas, such as eight, when asking, for ex-ample, what lifestyle habits can cause premature death. Another strategy to use when students are having difficulty generating ideas is to reverse the statement (e.g., premature death is caused by what lifestyle habits?)

Building Teamwork is a strategy that asks small groups of students to pre-prepare a group resume consisting of items such as hobbies, talents, travel, awards, favorite classes, schools attended, siblings, and any other information a student wishes to share. This strategy is designed to show the diversity of experiences and abilities in the class. In addition to the general categories listed above, health-related questions focusing on items such as favorite foods, sports, other fitness activities, past injuries, and other related topics could be included.

Cooperative Learning is a strategy that involves small groups of students working together to complete a health-related project or task. Teachers using this instructional strategy often assign specific roles, duties, and tasks to specific group members. The grouping configuration may be random, voluntary, or teacher assigned. Grouping configurations should change frequently throughout the term. Teachers should appropriately group students based on the group task and student abilities. See Chapter 11, Cooperative Learning, for additional information and examples.

Outcome Sentences are often used following videos or guest speakers. Ask students to complete a couple of questions such as I learned . . . , I was surprised. . . , I'm feeling . . . , or I would like to learn more about

Picture Making is similar to a graphic organizer. The teacher selects a health-related concept or information that could be visually illustrated. Small groups of students create a visual illustration of the information or concept on the board or paper. When completed, groups share and discuss their illustrations with other groups or the entire class. For example, the health-related concept could be: children inherit genetic traits from their parents.

Pre-reading Predictions is a strategy that allows the students, individually or in small groups, to make predictions about an upcoming reading assignment. For example, a teacher may select and share a few unfamiliar words from the reading and ask students to predict what the reading is about. Terms such as pathogen, incubation, prognosis, host, and immune might be selected.

Problem-Based Learning is a strategy where a problem drives the learning. Students are presented with a problem prior to learning the problem-associated knowledge or skill. Students must then decide and find the information they need to solve the problem. Sample problem: What are the best ways to reduce adolescent tobacco use?

Role Playing is a common strategy where the teacher asks several students to take on the roles of participants in the health-related situations being studied. This strategy can be used to demonstrate problem-solving and decision-making skills. Depending on the topic, the role-play can be spontaneous, or students might need some time to prepare. In more elaborate role-plays, students may require a few days to research and prepare for their roles. It is often important to remind students of the specific purpose of this activity.

Conclusion

Active learning is all about student engagement in health education topics and issues. Active learning is almost any learning experience other than independently and passively reading, completing a worksheet, or listening to a lecture. During active student learning, the role of the teacher changes from leader and presenter to coach and facilitator. Active student learning implies that students are doing most of the work. They are taking a greater responsibility for their own work and learning. In language diverse classrooms, students should have frequent and multiple opportunities to read, write, listen, and speak in the context of health education content.

Lesson activities can be modified to more appropriately meet student needs and abilities. Modification techniques include increasing or decreasing the language rigor, increasing or decreasing the independence rigor, and/or increasing product options.

Reference

Bonwell, C.C., and J.A.Eison,” Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom”, ASHEERIC Higher Education Report No.1, George Washington University, Washington, DC,1991.

Lewis, L.H. & Williams, C.J. (2004). *Experiential Learning: A New Approach* . San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Moon, J.A. (2004). *A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning : Theory and Practie*. New York: RoulledgeFalmer.

Smart, K.L. & Csapo, N. (2007) Learning by doing: Engaging students through learner-centered activities. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 70. (4), 451-457

Wurdinger,S.D.(2005). *Using Experiential Learning in the Classroom*. Lanham: Scarecrow Education.