

# **In Favour of Experiential Learning: An Endeavour Alluding to Students' Cognitive Milieu**

Rizki Febri Andika Hudori<sup>37</sup>

***Abstract:** This retrospective article portrays the endeavor associating the learning of language and of subject matter under the philosophy of experiential learning. Specifically, it seeks to point out how the adopted framework aids English instructors to embolden and sustainably propel junior high school students cognitively to learn English. The cognition manifests itself as a crux which in this case is perceived as the uttermost issue. It is due to the psychological characteristics of the students, which is mainly pertinent to their limitation to deal with the abstract, that numerous favourable strategies attending to experiential learning are seen to be mostly doable and helpful. Relying on the pedagogical premise, the English instructors are enabled to bestow powerful impetus arousing students' motivation through fostering their exuberant involvement in the classroom orchestra.*

***Key words:** experiential learning, cognition, and involvement*

## **INTRODUCTION**

These days, it is easy to enlist plethora of innovations and discoveries since teaching poses magnitude intricacies when dealing with students, be they young, adolescence, or adult. Dealing with any of those students accordingly demands distinctive approach, method, and technique. Of the utmost demand upon teaching across ages, be it sociopolitical, institutional, or pedagogical demand, is the imperative demand in which teachers are to be aptly sensitive and creative in orchestrating their teaching scenario, a very crucial philosophy which I assume to be intricate yet encouraging. Without multitude teaching principles and, more importantly, the insight, ability, and intuition to implement them, it is unlikely that teachers are able to end up their class with desired fruition.

In conjunction with any possibly adopted teaching philosophies, another multi-dimension tenet is to be taken into account, the twelve teaching principles. It seems to be hardly favourable to discern the notion above with regard to Brown (2007:63) who expounds that by perceiving and internalizing connections between practices and theories, teachers are more likely to engage in the so called enlightened teaching. Teachers, when facing all the emerging complexities, are to attend to plethora of cognitive, linguistic and socio-affective tenets. Teaching, to me, accordingly might be interpreted as the conundrum of appropriately and successfully plunging into students' world and sustainably sparking, amplifying, and paving their zeal for learning toward desired trajectory.

## **PERSONAL-RETROSPECTIVE PEDAGOGICAL SOLICITUDE**

This narrative, or narrative like as I assume myself, was initially triggered by my experience in handling an English program held by an English course, GET Jember (Global English Training), and SMPN 1 Panji as both coordinator and instructor. The program was designed to teach several subject matters in English: Mathematics, Biology, Physics, Geography, and IT, which I considered greatly laborious for the first graders of junior high

---

<sup>37</sup> An English Lecturer, UPT BSMKU, University of Jember

school. Empirically, based on the placement test, most of them had fairly rudimentary mastery of English, which was strongly delineated in the speaking test during which they had utmost difficulty. The written test result also reflected modicum mastery in English.

All the sudden, it was again convincingly attested for the students faced massive perplexity when embarking on joining the program. Hardly ever could they cope with “packing” of the subject matter, imposing the instructor to attend to code switching all the time. All these afflictions, as what I was afraid of, appeared to debilitate their motivation to learn English. There was a salient mismatch between what the instructors assumed to be right and what the students desired, propelling me to embark on an odyssey for the panacea.

The dualism of instructional venture at this juncture eventually seemed to pose the utmost of its challenge. Students got more frustrated and eventually impinged to take charge of their learning that they demanded to have literally out-of-track activities, consolation. Nothing was able to retrieve their zeal, but games and songs. It was about to come to a complete fiasco, I supposed, for most of the class hours was devoted for nothing, except dalliance. The empirics aroused me to attend to the twelve teaching principles under which I scaffold the forthcoming instructional framework.

### **ATTENDING TO THE TEACHING PRINCIPLES: DEALING WITH THE COGNITIVE REALM**

What I eventually took issue with constituted the inevitable cognitive facets, i.e. intrinsic motivation, meaningful learning, automaticity, strategic investment, autonomy, and anticipation of reward. However, based on what urgently occurred as the salient crux, I was focally nudged to attend to four nuances of cognitive realm, i.e. motivation, meaningful learning, strategic investment, and autonomy. Inward in nature, I foresaw that automaticity was of periphery as it was only gained when students had undergone intensive instruction and finally derived ample linguistic input, which I presupposed to be virtually arduous, if not absurd, to establish on the onset of instruction. Subsequently, anticipation of reward, to my best knowledge, was again of periphery since it hardly alludes to students’ cognitive process in that it focally solicitudes the external impetus toward language learning. Chomsky in Stern (1983:300) criticizes the underlying theories of Behaviourism, which I consider to have strong entailment toward anticipation of reward in that such anticipation explicitly seeks to pave students’ habit to desired outcome

Spurred by the empirical intricacy, I was initially led to flirt with the first notion, meaningful learning, for it was obviously what was missing during the class hours. Culturally speaking, the students found it rather odd to learn English. They had yet to discover the need to learn English, clearly explicating why there was feeble zeal to learning English. This first guide-mark led me to search what was interesting to them and what they wanted most, which later set a crucial milestone prettifying the whole instructional framework.

Having discovered the most decisive construct, this odyssey led me to another tack by which I came up with the notion of intrinsic motivation. Empirically, kindling students’ motivation toward learning was slightly absurd, eventually tugging me to transcend the obvious. This, as Brown (2000:59) asserts, was owing to the absence of needs, desires, or wants within oneself. He convincingly puts a sound basis intimating that the development of

intrinsic motivation does involve affective dimension. Thus, it seems to be naïve to overlook the affective essence within intrinsic motivation.

The last two facets, strategic investment and autonomy, were somewhat more arduous yet of the most decisive construct to rear. Particularly for achieving long term goal, these two cruxes were unequivocally inextricable. Firstly, slightly alluding to idiosyncrasy, strategic investment, as Brown (2007:69) expounds, puts a sound basis for adept mastery of the second language. This basis centres mainly on learner’s investment of time, effort, and attention to the second language in the form of an individualized battery of strategies for comprehending and producing the language. Autonomy secondly was also considered congruent with strategic investment. What was sought also implicated how to foster students to take charge of and sustain their learning beyond classroom and teacher. Of utmost expectation was students’ speaking the language inside and outside classroom, which was the most laborious endeavour. At last, all these cornerstones alluded me to an enlightenment toward the very hardship.

**ALLUDING TO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING**

Being joyously enlightened, I then nudged the concept of experience, a realm in which students were liberated to orchestrate and live their learning themselves. Contingently, this initial clue seemed to fit into the complicacy. Brown (2007:291) in his very comprehensive book justifies such learning as including activities that engage both right and left hemispheres, that contextualize language, that comprise direct encounter to subject matter being learnt, that integrate skills, and that lead toward authentic real world purposes. The bottom line in heading the barriers off was in experiencing the language instead of merely talking about it. This was the point at which experiential learning came into play. English, being the core of learning, was integrated within numerous physically engaging activities, some of which constituted role-plays, simulations, demonstration, game, and competition. That astute premise of Brown’s might be best interpreted through the diagram by Borzak (in Clark, Threeton, and Ewing 2010)

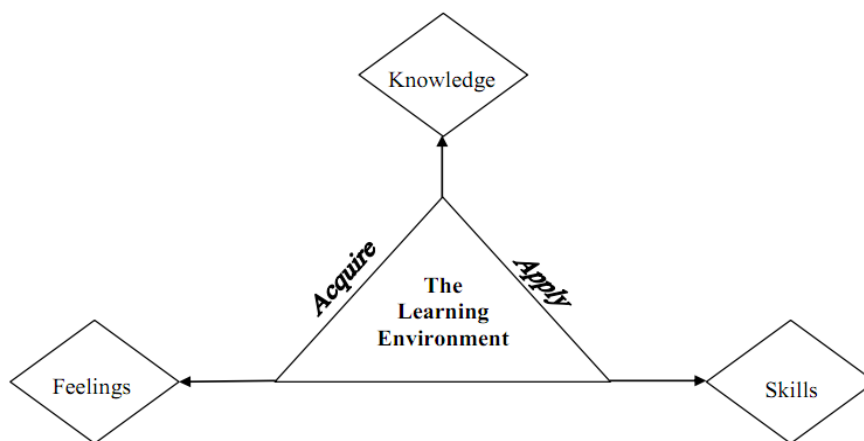


Figure 1 Experiential learning via a direct educational encounter (Borzak, 1981).

What initially came into my mind was how to link the aforementioned principles with the notion of experiential learning and, more importantly, how to actualize in the class the emerging stack of theoretical clues. Under the framework of experiential learning, I then first embarked on struggling to pop out the sense of meaningfulness in the learning. Basing the

meaningfulness on what they daily encountered in the class, subject matters, I tried to elaborate physical activity through which they could encounter what they learnt in class through English. Demonstration, experiment, and copious students' project related to the subject matters were the main undertaking in the class. Surprisingly, they behaved differently since then. There was abundant popping involvement in the learning process.

I then sought to expand the endeavour to kindle their zeal for learning, the intrinsic motivation. It was somewhat easy to arouse their motivation, I assumed, when they could see the meaningfulness. More games and quizzes wrapped in English on the basis of subject matters were elaborated. Experiential learning was aptly applied when teachers tried to spark joy and fun in the class for it per se allowed ample integrative activities, easing teachers to generate variant activities, and the students were basically fond of fun, interesting, and challenging activities.

The "experience" was obviously there when students were liberated to adorn their master piece themselves and sustain their individualized battery. Being liberated to experience the learning in any way they long, students were boosted to develop their own strategic investment and, for sure, their autonomy. These last two constructs, to my best knowledge, were somewhat self evoking when teachers successfully generated learning meaningfulness and intrinsic motivation. Teachers then were to facilitate the students to discover the specialized strategy of their own and sustainably keep the learning battery sparked, which demanded adept sensitivity and "sharp eyes" on the part of the teachers

### **THE MOMENT OF DISTRESS: PEDAGOGICAL AFFLICTION**

Despite all the superiority, experiential learning, as any other frameworks do, possesses distinct obstacles in its particularity. Emphasizing on experiencing the language, it demands the elaboration of continuum to achieve the utmost of language, subject matter and the "experience". Taking issue with the initial hindrance, the teachers in consequence were deliberately to distribute time allotment appropriately, which was rather absurd due to various activities and great number of students in the class.

Of the most salient corollary was the fact that teacher and students were to deal with both language and subject matter, which might be greatly stressful especially on the part of students. On the part of the teachers, surely they were to be knowledgeable on the assigned topics and formulate the optimum interplay between language and subject matter. Students, on the other hand, were led to grasp copious chunks of both essences, which might appear convoluting. In fact, the students experienced period of great distress mainly on the onset of the program. However, this moment of complicity gradually mitigated as students developed their English proficiency and confidence in speaking the language. Not only did this circumstance constitute language-subject matter intricacy, but it also came up as language-communication dilemma. This is hardly dissimilar to the premise of Stern's (1983:405) intimating that foreign language learners find it deliberately stressful when attending to both communication and code concurrently.

## THE VEHEMENCE OF EXPERIENCING: SOURCE FOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT: A CONTINGENT CONCLUSION

Experiential learning, having extended coverage to spur every student, can be an eloquent tenet to orchestrate classroom activities in that it has a sense of experience offering plethora opportunities to live the language. Kolb (in Beaduin and Quick, 1995) notably argued that learning is best facilitated in an environment where there is dialectic tension and conflict between immediate, concrete experience and analytic detachment. Through such learning, they are intrinsically empowered to internalize the language in authentically-contextualized academic nuance. What is of the most determinative impact is the condition elaborated through experiential learning. Such learning can greatly boost students' involvement, confidence, struggle, and, most importantly, the freedom of "living" the language. Harmer (1983:58) in the same tone also notes that through experiencing learning, students can debilitate their affective barriers, resulting in enhanced comprehension on language input, surely elevating their language acquisition. Kumaravadivelu (2008:118) elucidates even more heavily that because of the active involvement of the learner in the learning process, only meaningful learning, not rote learning, can lead to internalization of language systems

Despite the convenience, there are also pitfalls of which teachers must be aware. The code-communication essence warrants careful disparity between language and subject matters. All emerging efforts are to be chiefly devoted to, unless within content based instruction, language learning. It might appear arduous, I would say, to inject linguistic attribute within every learning component, seeking to elaborate experience in encountering subject matter as an integral part. There is also gradational linguistic complexity in using the language, which is owing to students' proficiency development. Using language which is too complicated will refrain students from grasping language and subject matter. Contrastingly, over-simplified language will debilitate the empowerment for language betterment. In a nut shell, it is focally teacher's "sharp eyes" which is mostly crucial in orchestrating classroom experience.

## REFERENCES

- Beaduin, P. B. and Quick, D.. 1995. *Experiential Learning: Theoretical Underpinnings*. Colorado: Colorado State University.
- Brown, D. H. 2000. *Teaching by Principles: AN Interactive Approach to Language*. New York: Person Education.
- Brown, D. H. 2007. *Teaching by Principles: AN Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. New York: Person Education.
- Clark R. W., Threeton M. D. and Ewing J. C. 2010. The Potential of Experiential Learning Models and Practices in Career and Technical Education & Career and Technical Teacher Education. *Journal of Career and Technical Education*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 46-62.
- Harmer, J. 1983. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Pearson Longman.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. 2008. *Understanding Language Teaching: from Method to Post Method*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Stern, H. H. 1983. *Fundamental Concept of Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.