

Designing Experiential Learning Activities for Primary Schoolers

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Abstract

Experiential learning is now deemed a crucial part in primary education in almost all learning contexts because it helps develop and cultivate children's cognitive and life skills. It functions as a bridge linking the knowledge that children acquire in regular classroom and their experiences built up by participating in real life activities, especially beyond classroom. With this in mind, the present study made an attempt to design an experiential learning model with coherent steps for primary schoolers by referencing Kold's theoretical framework (2015). And thereby, this study empirically made a concrete plan and administered a one-day field trip for the primary schoolers in Cao Lanh City, Dong Thap Province, Vietnam. The results obtained are overallly positive, but there is room for improvement. Thus, the study makes recommendations to primary school teachers for effectively designing and operating experiential learning activities.

Keywords: Experiential learning, primary schooler, designing procedure

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1. Statement of the problem

In Vietnam, K-12 education program after 2018 (MOET, 2018), experiential activity is included in the program as a compulsory element throughout grades 1-12. It aims to educate students' qualities and personality. Currently, experiential activities have been done in most classes subject to the required duration in the program. However, experiential activities are still open, i.e. not under any strict regulations by the Ministry of Education and Training. This article suggests the process of designing experiential sightseeing activities for primary students.

2. What is experiential learning?

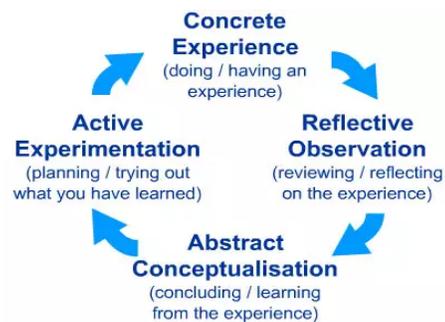
2.1. Experiential activity

Experiential activity is one of the educational activities at school. Under the organization and guidance of teachers, students take part in practical activities inside or outside school campus. Thereby, students restructure and refine their old experiences as such to develop their qualities, personalities, abilities and creativities. This activity in nature is a learning method, enabling students to connect theoretical knowledge learnt in class with realities, recognizing connections across different subjects, thus to help them develop comprehensively.

2.2. Kolb's experiential learning cycle

According to Kolb (2015), the experiential learning cycle consists of 4 steps as follows:

- **Step 1. Concrete Experience** – a new experience or situation is encountered, or a reinterpretation of existing experience.
- **Step 2. Reflective Observation of the New Experience** – of particular importance are any inconsistencies between experience and understanding.
- **Step 3. Abstract Conceptualization** – reflection gives rise to a new idea, or a modification of an existing abstract concept (the person has learned from their experience).
- **Step 4. Active Experimentation** – the learners applies their idea(s) to the world around them to see what happens.



Model 1: Kolb's experiential learning cycle

Experiential activities make students detect and resolve possible conflicts in their minds to create a new harmony in knowledge acquisition. This occurs in two continual processes of action and cognition. These steps can be repeated many times; the cycle can continue in a spiral that expands and elevates.

The nature of experiential activities is organizing activities for students to perform (individually or in groups). Thereby, students interact with realities in certain circumstances to construct current experiences. At the same time, within students' minds there are interactions between the existing experience and the currently gained experience. Thus, by processing information and systematizing knowledge, students gain new experiences (new competencies) and use new experiences as a means to solve a new situation or activity in real life.

2.3. Principles of organizing experiential activities

- Learning environments are real-life situations.
- Instruction: student-centered approach.
- Learning tasks are based on students' existing knowledge.
- Experiential activities are organized subject to Kolb's experiential learning cycle.
- The outcomes are to evolve student's personalities and life skills.

3. Process of designing an experiential sightseeing activity

3.1. Suggested process of designing an experiential sightseeing activity

3.1.1. Determining requirements, sites/places and participants

To ensure the feasibility of the activity, Teacher needs to consider (1) objectives, contents, the academic year's plans made by school, (2) student participants, (3) sites/places for field trips, (4) financial resources from outside school if any.

3.1.2. Name the activity

The activity name should reflect the core content of the activity; also sound interesting and suit students' needs.

3.1.3. Determining the targets, contents, and evaluation criteria

- **Targets:** for feasibility, Teacher should base the targets on contents and students' existing knowledge levels.
- **Contents:** they should include (1) experiential contents, i.e. features of the site to visit (geography, history of development, infrastructure, facility, etc.), which suit primary education program and students' needs and cognitions; (2) the contents which link different subjects in the program. Teacher should select contents from those subjects related to the experiential content; (3) Educational contents: basing on (1) and (2) above, Teacher determines the values of personality and behaviors to be embedded in the experiential activity.
- **Evaluation criteria:** Basing on targets and students' acquisitions, Teacher selects contents to be evaluated and evaluation formats which are suitable to the targets and accurately assess students' competences. The evaluation criteria should include 2 parts: (1) products/results of learning content awareness and (2) learning attitude.

3.1.4. Making plans

It identifies tasks and responsibilities of each and all stakeholders to create close relations between them. This involves several authority levels, and it should be done in paper work such as organizing plan, the decision of organizing committee (list of participants), task assignments, etc.

3.1.5. Designing operational plan for experiential activities

This step plays a very important role in the quality of experiential activities. Teacher should pay close attention to:

- **Contents:** Educational values embedded in the experiential activity and taught to students: basing on the content of specific activities, Teacher identifies appropriate formats, methods and means of operation. In order for students to pay attention to the content of the experiential sightseeing activity, Teacher uses learning worksheets for students to focus on the contents and also as an immediate tool for monitoring and assessment.
- **Performer issues:** Basing on the characteristics of tasks and their professional training, Teacher identifies appropriate performers;
- **Temporal issues:** Teacher identifies enough periods of time for the whole project, including preparation, performance and reports of the activity results.
- **Outcome issues:** Teacher identifies adequate evaluation criteria for specific activities. For accurate evaluation, Teachers need design evaluation sheets of specific criteria for each activity to motivate students.

3.1.6. Checking, revising and refining

This step is to check up the contents, procedures and time plans for operation concerning the issues of appropriateness, feasibility and target results. If there is any something in appropriate, it should be fixed timely. Finally, Teacher completes the activity design and makes it in official papers.

Note: These steps of designing are possibly integrated or expanded, based on the characteristics and volume of each project under operation.

4. Experiment

4.1. Designing a sightseeing visit to Nguyen Sinh Sac Mausoleum

Stopic: “Grateful to and follow the example of Nguyen Sinh Sac”

Participants: 5th-Graders

4.1.1. Learning outcomes: By the end of this activity, students will be able to:

- Present the process of founding this mausoleum site, biography and career of Nguyen Sinh Sac;
- Participate in some activities to express gratitude to Nguyen Sinh Sac;
- Actively join group or class activities;
- Proactively present ideas and take responsibilities on their own.

4.1.2. Contents

(1) Experiential dimension

- Biography and career of Nguyen Sinh Sac;
- The process of founding this mausoleum.

(2) Linking several content subjects and students' life experiences

- History subject of 5th-grade: Patriots such as Truong Dinh, Nguyen Truong To, etc.
- Ethics subject of 5th-grade: Grateful to martyrs and the wounded for the country's cause, "I love my country";
- Vietnamese literacy subject of 4th-grade: Write promotional paragraphs;

(3) Educative dimension

- To educate students how to express gratitude by actions such as burning grateful incense, cleaning the tomb area, writing reflections on the visit to the mausoleum.

4.1.3. Preparations

(1) Scheduling and funding

Teachers need plan sightseeing schedules so that the visit tour is proactive at work and parents can easily follow. Teachers need determine specific times for activities involved. Expenses for transport, food, drink, gifts, guides, etc. should be counted in advance.

(2) Needed materials

a. Teachers' materials

LEARNING WORKSHEET FOR EACH STUDENT		
Activity's name:.....		
Student's name:.....; Class:.....		
#	QUESTIONS	ANSWER OPTIONS
1	Another name of Nguyen Sinh Sac is	A. Nguyen Sinh Khiem B. Nguyen Sinh Thuyet C. Nguyen Sinh Cung D. Nguyen Sinh Huy⁽¹⁾
2	When did Nguyen Sinh Sac gain the second ranking title?	A. 1901 C. 1903 B. 1902 D. 1904
3	Where did Nguyen Sinh Sac stay while in Dong Thap?	A. Hoa An village C. Tre Viet village B. Hoa Sadec village D. Sen village
4	What did Nguyen Sinh Sac do while in Dong Thap?	A. Teacher C. Both A & B B. Doctor D. Neither A nor B
5	When was Nguyen Sinh Sac born and died?	A. 1862 - 1928 C. 1862 - 1929 B. 1861 - 1929 D. 1861 - 1928
6	What acreage is Nguyen Sinh Sac Mausoleum?	A. 9 ha C. 5 ha B. 4.6 ha D. 10 ha
7	Which ward is Nguyen Sinh Sac Mausoleum located in Cao Lanh city?	A. Ward 1 C. Ward 3 B. Ward 2 D. Ward 4
8	How many sections does Nguyen Sinh Sac Mausoleum have?	A. Tomb section of Nguyen Sinh Sac B. Exhibition house C. Uncle Ho's stilt house and the earlier Hoa An village D. All are correct
9	How many parts does the tomb section of Nguyen Sinh Sac have?	A. The main tomb and the statue B. The main tomb, lotus pond and tower C. The main tomb and Uncle Ho's stilt house D. The main tomb and Hoa An village
10	When was Nguyen Sinh Sac Mausoleum recognized as a national historical relic?	A. 1991 C. 1993 B. 1992 D. 1994
Write your own feelings while visiting Nguyen Sinh Sac Mausoleum?		
What qualities will you learn from Nguyen Sinh Sac?		

¹Those bold are the keys.

INDIVIDUALS' LEARNING OUTCOME EVALUATION				
Activity's name:.....				
Student's name:.....Class:				
Competency evaluation criteria		Development levels		
		Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Learning	Answer the learning worksheet			
	Tell stories about patriots			
	Clean the mausoleum sections			
	Write a script to advertise the Mousoleum			
Attitude	Write about feelings and lessons learnt			
	Join the activities			
	Group working attitude			
Teacher's comments:				
Evaluation criteria				
- Multiple choice section: Level 1: 1-3 sentences correctly; Level 2: 4-7 sentences correctly; Level 3: 8-10 sentences correctly;				
- Tell stories about patriots, clean the mausoleum sections, write a script to advertise the Mausoleum: calculated by the team's performance: Level 1: The team won the third and the fourth prizes; Level 2: The team won the second prize; Level 3: The team won the first prize.				
- Attitudes: Level 1: partial participation of activities, passive and uncooperative; Level 2: partial participation of activities, positive and cooperative; Level 3: Total participation of activities, positive and cooperative.				
Teacher's comments: (1) Not pass level 1; (2) Pass level 2; (3) Pass level 3 (Very good grade)				

GROUP'S LEARNING OUTCOME EVALUATION				
Activity's name:.....				
Group's name:.....Class:.....				
Competency evaluation criteria		Development levels		
		Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Achievements	Tell stories about patriots			
	Clean the mausoleum sections			
	Write a script to advertise the Mausoleum			
Attitudes	Organizing and managing groups			
	Group working attitude			
Teacher's comments:				
Evaluation criteria - Tell stories about patriots, clean the mausoleum sections, write a paragraph to advertise Mausoleumsection: Level 1: The team won the third and the fourth prizes; Level 2: The team won the second prize; Level 3: The team won the first prize. - Attitudes: Level 1: Poor team organization and management,uncooperative; Level 2: Group organization and management are not very good, some members are not cooperating; Level 3: Well organized and managed team, active members, cooperation, solidarity. - Teacher's comments: (1) Not pass level 1; (2) Pass level 2; (3) Pass level 3 (Very good grade)				

b. Students' preparations: Backpacks, coats, hats, paper, pens, etc.

c. Organizing group and assignments

- Divide class into 4 groups (subject to the group's composition).
- Assigning tasks to groups for preparations.

4.1.4. Organizing activities

(1) Activity 1: Learning about the process of founding the Mausoleum, biography and career of Nguyen Sinh Sac

a. Learning outcomes: Students are able to present the process of founding the Mausoleum, biography and career of Nguyen Sinh Sac

b. Administration: Teachers perform the following procedure:

❖ **Step 1: Burn the grateful incense:** The teacher guides students in line and to perform the flower-offering ceremony, burn the grateful incense to Nguyen Sinh Sac.

❖ **Step 2: Learning about the process of founding the Mausoleum, biography and career of Nguyen Sinh Sac:** Teachers perform the following procedure:

- Distribute and guide students how to perform learning sheets;

Organize students to follow the guide's addressing the process of founding the Mausoleum, biography and career of Nguyen Sinh Sac; and then complete the multiple-choice section of the learning sheet;

- Gather students in the reasonable place to complete the writing of feelings section;
- Duration: 10 minutes
- Collect and mark students' learning sheets.

c. Conclusion: Nguyen Sinh Sac is a teacher, a doctor, a patriot, President Ho Chi Minh's father. He led a simple, sacrificing life in love of his people. So, he is a shining example for us to follow.

(2) Activity 2: Telling stories about patriots

a. Learning outcomes: Student consolidates their knowledge about History of 5th-Grader

b. Administration: Teachers perform the following procedure:

- Tasks: Each group chooses a patriot and tell a biographical summary, operational process, patriotic contributions.

- Duration: 5 - 7 minutes (each group)

- Organize groups to tell stories and discuss about the stories

- Give comments on the achievements of the groups, cooperation spirit, attitude, etc.

c. Conclusion: The patriots have a living heart for everyone and ready to sacrifice their private interests for the country.

(3) Activity 3: Clean the mausoleum sections

a. Learning outcomes: Student will do some works to express their gratitude to Nguyen Sinh Sac

b. Administration: Teachers perform the following procedure:

- Tasks: Group 1: clean the grave; Group 2: scavenge around the grave; Group 3: cut the grass around the grave; Group 4: water the flower pots.

- Duration: 20 - 25 minutes

- Comments and evaluations.

c. Conclusion: It is necessary to show the gratitude to Nguyen Sinh Sac. By doing good things, each one should be grateful to those noble hearts and living for the people's sakes.

(4) Activity 4: Playing a tour guide role

a. Learning outcomes: Students will design the script to promote the tomb of Nguyen Sinh Sac mausoleum

b. Administration: Teachers perform the following procedure:

- Task: Each group designs a script to promote Nguyen Sinh Sac mausoleum;

- Duration: 5 - 7 minutes (each group);

- Each group presents their script and discussions follow;

- Comments and evaluations.

c. Conclusion: The promotion of the Nguyen Sinh Sac Mausoleum helps spread his example to everyone.

4.1.5. Comments and evaluations: Teachers perform the following procedure:

- Distribute evaluation and learning sheets to students.

- Guide students to synthesize and complete the evaluation form.

- Collect evaluation sheets to summarize and write general comments for each student.

- Organize arts/games for students to play while teachers complete evaluation paper works.

- General comment, assessment on activities and results announcement.

4.2. Experiment results

For experimenting the process of designing and operating one experiential activity, first we had a contact with the managerial staff of Nguyen Sinh Sac Mausoleum and asked for permission to organize an experiential activity for primary school students at this mausoleum (in the 2018 – 2019 academic year). Upon their permission, we went on to see and present our activity plan to the Principals of 3 primary schools, namely Chu Van An, Le Van Tam (both in Cao Lanh city center), and Phan Chu Trinh (urban school of Cao Lanh city), which were scheduled to take part in the activity. Following the Principals' agreements, we then went to meet 3 group leaders and 5 in-charge teachers of 5-grader classes who were supposed to take part in the experiential activity (total number: 214 students from the 3 schools mentioned above). Also, we presented our activity plan in details to the speaker at the mausoleum, group leaders and teachers of the 3 schools involved. The obtained results were gratifying with 72.38% of the student participants gaining good grades and higher, showing their motivations, positive attitudes and active oral presentations.

However, during the experiment we met a number of difficulties, for example: (1) the schools appeared to worry about the lengthy duration for the activity and the hard task of monitoring the student participants during the entire activity; (2) the group leaders and in-charge teachers found it very new to the activity and had not got the ample skills to monitor students outside classroom; (3) student participants had not got used to learning worksheets and working in groups outdoors. Furthermore, group leaders and teachers complained about spending too much of their time in advance, instructing students about the field trip, collecting necessary materials and other stuffs. Previously, a field trip like this was not integrated with learning assignments.

The lessons we have learnt from organizing the above activity are (1) the designed plan should be particularly specified so that teacher and students participants can do their jobs correctly and effectively subject to the allotted duration; (2) Learning worksheets should be used to integrate learning tasks with sightseeing, which attract students attention and survey their attitudes; (3) The better preparations, the more effective interactions between teachers and students involved; (4) Evaluation sheets, both of individuals and groups, should be used to motivate students' learning; (5) Teachers and students should learn how to work together outside classroom.

5. Conclusion

For better monitoring experiential activities and learning outcome evaluation, it is essential to ensure the principles and feasibility of designing plans and organizing sightseeing visits. For plan-designing, teachers should fully understand the basics of experiential activity framework, objectives of primary education program, implement appropriate methods of planning procedures with sequential steps, and identify compatible formats of learning outcome evaluation ensuring accuracy and objectivity.

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