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## EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN ELT METHODOLOGY

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By present, there has been a humanistic shift in ELT paradigm, seeing learners central to their own learning, and considering their active participation in learning. This was the central idea for New Generation Teacher Project which was a British Council Ukraine and Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine joint initiative. The Project was focused on designing an innovative methodology curriculum and piloting it in Ukrainian Pedagogical Universities.

In the Methodology Curriculum, learners are supported to take control of their own learning, to organise their work and assess their own progress. The main assumption is that if they come to be responsible for their own learning, they will become responsible adults. This is the matter of trust. If we do not trust our learners and are afraid to give them freedom they will never learn to be responsible. And it is not only about schooling, it is about life in general but about sustainability and about the future. As trainers on this course the Project team members were able to see the process of transformation, in which we were also involved, in action.

One of the Curriculum principal strategies is experiential learning which values experience as crucial for learning. Learning through experience is also associated with learning through action, learning by doing, and learning through discovery and exploration. As a philosophy and methodology, experiential learning fosters educators to “purposefully engage with students in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values.” (Association for Experiential Education, para. 2).

Nevertheless, it is important that the students’ experience should be meaningful for learning which can be achieved by reflection. As Huxley stated, “experience is not merely what happens to us. More importantly, it is what we do with what happens to us” (as cited in Neill, 2004, p.1). To make it meaningful, it is vital that it should be active and bring a certain change to the student’s personality and change reality to some extent.

In line with that, Kolb (1984) created a now widely used learning cycle which demonstrates the process by which experience is translated into learning. There must be a reflection on the students’ experience which is followed by an understanding of what the new learning means to them and a conceptualization of how it can be used in the future. That is, experiential learning encompasses four basic elements: concrete experience, observation and reflection, the formation of abstract concepts, and testing in a new situation (Kolb, 1984).

Following that theoretical assumption, educationalists developed some principles of how to implement experiential learning in the English classroom:

- language learning is facilitated when students are cooperatively involved in working on a project or task (Knutson, 2003)
- the four skills should be integrated
- the purposes should be authentic
- learning should be based on physical involvement in the phenomena (Brown, 2007, p.291) and the psychomotor aspects of language learning by involving students in physical actions in which language is subsumed and reinforced (Brown, 2007, p.292).

- learning should encourage personal input, initiative, and self-direction.

All the sessions designed by the Project team in piloting the Methodology Curriculum begin with accessing the specific past experiences of students (Start where your students are), and then build on these experiences to construct a framework for learning unique to the requirements and learning style of each student. As Spruck-Wrigley (1998) put it, “In practice, experience-based, project-based, and task-based learning become experiential when elements of reflection, support, and transfer are added to the basic experience, transforming a simple activity into an opportunity for learning (Spruck-Wrigley, 1998).

Experiential learning also requires teachers to accept a different role in the classroom than the traditional teacher-as-expert. In the experiential classroom, their roles change into facilitators, guides, and helpers which does not go in line with traditional teaching subject content using a teacher-centered approach. Within the project the team members have done in-service work with teachers to implement experiential learning in ELT. There should be noted that there is still a considerable resistance to it as some teachers consider it unrelated to the subject content, and uncontrollable due to learners’ personal communication.

In fact, experiential learning is not uncontrolled; on the contrary, if the teacher is prepared, able to predict potential difficulties and creatively open to “teachable moments” it may lead to New Generation English Language Learning which is creative and meaningful.

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