

NSEE Principles of Best Practice in Experiential Education

Regardless of the experiential learning activity, both the experience and the learning are fundamental. In the learning process and in the relationship between the learner and any facilitator(s) of learning, there is a mutual responsibility. All parties are empowered to achieve the principles which follow. Yet, at the same time, the facilitator(s) of learning are expected to take the lead in ensuring both the quality of the learning experience and of the work produced, and in supporting the learner to use the principles, which underlie the pedagogy of experiential education.

1. Intention: All parties must be clear from the outset why experience is the chosen approach to the learning that is to take place, to the knowledge that will be demonstrated, applied or result from it and to the choices required to support the learning process. Intention represents the purposefulness that enables experience to become knowledge and, as such, is deeper than the goals, objectives, and activities that define the experience.

2. Preparedness and Planning: Participants must ensure that they enter the experience with sufficient foundation to support a successful experience. They must also focus from the earliest stages of the experience/program on the identified intentions, adhering to them as goals, objectives and activities are defined. The resulting plan should include those intentions and be referred to on a regular basis by all parties. At the same time, it should be flexible enough to allow for adaptations as the experience unfolds.

3. Authenticity: The experience must have a real world context and/or be useful and meaningful in reference to an applied setting or situation, including genuine relationships within the experience. This means that it should be designed in concert with those who will be affected by or use it, or in response to a real situation.

4. Orientation and Training: For the full value of the experience to be accessible to both the learner and the learning facilitator(s), and to any involved organizational partners, it is essential that they be prepared with important background information about each other and about the context and environment in which the experience will operate. Once that baseline of knowledge is addressed, ongoing structured development opportunities also should be included to expand the learner's appreciation of the context and skill requirements of her/his work.

5. Reflection: Reflection is the element that transforms unexamined experience to a learning experience. For meaning to be discovered and internalized the learner must test assumptions and hypotheses about the outcomes of decisions and actions taken, then weigh the outcomes against past learning and future implications. This reflective process is integral to all phases of experiential learning, from identifying intention and choosing the experience, to considering preconceptions and observing how they change as the experience unfolds. Reflection is also an essential tool for adjusting the experience and measuring outcomes.

6. Monitoring and Continuous Improvement: Any learning activity will be dynamic and changing, and the parties involved all bear responsibility for ensuring that the experience, as it is in process, continues to provide the richest learning possible, while affirming the learner. It is important that there be a feedback loop related to learning intentions and quality objectives and that the structure of the experience be sufficiently flexible to permit change in response to what that feedback suggests. While reflection provides input for new hypotheses and knowledge based in documented experience, other strategies for observing progress against intentions and objectives also should be in place. Monitoring and continuous improvement represent the formative evaluation tools.

7. Assessment and Evaluation: Outcomes and processes should be systematically documented with regard to initial intentions and quality outcomes. Assessment is a means to develop and refine the specific learning goals and quality objectives identified during the planning stages of the experience, while evaluation provides comprehensive program data about the experiential process as a whole and whether it has met the intentions that suggested it.

8. Acknowledgment: Recognition of learning and impact occur throughout the experience by way of the reflective and monitoring processes and through reporting, documentation and sharing of accomplishments. All parties to the experience should be included in the recognition of progress and accomplishment. Culminating documentation and celebration of learning and impact help provide closure and sustainability to the experience.

NSEE Ethical Principles

Principle one: Recognize and Use Practices/Standards - Experiential educators use recognized, quality standards and practices in the selecting of learning sites, in supervision of students engaged in field-based learning experiences, and in the creation and maintenance of ethical partnerships with the communities and organizations that host and support these students, maintaining privacy, confidentiality and reciprocity throughout.

Principle two: Address Legal and Ethical Issues - Experiential educators are aware of and sensitive to recognized legal, ethical and professional issues germane to the field of experiential education and act in accordance with established guidelines to ensure appropriate practice, for example, NSEE Principles of Best Practices (1998, 2009, 2017).

Principle three: Foster and Uphold EE Values: Experiential educators uphold the principles of engaged education and democratic societies, the pursuit of truth, and the freedom of students to express their viewpoints, engage in critical thinking, and develop habits of reflection and civil discourse, listening and learning from those whose experiences and values differ from their own.

Principle four: Ensure Excellence in Curriculum Design: Experiential educators create informed learning contexts that foster student growth and actualization of potential, achieve academic and civic goals, and reflect excellence in curriculum design and quality.

Principle five: Promote empowerment/fairness through teaching/modeling EE - Experiential educators recognize the depth of responsibility in teaching and modeling the values, skills, and relationships that foster a spirit of inquiry and fairness without discrimination or disempowerment.

Principle six: Employ EE Pedagogy and Research: Experiential educators are informed and guided by a body of knowledge, research, and pedagogical practices, recognized by and specific to the field of experiential education, including reflection, self-authorship, assessment and evaluation, civic engagement, and the development of personal and social responsibility.

Principle seven: Contribute to and expand the EE Professional Field: Experiential educators are committed to excellence through active scholarship, assessment and instruction, and the creation of shared knowledge and understanding through affiliation with networks and organizations that advance experiential learning.