

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Handouts for Instructors

These handouts were created by Vacation School Lipnice (Prázdninová škola Lipnice) – Outward Bound Czech Republic.

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INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

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EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

By **experiential learning** we understand such **educational processes** that comprise inducing experiential situations, their debrief and reflection in order to **gain experience** which is transferrable into real life. Goals of such educational processes can be set up and reached in various types of environment (academic as well as extracurricular, natural and cultural), in various social groups (differentiated by age, social status, professional rank and/or other demographic factors) and accomplished by various means (games of all kinds, model situations, creative and dramatic workshops, talks and discussions, physically as well as mentally demanding challenges, activities leading to increased self-knowledge). For experiential learning, **the experience is always just a means, not the goal**; the goal remains the ancient Greek educational ideal, the versatile personality development aiming at harmony.

Ivo Jirásek

Experiential learning

- ☛ Emphasises learners' and participants' activity.
- ☛ Educational processes are based mainly on one's own experience and its consequent processing and utilization for personal growth.
- ☛ Makes use of experience acquired from games/activities for specified educational goals.
- ☛ Connects two seemingly contradictory aspects – games (playing) and education (purposeful development and education).
- ☛ It is a method which involves a whole personality.
- ☛ It is suitable for development of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

One needs to learn

- ☛ To work with the group dynamics.
- ☛ To introduce and run games/programmes/activities.
- ☛ To lead reflections/debriefs after activities.

Two areas of application of experiential learning

AREA 1

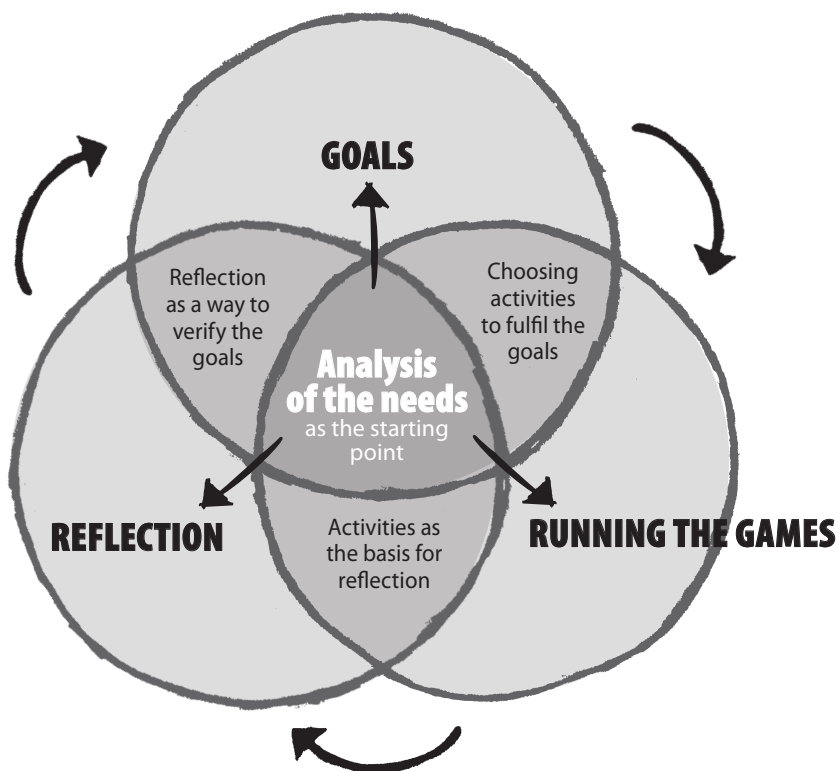
- » Attaining self-knowledge
- » Group creation
- » Team co-operation
- » Solving problems
- » Communication
- » Feedback
- » Developing knowledge, attitudes and values

AREA 2

- » Education in concrete knowledge
- » Application during school trips, courses and extracurricular activities

INDIVIDUAL STEPS WHEN USING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

- **1. Analysis of the needs** (what we want to emphasise and why, where the problem is, what we want to evaluate, how the experiential learning should be involved).
- **2. Setting a realistic goal** (what the learners should take from the activities, what competence they should learn, how this will be evaluated and how the experience will be incorporated).
- **3. Running the game/activity itself.**
- **4. Reflection of the programme and evaluation** (the following can serve as the basis for evaluation: what the learners have learned, what competences were acquired, how the experiential method has functioned).



SETTING GOALS OF PROGRAMME

START WITH THINKING ABOUT THE END

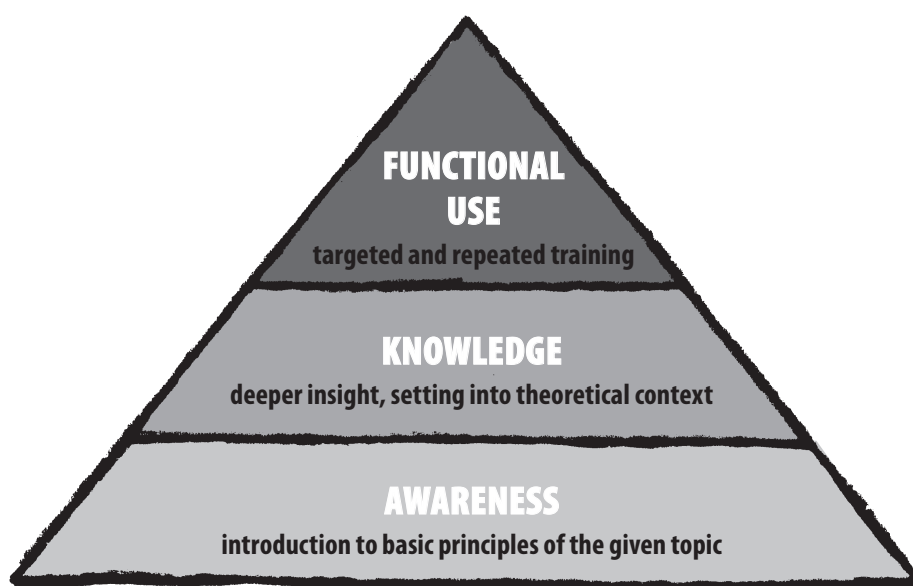
REAL GOALS AND THEIR NUMBER ARE DEFINED BY

- ☛ Purpose of the programme
- ☛ Number of participants
- ☛ Length of the programme

AREAS FOR DEFINING THE GOALS

- ☛ Knowledge
- ☛ Skills
- ☛ Attitudes

ACCOMPLISHING THE GOALS ACCORDING TO THE LEVEL OF THEIR MASTERING



The higher we move in the pyramid, the more important it is to specify precisely the goals of the training of educational programme, select the most important areas and topics, narrow the scope and give everybody space for individual digestion, feedback and practice which requires more time and less participants.

When setting goals, we recommend using verbs in the formulations and being as specific as possible about the content of the learning.

Source: *Outward Bound - Česká cesta*

WHAT IS A WELL FORMULATED GOAL AND WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

- ☛ Goal is a state which we want to reach, where we want to get.
- ☛ To succeed, the goals should be formulated in such a way as to meet several criteria.
- ☛ The method which helps to set goals is called SMARTER. It is an acronym for words describing the attainable goals.

S » Sufficiently:

- concrete and unique.

M » Measurable:

- the results must be noticeable.

A » Acceptable:

- if we work on something with other people, we should all know what the goal is, and share it.

R » Realistic:

- do not plan something that cannot be achieved for various reasons.

T » Time-bound:

- If there is no time limit, the goal can be postponed forever.

E » Exciting:

- Goals that motivate us and are attractive are easier to achieve.

R » Recorded:

- To be able to get back to the goals, they must be recorded in a way that is suitable for us.

ACTIVITIES CAN HAVE VARIOUS AIMS:

Create experience and/or learning

CREATING EXPERIENCE

- ☛ Emotional (joy of winning, excitement from a good solution...)
- ☛ Relational (meeting other people, experiencing effective co-operation)
- ☛ Physical (overcoming one's own limits, endurance in running, mastering new sport...)

CREATING LEARNING

- ☛ Learners get feedback, learn about themselves (how they communicate, how they cope with stress situations, what qualities they have, how skilful they are, what talents they have).
- ☛ They learn new facts (knowledge) about a specific topic (what kind of drugs we know, how we separate and recycle waste, what communication theories there are, what steps must be done when leading a campaign...).
- ☛ During practical testing they will acquire skills and competences (how to negotiate with authorities, how to solve complex tasks, how to discuss things in a bigger group...).

PREPARATION AND RUNNING THE PROGRAMME

There are three main types of programmes. At the end of the text, you will find examples of each of them.

Activities/Games

Model situations – We provide a missing experience in a smaller scale.

Real challenges – Participants face a real problem which is not created artificially.

Aspects of introducing activities or what to take into account when preparing a programme

PARTICIPANTS

- » Age – Each activity can have various outcomes and success with various age groups.
- » Gender – This factor needs to be taken into consideration when creating smaller groups, too.
- » Group size – This influences mainly the level of involvement, efficiency and variety of opinions.
- » Mutual relationships and status of individual participants – If we know roles that participants play within the given group, it is good to take them into account.
- » Current atmosphere in the group and participants' state of mind.
- » Context – What preceded the programme, what season of the year is, what are the main issues the group is dealing with, etc.

INSTRUCTIONS

WHAT GOOD INSTRUCTIONS SHOULD INCLUDE:

- » The task and the goal – what should learners do, what is the required outcome.
- » Motivational introduction – sometimes it is good to include that, too.
- » Rules and limitations – what learners can and cannot use when fulfilling the task: they include restrictive rules (e. g. that they cannot talk, they must not hurt each other) and defining rules (you work in groups of 4, you use a paper and pencil etc.)
- » Time scope of the activity – the limit when the task has to be finished.
- » Role division – whether and how the leader will be designated and/or whether there are other roles for team members.
- » Division into groups or teams – many activities require working in smaller groups; it is desirable to divide learners in an appropriate time when it does not disturb explanation of rules and learners do not lose attention.
- » Sequence of steps, description of individual phases of the activity.
- » When necessary, instructions to use specific skill, tool and/or way of handling.
- » Repetition of important facts – activities usually have several key points which should be repeated.
- » Space to ask questions

RUNNING THE ACTIVITY:

There are two types of instructor's interventions which should help when the activity is in progress:

1. Setting the boundaries

- » Defining the rules
- » Repeating the instructions
- » Watching out for respecting the rules

2. Facilitating the process

- » Reflecting situation, "setting the mirror" ("At the moment, everybody is talking at the same time.")
- » Encouraging, evaluating ("All groups managed to solve the task." – "You are on the right track.")
- » Support by way of asking questions ("Are there other options that could help you?" – "How can you carry on at the moment?")
- » Help with orientation in the given situation ("You have 10 minutes to go." – "You have discovered most of the things, you might try to sum up everything, maybe you will come up with some more ideas." – "You might look at the rules once again, maybe you will find some clue.")
- » Direct help
- » Checking, showing interest ("How is it going?" – "How are you doing?" – "How much time do you need to finish it?")
- » No reaction, silence

When you do not intervene into the activity:

- » Observe what is happening, be ready to intervene when needed, be at hand.
- » Make notes describing behaviour of individual participants, write down statements during important moments, record crucial incidents during the activity so that you can lead a good debrief and give feedback after the activity.
- » Watch the time.
- » Prepare materials for reflection and evaluation.

TIME LIMITATIONS

- » Prepare a time schedule where all the phases of activities are recorded, e.g. motivation, explanation of rules, activity itself, reflection. These "time slots" are then easier to follow (or shift spare time to those slots where needed). It is always better to finish earlier than to be late.
- » Activity is influenced by time of the day as well as season of the year. We can work with it intentionally.

LOCATION

- » Classroom, lecture room, gym, meadow, city environment – this aspect can have a major influence on the outcome of the activity.

MATERIAL

- » Think ahead what you will need during the programme.
- » Prepare enough material (plus some backup) in appropriate quality.
- » Learn to manipulate with all equipment and open all needed files (and check once again before the start of the programme).
- » Make sure that the material is used in an adequate way.
- » After the activity, make sure the material is collected, treated appropriately and put away.

Discussing the activity with the participants:

YOU CAN FOCUS ON VARIOUS THINGS IN THE REFLECTION::

- ☛ Participants' feelings and experiences
- ☛ Connecting feelings with rational understanding ("aha moment")
- ☛ Participants' interactions and sharing what happened and how it was perceived
- ☛ Feedback among participants, towards the activity as well as the instructor
- ☛ Uncovering basic principles related with the aim of the activity (the reason behind running the activity)
- ☛ Supplying additional information from other participants as well as instructors
- ☛ Connecting activity and outcomes with real (personal) lives of participants – within their families, school, friends
- ☛ Raising questions for pondering

Reflection step by step according to Kolb's cycle of learning

- 1. Description of the activity** – ventilating feelings, experiences, misunderstandings. A common picture of the group acting during the activity gradually emerges from the mosaic of individual experiences. These experiences are a point of reference for instructors leading the reflection
- 2. Discovering principles, models, outcomes connected with the activity** – it is a "recasting" of individual experience into more general principles of behaviour, models of functioning, theories and procedures connected with similar type of activity as represented by the programme. After that it is possible to move to suggestions how to transform the tried and tested, functioning ways of behaviour into practice.
- 3. Relating models and principles from the activity to real life** – connecting the models introduced by the activity to reality of participants' lives (relationships in the family, among friends, in the class). It is ideal when we come back to experiences that participants already have, and extend them gradually.

How to work with reflection of the activity

- » **Open questions** – If the instructors want to control the discussion at the beginning, they can ask open questions. These questions keep space open for various answers but at the same time, they give the discussion a certain direction, e.g.: "What was typical for your co-operation?"
- » If the instructors express the topic of the reflection as well as the way they want to lead the reflection, they can move faster to what was goal of the given activity. Such an announcement can provide participants direction and a clue how they should react and what they should share with others. For example: "I have some observations about how you co-operated, you sure have your own. Let's have a look at individual situations which, according to you, are connected with co-operation."

Structuring reflection

- » **Specifying questions** – Questions guiding participants to be more specific when describing actions, experiences and opinions. For example: Learner: "It seems to me that the second group did not co-operate with us at all." Instructor: "Can you be more specific, what do you see as not co-operating?" The learner explains, instructor can make notes and then asks: "You explained what you see as non co-operation. Could you tell now how the second group should behave so that you perceived it as co-operation?"
- » **Working with outputs** – If the outcome should be a list of co-operative behaviours, after open and specifying questions we create a list compiled from rephrased statements of learners (transformation of experience into learning).
- » **Application in practice** – The crucial moment is whether the learners are able to apply the principles that they formulated in the real life. How can we work with the list of co-operative behaviour any further? We can again ask open question: "We have this list, how can we use it?" and facilitate the ensuing discussion. The discussion can also be structured with the help of questions like: "What can you do to work and behave according to these formulations?" We try to guide the discussion so that the learners speak about concrete changes and actions that they can do. "What can we do to motivate the other group to behave in a co-operative way?"

Other methods

- » **Closed questions** – “Are you happy with the result that you have reached?”
- » **Confrontation of theory and reality**
- » **Commenting what is happening during reflection** – “After this question you stayed silent. . .”; “You are now all talking about Martin but you gave him no chance to say something.”
- » **Presenting one’s own observations** – “In one moment you have divided into two subgroups with different opinions, led by Petra and Dan. Can you say something about that?”
- » **Interpreting of the actions by the instructor**

What helps to run an effective reflection

- » **Setting clear goal of activity as well as reflection** (where the reflection should lead).
- » **Using a suitable type of activity to reach the given goal** – the activity should incorporate the potential to develop given topics and experiences, it should not be too long compared to the time needed for reflection and should not contain risks that would lead the group away from the specified goal.
- » **Change of environment** – when the activity is over, it is suitable to change the venue and seating of the learners so that the learners both mentally and physically feel that the activity is over and another phase starts – reflection; e.g. change of seating from small groups to a big group, etc.
- » **Structuring by the instructor** – defining of the topic for reflection, rephrasing learners’ statements in such a way so that they contribute to the overall goal, using terminology of the given topic, asking specifying questions, adding theoretical information, summarizing and classifying learners’ statements, transforming concrete experiences into wider principles. . .
- » **Bringing attention to the flipchart or blackboard** – writing things down helps to gain distance from interactions and inner experiences and move towards creating more general outcomes; in this way, collective memory is also created – things that are written down stay in front of everybody for longer time. Also, learners can identify with individual experiences of the others via public record.

What to do when there is not enough time for reflection

- » Limit the length and number of learners’ contributions: “Summarize for the whole group in what way the agreement was reached.” “Try to describe your actions in two minutes.”
- » Ask closed (semi-closed) questions: “How many people in your group contributed with ideas?” “Which idea did you chose at the end?”
- » Restrict the topic of reflection: „Try to discuss only the question of what helped you to solve the task in an effective way.”
- » Divide participants into smaller groups and give each of the groups different question for reflection.
- » Summarize discussion often: “So it helped you a lot to prepare individual steps beforehand and prepare materials for negotiations with the other group.”

Asking for feedback on activity

WHEN TO ASK FOR FEEDBACK:

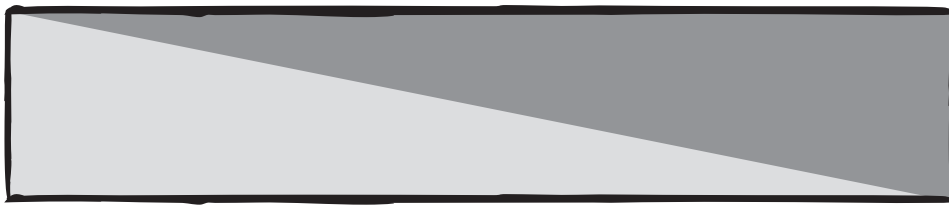
- » After giving instructions – making sure that instructions are clear and whether and how learners understand the task.
- » During the activity – checking whether participants understand what they should do.
- » After activity – as a part of reflection.
- » After each theoretical input – making sure that participants understand.
- » After each block – checking whether participants are happy with the pace and whether they orientate themselves in the topic.

RISK MANAGEMENT

*"Right to adventure is one of the basic human rights."
"Risk is the essential part of any adventure."*

RISK MANAGEMENT IS NOT ABOUT AVOIDING ALL THE POSSIBLE RISKS, IT IS ABOUT MANAGING THEM.

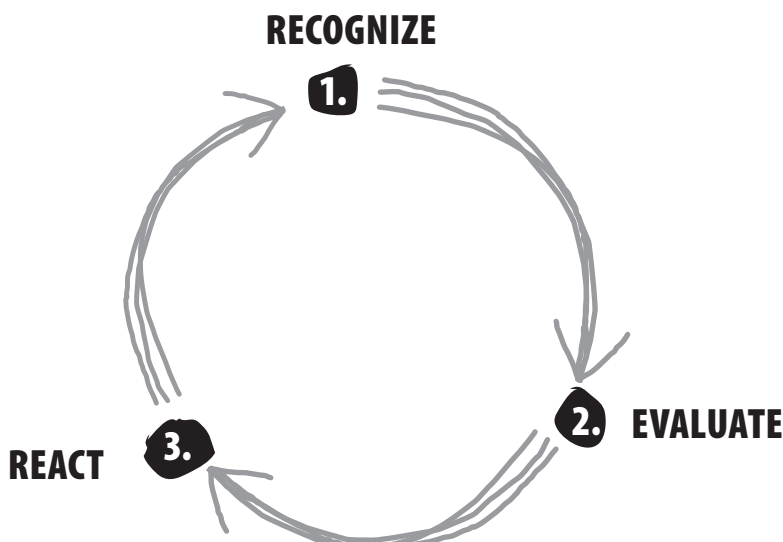
There are two extremes of "risk management":



Absolute safety ←————→ Pure hazard

- ☛ Risk management is not a state; it is a dynamic and continuous process.
- ☛ It is ok to move out from the "absolute safety" zone, but it is important to always know where are you on the scale and why.
- ☛ Risk management is as good as the person who does it.

Three steps of risk management



You don't need to be an expert to evaluate the risks. You need common sense and **good judgment**.

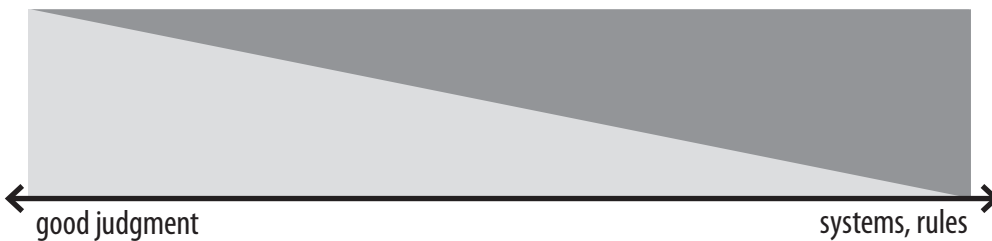
A good judgment is the **ability to make a decision**:

- ☞ Perceptiveness – do you perceive, what is happening around you?
- ☞ Foresight – „...and what will happen, if...?“
- ☞ Knowledge – do you understand the problem, what do you know about it?
- ☞ Experience – have you experienced anything similar before?
- ☞ Intuition – „...it doesn't feel right“

„A leader with limited knowledge and superior judgment is better than one with vast knowledge and little judgment“

STEP 3 – REACT

Two extremes of making decisions.



“Risk management can not be dictated by rules. There are no rules that apply all the time. What does apply is good judgment.”

Risk management is the process of balancing between rules and good judgment both of which help us decide what to do and how.

TYPICAL CAUSES OF SAFETY INCIDENT IN THE EXPERIENTIAL/OUTDOOR LEARNING COURSES

HASTE
UNDERESTIMATION
TIREDDNESS