Fact Sheet
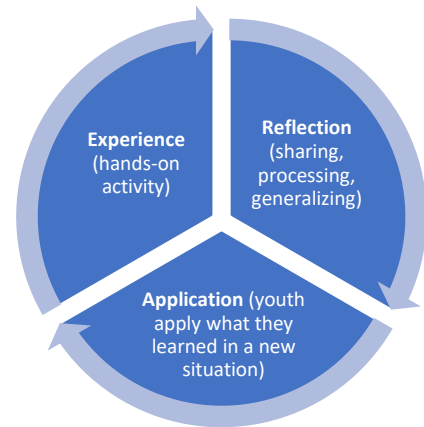# Integrate Experiential Education into Online Learning

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Online learning environments may provide opportunities for youth to develop their agency, competence, and belonging similar to physical learning environments. The 4-H youth development program is well-positioned to foster innovation for online learning that utilizes experiential education.

Experiential education – also known as *hands-on learning* and *learning-by-doing* – is a core instructional approach in the 4-H youth development program. Experiential education is a cycle composed of three phases: experience, reflection, and application[i]. This model is reflected in the diagram.

Practices. Experiential education may be implemented in online learning environments with adaptations to ensure core instructional principles are integrated[ii].

- *Authenticity*: Selection of hands-on activities relevant and meaningful to young people's lives; activities fit within constraints posed by online environments (e.g., materials are available at-home, activities may be completed by one person and not require group work).
- *Connection to the future*: Educators ensure selection of activities most likely to support future learning. Youth reflect on their experience and how they might use what they have learned in the future.
- *Active learning*: Youth are intellectually, emotionally, socially, and physically engaged in an active process of learning. Youth ask questions, use models, conduct investigations, analyze data, construct explanations, engage in discussion, and evaluate information.
- *Drawing on previous experience*: Youth connect the activity to their previous experience. This is supported by the educator facilitating open-ended real-time voice and video chat discussions synchronously and asynchronously through email, blogs, podcasts, videos, and social media.

Cyclical Experiential Education Model

Practical Educator Practices[iii]
• select suitable experiences for online environment
• set boundaries and expectations
• ensure emotional safety
• facilitate the learning process
• guide reflection

Outcomes. When implemented well, experiential education in online environments will achieve similar outcomes to physical environments[iv].
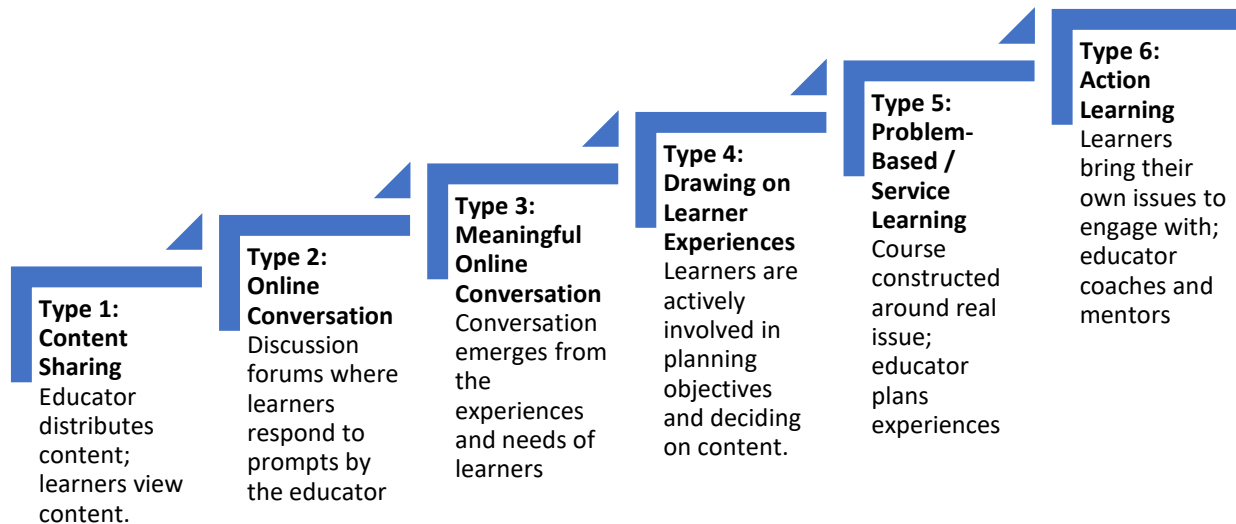
- *Agency*: allowing youth to become change agents in their own lives and in their communities.
- *Competence*: Development of mastery, including learning skills, deepening knowledge, participating to a fuller extend in community practices, and ability to apply experiences in new situations.
- *Belonging*: Development of a community in which youth have a place and see themselves as members. Establishing a sense of belonging is challenging in online communities, thus, the educator should take extra time to provide both informal and structured moments for connection, sharing, and discussion.

Alternatives for the term "online learning" include e-learning, distance learning, virtual learning, web-based learning.

Taxonomy of Experiential E-Education[v]

The taxonomy pictured below may be useful for educators in planning a 4-H virtual educational project. The lower levels may be considered as "passive" learning while the higher levels may be considered more "active" learning. Given the goals and objectives of 4-H, educators should aim for higher levels.

Type 1: Content Sharing
Educator distributes content; learners view content.

Type 2: Online Conversation
Discussion forums where learners respond to prompts by the educator

Type 3: Meaningful Online Conversation
Conversation emerges from the experiences and needs of learners

Type 4: Drawing on Learner Experiences
Learners are actively involved in planning objectives and deciding on content.

Type 5: Problem-Based / Service Learning
Course constructed around real issue; educator plans experiences

Type 6: Action Learning
Learners bring their own issues to engage with; educator coaches and mentors

Example Type 4: 4-H Rocketry

- *Summary:* Youth are involved in a hands-on project at home, where meaningful discussions with peers and the educator happen both asynchronously and synchronously. This communication helps promote a sense of belonging and competence in the content of aerospace, building/constructing models, and communicating online.
- *Technology:* The educator sets up monthly meetings using Zoom along with a private ProBoards forum.
- *Meetings:* Real-time, synchronous meetings take place once a month for an hour. The educator poses questions, facilitates discussion, and shares information. In-between meetings, the educator and youth post on the forum.
- *Learning Experiences:* At the beginning, youth are involved in a discussion of what they are interested in, what topics they would like to learn, and topics they would feel comfortable researching and sharing with others. During meetings, the educator poses questions, has youth watch videos and discuss, play an interactive game, or have youth share what they have been working on. In between meetings, youth are tasked to work on their model rocket. They post questions and messages to the online forum. Near the end, youth record video of their rocket launch and post it online.

Example Type 5: 4-H Environmental Stewardship

- *Summary*: Youth are involved in learning and contributing to the natural environment by conducting a service-learning project on the same topic but in different physical environments. Active and authentic learning takes place as youth learn about environmental restoration and apply that knowledge to a real project in a local place. Youth bring their prior experience, collaborate, and learn that they can make a difference in their community.
- *Technology*: The educator sets up monthly meetings using Google Hangouts along with creating a private Facebook group.

- *Meetings*: Real-time, synchronous meetings take place twice a month for an hour. The educator poses questions, facilitates discussion, and shares information. In-between meetings, the educator and youth post on the forum.
- *Learning Experiences*: At the beginning, youth meet regularly twice a month to discuss the environment, ecology, and other content involved in environmental restoration. The educator helps connect youth with organizations with similar missions. Youth leave messages in the Facebook group to help plan and respond to each other. The educators and other youth leave links to websites and videos that display tips and ideas on how to restore native landscaping, irrigation, and related content. Youth determine what environment they will each restore – their backyard, local park, or other outdoor environment – and identify and complete tasks in the physical world (although not synchronously with other members of the project). Near the end, the educator helps facilitate debriefing, helping youth evaluate their success, what could have worked better, and ideas for a future project.

Example Type 6: 4-H Leadership
- *Summary*: Youth are involved in a leadership project without an explicit content learning goal. Instead, youth learn by planning and implementing a service project to benefit the organization or community. Actively planning, implementing, and evaluating a service project combines meaningful learning with leadership development. Youth develop agency, a sense of belonging in a community of practice, and competence in both the issue under consideration and in teamwork, organization, and coordination.
- *Technology*: The educator provides a Zoom meeting room; and creates a SMS text group using GroupMe.
- *Meetings*: Real-time, synchronous meetings take place once a month for two hours. The facilitator role rotates between youth in the group. Youth text each other via a group chat in-between meetings.
- *Learning Experiences*: The educator helps provide the initial structure and group formation (e.g., introductions, ground rules, decision-making process, etc.). The educator takes a back seat and helps by offering suggestions and reflective questions. Youth spend time asynchronously texting the group with ideas and questions. At scheduled times, youth communicate synchronously to discuss these ideas and select an issue that is meaningful to them. From that point, youth plan the project, and determine how to address the issue.

[i] Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

[ii] Carver, R. (1996). Theory for practice: A framework for thinking about experiential education. *Journal of Experiential Education, 19*(1), 8-13.

[iii] Itin, C. M. (1999) Reasserting the philosophy of experiential education as a vehicle for change in the 21st century. *Journal of Experiential Education*, *22*(2), 91-98.

[iv] See note ii above

[v] Carver, R., King, R., Hannum, W., & Fowler, B. (2007). Toward a model of experiential e-learning. *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, 3*(3), 247-256.