APPLICATION OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THEORY IN TEACHING GEOGRAPHY AND SUSTAINABILITY STUDIES

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Abstract

There are two basic education philosopher that define schooling and dominate or influence teachers' classroom practice of teaching and learning. They translate in the classroom practically to teachers centered philosophers and student–centered philosopher. Traditionally, teach centered philosophies emphasize the importance of transferring knowledge through core courses in the traditional academic disciplines and the teacher is the authority figure in the classroom. The world is moving from essentialism where the teacher dominates to progressivism: which has become a necessary change in the central of progressivism is the experiential learning model where a learner centered model of learning which is concerned with training the mind or preparing students who learn by doing. This article examines this experiential learning theory by David Kolb (1984) an American psychologist whose work drew from earlier theories by Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky who placed great emphasis on experiential learning and modeling. Experiential learning theory can be applied in: (1) Teach learning (2) circles of knowledge as teaching and learning tools in traditional subject like Mathematics, English and even in modern disciplines as geography and sustainable development studies. It is effective in preparing learners to do well in the real world.

Keywords: Experiential learning, teaching strategy, geography and sustainability studies.

Introduction

The world is moving from essentialism to progressivism in education. Progressive education is characterized by flexible curriculum, activity curriculum, a focus on learners interest and understanding rather than recall of information Enoh (2013). Learning how to learn is more emphasized than amassing information. Camus (2023) an epistemologist queried that instead of building new schools that try to design curriculum backwards that is to think and function

or do what teachers mostly unthink; schools and classroom in the 21st century embrace the evolutionary idea of "build an education around the students, where we have student decide what they will learn". Students must assume primary responsibility for their own learning. Old jobs as teachers is to make certain that our students can do well in the real world. The theory of experiential learning as posited by Kolb.

Notable pegagogists counsel that all instructional activities must be structured to suit learners' learning characteristics and learning styles (Aglazor and Agiande 2017). This article X-rays two methods of learning or classroom instruction that help learners learn independently with teachers or instructor's acting as mediators supervising with results that are long lasting and indelible. According to Bryce 2004 as cited in (Agiande et al 2015) strongly opined that the teachers in the 21st century classroom is no longer at the center of the teaching and learning situation. But learning now rests squarely on the shoulders of learners with the teacher's role now as a facilitator of the learning. (Agiande et al 2015). According to Wolfe (2019) many teachers and educators have a history of jumping on bandwagons and they often have accepted unproven theories as facts and have applied strategies without careful analysis of their effectiveness.

None can contest the fact however that there is a tremendous amount of research findings on modern approaches to teaching; on the extreme end of the same continuum, is the fact that many teachers still teach the way they were taught; they intuitively without attempting to apply cutting edge principles into their classroom practices. But according to Orlich et al (2017) many such teachers ignore diversity in the classroom and learners' learning style or methods of teaching based on research.

But Marzano et al (2011) b1elieve strongly that there are certain classroom teaching strategies that really work based on long term research evidences. Two of those methods are:

1. Team learning and
2. Circle of knowledge

The two methods of team learning and circles of knowledge have been in practice for decades they evolved as strategies for teaching and learning in keeping with the educational theories of Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky, who placed great emphasis on experiential learning as well as modeling from the lower tiers of education to higher levels of learning. The approaches have a bias towards training learners instead of merely educating them and filling their heads and hearts with facts, data or memorization of bodies of knowledge (Agiande 2021). The methods seek to "train" learners to perform or demonstrate knowledge and experience from a problem solving, critical thinking, platforms.

This methods can be used to impact skills to solve practical and existing environmental problems, issues and sustainable development challenges facing humanity in the 21st century (Georgianna & Griaqunito, 1995) Agiande (2021).

Extant literature and current cutting edge research proved that there are certain research based strategies for instruction that do work and increase student learning and achievement even in this digital and AI era.

These twin methods of learning was made popular by a group of American teachers, learning Psychologists and pedogagists in the field of classroom group dynamics in teaching and learning as a method of teaching and learning designed to facilitate a combination of *contracts, independent assignments* and other types of small group instructional strategies as these are essential to meeting the different learning styles modalities that meet the needs of individual students; methods that are in tandem with students' preferred learning styles and meet the need for socialization and group learning in an inclusive classroom (Marzano et al 2011).

Classroom situation where a teacher strive to accommodate all learners needs team learning and circles of knowledge is a programme of individualized instruction that allows learners to work in PAIRS and TEAMS or alone. As a teaching strategy on building small group interaction into the learning process, its initial testing was aimed at preventing youngsters of ages 6 – 12 years from becoming isolated and creating a group where learners with different learning modalities can interact and help each other learn by bring to bear learning modalities to see how they can blend and bond, while learning in the process without being lonely during the course of instruction by working together. Students overcome the inhibitions that the presence of a teacher often brings in some subject areas.

According to Clark and Mayer (2016) psychological research in the science of instruction that is supportive of these methods indicate that youngsters especially those of the above age bracket often feel isolated in a classroom climate where they seem left behind in subjects that they find difficult and whose performance make them feel inadequate and vulnerable before their peers and teachers. Team work then helps them to:

i. Spark each other's interest
ii. Take responsibility for their own learning and
iii. It gives them a chance to learn at own pace – only with the support of peers
iv. It help children approach learning as fun as it specially afford them the gain of recognition in group respect and self-esteem from their peers which is important to youngsters.
v. It can be used to promote gender equality in the classroom by paring boys and girls

Team learning is an excellent technique for introducing new materials to children such as reading, writing (essays) poetry, history of other lands and cultures etc. it's a tool for integration in a diversity classroom.

Georgianna and Giaquinto (1995) asserts that team learning is not only an excellent technique for introducing new materials, but as a student centered framework for learning; it equip groups of students with the needed skills to collectively share the responsibility that facilitate the educational process for the common good of all.

The Planning Process and Components (Mechanics) of Group Learning

It is necessary for teachers to plan team learning activities. Bass (1965) Johnson and Johnson (2018) in planning for team learning; teacher will be able to more effectively strategize enrichment and interventive measures to ensure the personal involvement of each child or learner in the various teams.

The following steps are therefore necessary among others: to keep in mind while planning

- The teacher first of all provide the learning atmosphere for the activity such as learning station, game tables, special sections within a class such as carpeted sections of a class tools for the team work such as books, games, puzzles, pictures, drawings or painting kits. This work well for history routing, arts and painting lessons.
- The singular goals of the work of the teams or individuals is explained *ab-initio* by the teacher as to what He/She wants the learners to achieve and give them a freehand to decide how to get there as groups or individuals.
- Students are permitted given to free hand to choose how they want to work and whom their team members should be; chums pals etc.
- Individual learners are to encouraged to participate in their chosen groups or team actively. A chart prepared ahead of the activities can be booster and reminder prior to the actual activity.

The Teachers Facilitating Role in Team Learning

1. The teacher must have a workable plan or schedule on how to work directly with each group.
2. Teacher will ask questions, inspect progress in relation to the set objectives for the teams
3. Constantly enquire to determine areas of difficult or challenges where intervention in needed
4. The teacher looks out for obvious areas of difficulty not detected or reported by the students out of fear shyness
5. Teacher can visit with each group spontaneously or wait to be invited by groups to prevent interference.
6. Teacher constantly looks out for individuals in a group who are not participating so as to correct and motivate such since this is the reason for creating the groups in the first place.

Circles of Knowledge

Circles of knowledge are organized slightly differently from the teams. In circles of knowledge, learners are grouped in small numbers of 4 – 5 years with assigned materials like a poem, a story or a specific environmental challenge. They are given time to read it out loud to themselves and help each other understand by explaining key concepts , difficult pronunciations of words and terms etc. after which the teacher then do some or more of the following:

1. Ask questions that require answers from the body of the material; piece of poetry or history.
2. The teacher may also ask questions outside the material to a team, and each team is required to co-operate to get the answer.
3. Each team is expected to select a leader who serve as the recorder to represent it to record answers, corrections or present a thought on behalf of the group or circle.
4. Students are deliberately required to depend on each other for clarifications of meanings pronunciations of words e.g. carbon sequestration.

Circles of knowledge are advantageous as it permit students to do the following:

a. Focus student's attention on one concept at a time see Agiande (2017) teaching for understanding in Environmental Education.
b. Provoke each other to participate in learning as opposed to passitivity
c. It exposes students to learning activities take drive away boredom example, making them to locate the most culturally diverse nation on a map.

Experts concede that team learning and circles of knowledge can be organized in such a way that every child contributes to group discussion, participate in a project, share knowledge, and find acceptance and a platform for expression that ordinarily could never happen. The teacher must serve only as a moderator who attend to each group, mark and grades each group at the end of the exercise (Johnson and Johnson 2018).

Practical application of Team Learning and Circles of Knowledge in geography and sustainability studies

In the teaching and learning of geography, many students sometimes even teachers complain that the teaching of certain lessons are reduced to just names of places, name of relief and land forms, dates, spatial data, quantitative figures and measurement that seem not to capture

student interests ad concentration, but the same lessons can yield different assigned themes, concepts and certain phenomenon to investigate either as a team or as individuals.
For an example instead of listing the different ecosystem, types that occur in a certain geographical area, groups could be assigned to investigate "Biomes types and where and why they occur where they are; and to ascertain the climatic factors that favour the growth of each Biomes". The process of studying gathering of information, processing, the information and sharing of the responsibilities in a group or team, prepares each team member life outside the classroom Johnson & Johnson (2018).

Teaching and learning of sustainability and its principles also is best taught with a wide variety of activities. Something to interest everyone. Project Learning Tree PLT (2016). The experiential process that affect team members or individuals the opportunity to experience what Kolb describe as the four phases of:

i. Concrete experience
ii. Reflective observation
iii. Abstract conception and
iv. Active experimentation

These phases help learners, support learners alignment and enriches a variety of teaching and learning opportunities.

A typical lesson on sustainability on a theme like "diversity" could be made rich for learners in subject like Fine Arts, Visual arts or even geography. The approach should be to guide learners to explore it on different fronts like cultural, diversity, eco systems, planet diversity. The process of investigating the different diversities produces skills such as observing, organizing information, classifying, categorizing and concluding skills that a teacher cannot expose them in a single lesson.

The greatest advantage of the experiential learning methods of student – catered learning help all too avoid loafing (classroom loafing).

The twin method or strategy for learning help teacher to manage a heterogeneous gender diverse, multi-cultural classroom to accommodate for learners learning modalities simplify complex process of learning and afford each child a window to express how each learn best. The process shift attention from teachers to learners thus enhancing individual confidence of learning who have overcome tension, shyness and imposed limitations to class participation.

Conclusion

There are many ways that teachers can teach effectively for better learning outcomes such as the one highlighted here in this study. They are all part of individualizing instructions or breaking down lessons to bite-size so that individual learners who will normally be lost in the process of teaching and learning can be reached individualized instructions are fast becoming popular due to the current emphasis on inclusive education and education that carries every learner along.

It is even more important to state here that the template that shaped teaching and learning has shifted both in the classroom and other learning situation. These approaches to learning can both be used in classroom learning situation in industries in gyms and kinetic practices in the arts and in de-programming situations for addicts and in correctional facilities.

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