Education For Good: Symposium Proceedings

From Dewey to Doing: How Experiential Education Theory Can Be Effectively Used as a Best Education Practice

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Abstract

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This manuscript documents how the promise of best educational theory fares in the real world crucible of community-based education programs. For almost a hundred years, the work of John Dewey has inspired educators who adhere to an idea proposed by Aristotle that "what one learns to do, one learns by doing." We will argue that the need for experiences, distributed over time, and with time built in for individual and group reflections on action provide the best opportunity for learning.

The paper builds upon program and assessment examples, and the outcome data gleaned from hard-won lessons to describe how Dewey's principles of interaction and continuity are brought into play day after day in 4-H. The presentation makes visible the impacts of interaction and continuity in the context of a strong and ongoing experiential Ridges to Rivers: Watershed Explorations Program for youth. We will also discuss what makes an "experience" valuable to learners and how these principles can help educators understand the participant's learning experience.

The authors assert that although the principles of interaction and continuity are vague and often overlooked, they are important underpinnings of Dewey's philosophy of experiential educuation. Furthermore, a good understanding of the principles can help a practitioner in the field of experiential education refine and strengthen the effectiveness of their work.

Introduction: Theory into Practice

This paper documents how the promise of best education theory into practice fares in the real world crucible of community-based education programs. As our research tool, we use an inquiry process (Karplus, et al., 1980; National Research Council, 2000) to ask what, why, where, who and how to answer our questions, and to generate others, as we

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