



EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION - AN OPPORTUNITY FOR COMPENSATORY EDUCATION

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Abstract/Izvlaček

The article describes a project about 'experiential education' at a school in Germany. The main educational objective is to offer an alternative way of teaching pupils who show destructive and aggressive behaviour. After a critical analysis of the concept of experiential education with regard to its educational relevance, the conceptual design and implementation of the project is presented. The experiences gained through participant observation and interviews can be interpreted in such a way that pupils with behavioural problems can gain a new, different access to themselves through special movement- and social-related activities, an outcome which has positive effects on social behaviour in the class and school climate in general and working behaviour in subject lessons specifically.

Keywords:

experiential education,
compensatory education,
holistic approach, ego-
effectiveness

Ključne besede:

izkustveno
izobraževanje,
kompenzacijsko
izobraževanje, celostni
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Izkušensko izobraževanje – oblika kompenzacijskega izobraževanja

V članku je predstavljen projekt na področju izkušenskega izobraževanja na primeru šole v Nemčiji. Osnovni cilj projekta je razviti alternativno obliko poučevanja učencev, ki kažejo destruktivno in agresivno vedenje. V prispevku je najprej predstavljena kritična analiza koncepta izkušenskega izobraževanja z vidika vloge in pomena tovrstne oblike poučevanja, medtem ko je v drugem delu opisana konceptualna zasnova in izvedba projekta. Rezultati raziskave, pridobljeni z opazovanjem z udeležbo in intervjuji, kažejo, da lahko učenci z vedenjskimi težavami dostop do lastnega zaznavanja/razmišljanja pridobijo prek gibalnih in socialnih dejavnosti. S tem pa lahko pozitivno vplivajo tako na splošno socialno vedenje v razredu in razredno klimo kot na vedenje pri šolskih dejavnostih specifičnih predmetov.

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Introduction

After the first 'wave of experiences' at the beginning of the last century, experiential education embarked on an extended renaissance in educational discussion and practice. Towards the end of the last century, an 'experience orientation' invaded almost all areas of society (Schulze, 2000), so it is common to speak of a second 'wave of experiences'. In the last two decades, this second wave has increasingly focused on the potential for and significance of experiences in teaching and educational processes and is thus enriching the educational discussion (Schenz, 2006; Becker and Schirp, 2008; Zoglowek, 2009).

Oelkers (1992) posed the question, "Can experiencing educate?" at the beginning of the resurgence of 'modern experiential education' (Kölsch, 1995) and answered it himself as follows: "Experience can educate, and education can be an experience, although it is difficult to control, only weakly foreseeable and always associated with incalculable side effects" (Oelkers, p. 9, 1992, own translation). Despite the scepticism expressed here, which is shared by not a few, many published teaching projects have reported successful experience-oriented practice (e. g. Fischer, 2004; Michl, 2015; Heckmair and Michl, 2018). Thus, there is sufficient reason to believe that experience has high educational and learning potential. "Children can learn many things in and about experiences; their senses can be trained, and a variety of experiences can be gained that they would not otherwise have had in many families and their living environment. However, whether and how the initiated experiences make a contribution to the (self-)education process cannot be planned" (Höltershinken, p. 67, 2013, own translation).

The basic question of how upbringing and education can be made plannable cannot be answered by experiential education, but that experiential education can make a contribution cannot be denied either. This article is to be seen as a further contribution to presenting the possibilities of experiences in the educational and learning work in school (see a similar related approach with a different angle of incidence by Zoglowek and Kuhn, 2021).

Experiential education

"Experiential education sees itself as an alternative and supplement to traditional and established educational and learning institutions" (Fischer & Ziegenspeck, 2008, p. 27, own translation). It aims towards a holistic approach and procedure.

Cognitive, affective, social, and motor areas are to be addressed at the same time, as these are necessarily mutually dependent. From the phenomenology of experience developed by Dilthey (1919), Neubert (1932) worked out seven experience-oriented moments, from which she derived pedagogical principles for a school education oriented towards the humanities. These are, for example, the "method of contemplation", the "claim of wholeness" or the "development of individuality" with simultaneous "learning of objective learning content" (Neubert, 1932, p.16ff, own translation). According to Dilthey, the triad "experience - expression - understanding" form a significant epistemological unit. Furthermore, he emphasizes that knowledge is only possible through experiencing, in the meaning of 'reliving', and working through the experiences. It is not the experience as such that is decisive, but the educational reflection on it. Didactically, this triad process is of the greatest importance, since it "expresses both the holistic context and the creative power of the experiences for the individual development of the person" (Zoglowek, 2009, p. 197). Even though Neubert critically discusses the possible limitation of the educational effectiveness of experiences - such as the ego relation and the individuality of the experiences, or its emotional relation - she ultimately pleads for experiences as "eternally valid methodical means" (Neubert, 1932, p. 60, own translation) (see also Koring, 1997; Zoglowek, 2009).

Even though experiential education is still met with scepticism, it has nevertheless found its place and significance in today's (school) education over the past two or three decades. A coherent theory, a comprehensive concept or a fundamental didactic foundation are still lacking, but this is probably not even possible, given the complexity, subjectivity, and general imponderability of pedagogically initiated situations. Nevertheless, there are enough examples of successful and functioning experiential social and schoolwork from the primarily socio-pedagogical practice. There are also increasing attempts to provide a deeper theoretical foundation and systematization of experience-based learning (Zuffellato and Kreszmeier, 2007; Fischer and Lehmann, 2009; Michl, 2015; Heckmair and Michl, 2018). With its claim to be an "alternative supplement", experiential education today can contribute to enriching everyday school life and schoolwork without striving for a "reform of the didactics of experiential education" or a "transformation of the school through experience", as Neubert (1932) emphasized.

One often finds "today's experiential education programmes and their reality [...] as not copyable and transferable originals, which are convincingly positioned in their niche existence of 'pedagogical provinces', but without other pedagogical areas being able to be connected according to their ideas [...]. Thus, the problem of experiential education is no longer how new concepts, programmes or discourse options can arise in the processes of pedagogical practice and educational reflection, but how existing potential can be used more offensively and not permanently wasted" (Fischer, 2004, p. 4, own translation).

Compensatory education

Compensatory education was primarily a concept in early childhood education, most popular in the 1970s and 1980s. Inspired by support programmes in the USA to increase the developmental chances of children and adolescents in precarious life situations and educationally disadvantaged homes, such initiatives were also taken in Europe at this time (Bloom, Davis and Hess, 1964; Iben, 2008). In view of the lack of evident success and increasing criticism of the content, compensatory education was lost from the 1980s onwards (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Bernstein, 1981), but since the turn of the millennium, it has gained renewed importance in connection with the increase in children with a migration background and children in poverty (BpB, 2009; Schmidt and Smidt, 2014). However, in their review of the significance of the compensatory approach for early education, Schmidt and Smidt (2014) conclude that available research findings show no significant compensatory effects. This does not mean, however, that the entire concept must be rejected in principle: "However, these findings do not fundamentally call into question the basic potential of the compensatory approach. A balance of the current empirical state of knowledge shows that early compensatory support can have clearly positive effects" (Schmidt and Smidt, 2014, p. 141, own translation).

Compensatory education, understood as an educational aid accompanying schooling to compensate for socio-culturally determined behavioural and learning deficits, can certainly help children to develop their natural talent and aptitude potential.

This is precisely the aim of this article: the presentation of an experiential education project in a school, in which an alternative learning and educational program is created for a certain group of pupils who show salient negative behaviour.

The experiential education activities offered for the development of ego-strength and self-efficacy, of independence and self-responsibility can thus assigned a certain compensatory function.

The experiences project

The theoretical approaches briefly presented in the introduction form the basis for an experiential education project that attempts to respond to a problem that has existed at this school for years. Even if the approach can be considered primarily socio-pedagogical, it should nevertheless be pointed out at this point that no experiential therapy is carried out, but rather an attempt is made to react to constantly occurring behavioural deviations that, so far, have resisted successful change.

Inspired by Pestalozzi's pedagogy of an all-round, holistic education of head, heart and hand (Pestalozzi, 1996) and referring to the didactics of experiential education, alternative working and learning strategies are developed for a certain group of pupils. By means of primary experiences, an approach is initiated to enable learning with (more) commitment and motivation. The model of the human experience circle developed in the experiential education of Ziegenspeck (1992) serves as a ground-breaking approach (see Table 1).

Table 1: The human circle of experience (Ziegenspeck, 1992, taken from: Fischer and Lehmann, 2009, p.134, own translation)

Individual Level		
To be	To become	To want
Curiosity	Courage	Interest
Pleasure	Creativity	Responsibility
Love	Achievement	Steering
Self-awareness	Autonomy	Emancipation
Identity	Mastering	Integration
Heart	Hand	Mind
Emotionality	Psycho-motorics	Cognition
Soul	Body	Spirit
Life	Activity	Learning
Relationship	Work	Education
Humanity	Individuality	Enlightenment
To be	To become	To want
Sociocultural Level		

Problem outline

The school has been trying for years to counter the problem of pupils with behavioural problems by means of various educational resources, without much success so far. The negative behavioural problems observed from the very beginning of the school year could generally not be eliminated. On the contrary, they often intensified over the school year and ended partly with draconian disciplinary sanctions, up to expulsion from school.

Deep-seated social development deficits such as aversive and destructive behaviour, absent and deviant behaviour in class, as well as aggressive and delinquent behaviour towards fellow pupils and teachers are more or less the order of the day for some pupils. The negative influence on the class and teaching situation is considerable and disturbs or prevents the positive learning climate that is the goal. Exclusion from class or lessons may improve the situation for the rest of the class, but it does not help the excluded ones, instead, it reinforces their underdevelopment in the social as well as the intellectual sphere.

Intervention programme

Pupils who provoke by extravagant behaviour in class usually cannot be integrated into the school behavioural framework and into school learning processes using conventional methods. The actual productive, cognitive work of a school lesson can have little or no success as long as emotional and psychological approaches are blocked.

Breaking up or interrupting teaching routines can be a sensible method to help the entire class, but especially those students who are negative conspicuous. For this purpose, action- and experience-oriented activities from the field of experiential education (Neubert, 1932; Fischer, 2004; Meier, Hampel, Gaiswinkel and Kümmel 2009; Michl, 2015), but also the Scandinavian concept of *friluftsliv* (Hofmann, Rolland, Rafoss and Zoglowek, 2015), are selected and tailored according to the situation of these conspicuous pupils.

Step 1 - Situation analysis

A multi-professional team of teachers, consisting of a member of the school management, the class and subject teachers, a social worker, a special-education teacher and a leisure educationist, accompanies classes 5 and 6 and determines which pupils should participate in the experiential education project.

The pupils are also involved in this process, i. e., action is taken in consultation with them, so that the measures and activities are understood as individual help and not as punishment.

Step 2 - Intervention

The social worker and the leisure educationalist set up an activity programme and a time schedule for the selected children, when and where experiential education-oriented "adventure activities" take place. The social worker and the leisure educationist, who is an "outdoor specialist", carry out these activity-learning units.

Table 2: Time schedule of experiential educational programme

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1	Grade 5 Actions Aula/ Hall A	Grade 6 – gr.1 Actions Aula	Grade 6 – gr.2 Actions Hall B	Grade 5 Reflection	
2	Grade 5 Actions Hall A	Grade 6 – gr.1 Actions Hall B	Grade 6 – gr.2 Actions Hall B	Grade 7- gr.1 Reflection	Grade 6/7 (girls) Reflection
3		Grade 7 – gr.1 Actions Hall B	Grade 6 – gr.2 Reflection	Grade 6/7 (girls) Actions Hall C	
4		Grade 7 – gr.1 Actions Hall B	Grade 6 – gr.1 Reflection	Grade 6/7 (girls) Actions Aula	

Table 2 shows the experiential education timetable for the current school year. From the beginning, the activities take place outside. However, additional sports-hall hours are always available, so that the activities can take place in any case, regardless of the weather.

The experiential education activities are physical and movement-related activities and challenges. These can be nature hiking, climbing, skating, canoeing, strength and balance exercises, or other activities in the natural environment that are, first and foremost, physically challenging. For example, the pupils must find their way around an unknown natural area in small groups, using only a map and compass to reach a certain destination, or climbing activities, where they have to support, carry and secure each other in pairs. To cross a river or moorland with dry feet can be another exciting challenge for a small group.

It is crucial to provide situations where the task arouses curiosity. Curiosity for action and excitement. The experiences should trigger, support and further develop a positive self-image and personality development. "The theme of experiential education is, of course, the improvement of the personal situation" (Fischer, 2004, p. 8, own translation).

In order to involve the pupils better in taking responsibility for the activities, they should also partly decide what is to be done. For example, at the beginning of the lesson, they are offered various activities from which they can choose. In "free" phases, pupils can also decide what they want to try out today without a predetermined task. However, care is to be taken to ensure that no more than two activities are offered at a time.

Step 3 - Reflection

In the theoretical presentation of experiential education, attention was drawn to the special importance of reflexive processing of the activities and situations experienced. This period of reflection is also attributed a decisive importance in this method. It corresponds to Dilthey's triad process of 'experience - expression - understanding', which is important for comprehension and cognition, but also to the phase of 'transfer', i. e., the transfer and integration of the content of the experiences into a school subject context.

Figure 1 illustrates the (potential) learning process by turning frequent experiences into an experience that, in turn, becomes knowledge that can be applied in other situations. It is therefore important that all action units are connected to or completed with a period of reflection. This reflection work is mainly initiated and led by the social worker, but the leisure educationist or other teachers can also participate.

As a guideline, the content of these reflection periods is accomplished by general methods of social youth work such as 'analysis of the energy level', 'movement analysis' or 'writing down thoughts with pen and paper' (Jugendleiterblog, 2018).

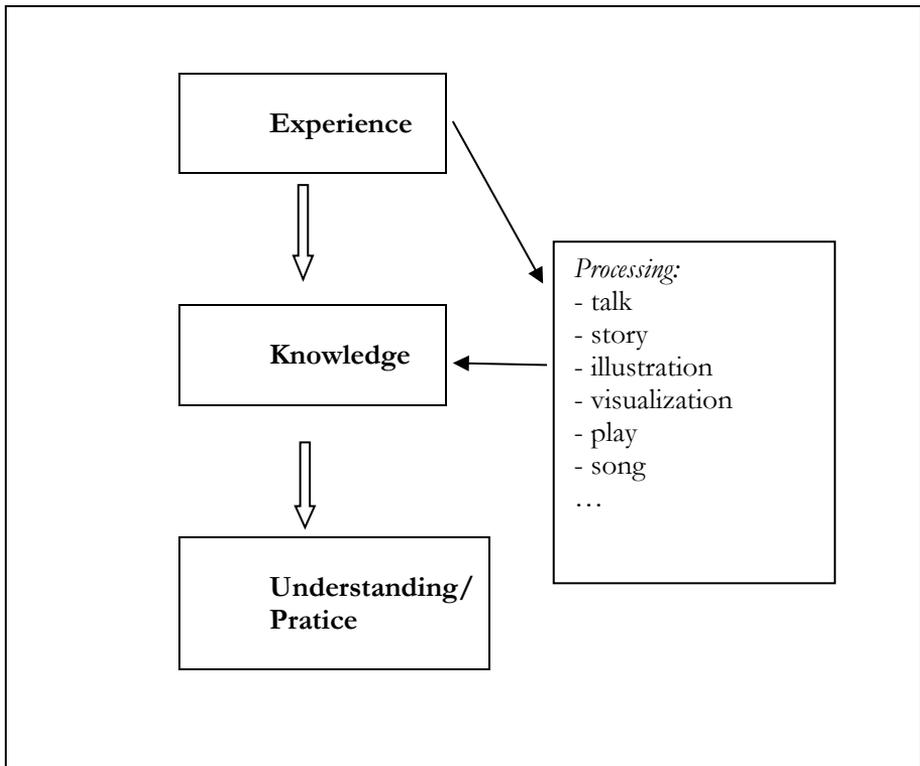


Figure 1: Experience - Expression - Understanding (Zoglowek, 2009)

Step 4 - Subject-specific integration

In addition to this desired stimulation of ego and social competence, the first part of the reflection phase - and this is the innovative and most important aspect in this approach - is also meant for the stimulation of subject-specific competence. By being removed from normal lessons, pupils necessarily miss out on parts of the subject lessons during their experiential education activities. These curriculum-related achievements are now included in the experience education approach to assist in the reintegration of pupils into regular lessons over the long run.

Here, the epistemological unit 'experience - expression - understanding' is applied in a double way, both intentionally and instrumentally. The pupil can and should verbalise and express her or his experience in the period of reflection.

Thus, the experience is understood. If, in the next step, pupils are able to describe their activities and experiences in more detail, in keywords or in whole sentences, the experiences can become a starting point for learning processes within, e. g., German lessons. Physical activity and experience thus do not remain on a physically or emotionally satisfying level but are taken as a concrete starting point for cognitive-abstract learning.

The following example illustrates such a procedure. Table 3 shows a simple word-writing exercise, while Table 4 calls for more complex descriptions, including individual comments and explanations by the pupils.

This is an example for a German lesson but could also apply to an English lesson.

Table 3: Keyword description of the experienced activities

	Review	Experiences	
Activity	Location	Devices/Materials	Evaluation
What did you do?	Where did you do something?	With what did you do something?	How did you like it?

Table 4: Scheme for a more complex description of the experienced activities

Experience arena school
Activity: what, when, where?
Devices/materials:
Evaluation:
Comments/explanation:
Pictures/photos:

In addition to physical, social and emotional moments of experience, all experiential education activities should offer opportunities for communicative, verbal and cognitive learning. From the keyword-like description of individual activities to description of procedures, comments and justifications and the keeping of a weekly report booklet, which is an inducement in order to compile a good internship report. When the verbalisations and written descriptions of the experienced activities reach the level required in Table 4, the pupil can be reintegrated into the regular lessons.

Initial experience

The experiential education project is still in its initial phase. Since no generally applicable concepts can be used, the teachers must develop their own approaches and try out their own ideas.

Experiences in one group cannot be generalized to other groups, or only to a limited extent. What might be a success for one pupil, might be a failure for another. Therefore, it is possible to report about experiences in general, but not to generalize them or even to evaluate them with regard to different perspectives or implications. Here every pupil stands alone. Given the relatively difficult starting position, the staff supporting this experiential education project is satisfied with each pupil who shows positive behavioural changes - and after a certain period of time, the youngster can be taken back into 'regular teaching', provided these pupils have achieved a positive attitude towards their work in class.

The short interviews, which were carried out with the social worker, the leisure educationist and various teachers, show clear improvement in the relationship levels between the actors. Improved working behaviour in class and a positive change in social behaviour are reported. Behavioural problems are decreasing in favour of steady development of the individual personality and self-discovery. The relationship level in 'normal' teaching lessons has become more sustainable, along with a decrease in juvenile delinquency. Pupils can always be reintegrated, even if this is not possible in all cases.

As in any serious educational and teaching work, each specific pupil is to be regarded as an individual. Education is an individual process. Whether experiences contribute to the (self-) education process, (see Höltershinken, as cited in the introduction), can only be ascertained afterwards or much later. If, however, experiences support a desire for personal development, then these experiences are of inestimable value in education and the art of teaching. So, every successful attempt can be seen as confirmation and encouragement of the experiential education project. Thus, the short description of an individual case should be used to outline the importance and correctness of the experiential educational approach.

Case description: Timmy

Timmy registered for grade five in summer 2018. The primary school that had educated the boy for four years described Timmy's behaviour as follows:

Single mother, father never present. Mother has an alcohol problem; Timmy was temporarily placed in homes several times after intervention by the Youth Welfare Office. Timmy shows negative social behaviour, is quick-tempered, massively disturbs teaching, is unfocused, has a weak learning attitude style, and he is aggressive and sometimes violent.

The fifth school year initially was a challenging year for both the pupil and his teachers. Repeated crisis interventions occurred, and direct institutional care followed. For Timmy, the first school disciplinary measures were imposed. Last autumn, the school attempted to influence the boy through experiential/outdoor education. Timmy reacted positively to the new physical challenges. He climbed with motivation, gladly accepted the opportunities for skating, boarding or archery and quickly developed a positive relationship towards the social worker and the outdoor educationist. Although he still rejected regular lessons and the corresponding teachers, the professionally-guided reflective talks and the resulting growth in personality and strengthening of his self-efficacy led to slow changes in Timmy's attitude. In addition, an individual learning assistant helped to reduce Timmy's resentment towards teaching. The periods of effective learning in class increased, and crisis interventions by the youth welfare office have not been necessary for months.

Final reflections

Educational work is always a great challenge, and for all the major achievements that schools and educational institutions, teachers and educators worldwide have accomplished each year, there are no recipes or concepts for successful work. In principle, successful education and educational formation cannot be planned (see also Scholz, 1964; Schwiersch, 1995; Schäfer, 2011; Höltershinken, 2013); success is more likely to be determined by the diversity and variety of approaches and methods, proposals and opportunities. Not to mention the social, political and socio-cultural conditions that shape the respective educational and teaching concepts. The variety of teaching and educational approaches also includes experiential education, as it has been documented in a series of publications. The holistic approach, based on action and experience, can certainly be ascribed a compensatory component, similar to the way Kurt Hahn tried to demonstrate the possibilities a hundred years ago in his experiential therapy approach, how every young person can discover and promote previously undiscovered abilities in him- or herself (Hahn, 1958; 1998). Working in the field of experiential education can perhaps do partial justice to the educational principle of 'equal opportunities for all'. By working with socio-cultural differences and deficits, we can try to achieve an equal basis for learning.

It is evident that the physical challenges can be beneficial in two ways: on the one hand, it is about overcoming individual blockades; on the other hand, it is also about relaxation and contemplation. Between these two (emotional) states, we can offer experiential education activities, so that a feeling of capability and self-efficacy can be developed. If these experiences can be carefully transferred to other school situations and developmental challenges, the general educational and learning goals of schools can be achieved. With its aspirations, this school seems to have taken a step closer to this objective. And they are thinking ahead.

The future goal is not only to use experiential education as a socio-pedagogical strategy for difficult pupils, but also to offer these personality and self-image-promoting activities to all pupils. School should be a place for children and young people to have many opportunities to develop fundamental attitudes and qualities. The path via action- and experience-oriented learning seems to be a successful one, based on previous experience.

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