

Muse Machine

SUMMER 2019

“Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.” – John Dewey

Why Muse Pedagogy Matters: *Our work with schools, teachers and students is grounded in theory, research, best practice and joyful learning. At the center of this work is a pedagogy that is arts-based and experiential and allows for the application of learning in a wide range of subject areas. This pedagogy also positions art-making as a core function of learning and life. Through our work we honor every learner’s prior knowledge and experience as foundational in the pursuit of new knowledge that naturally builds over time with practice and reflection. As a result, learners naturally reflect on their learning process and understand its meaning in their cognitive development and their lives.*

Introduction

During its 2016 Summer Institute for Educators, Muse Machine honed its approach to professional development, which employed experiential teaching and learning. Results of subsequent institute evaluations and many comments of participants and teaching artists suggest that the approach was effective and appreciated. The 2019 summer institute will build on this success, again employing experiential learning throughout its four days. This resource guide provides an overview of this technique.

What is Experiential Learning?

Experiential Learning is learning through experience. More precisely, it involves having a learning experience and then *reflecting on it*. Reflection is a key part of the process, as it:

- deepens the learning experience;
- helps to foster meaning; and
- promotes greater retention and transfer.

Experiential learning is an intentional process, designed purposefully by a teacher or artist, and may take place in either formal or informal situations and in a variety of contexts, including classrooms or community settings. Teachers and artists can be taught how to use experiential learning through professional development that often includes modeling experiential learning; for example, during the summer institute.

Philosophy, Purpose, and History

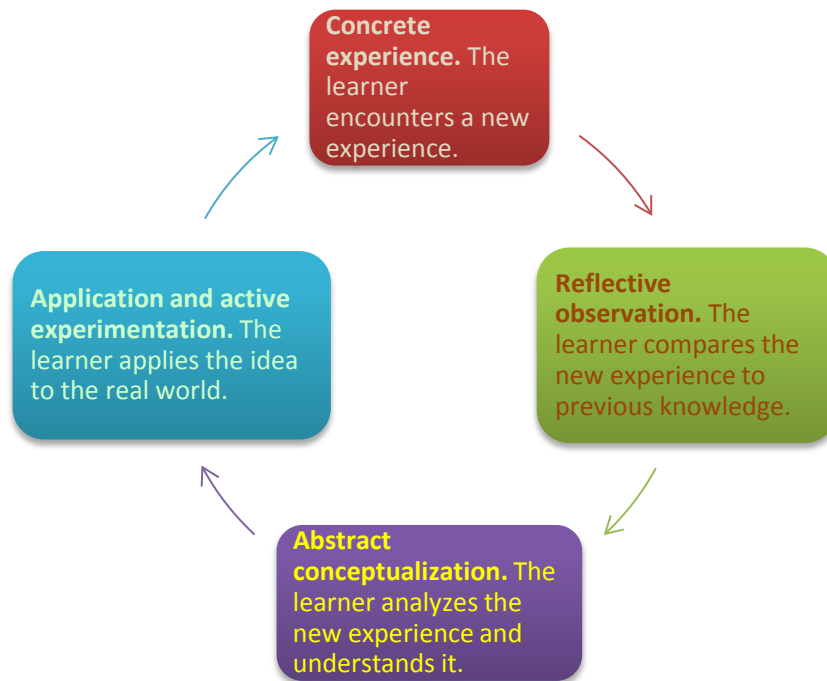
Experiential learning has a long history, going back to the time of Aristotle. It gained prominence in the last century with the work of American philosopher William James (ca. 1910). Early thinkers included John Dewey and Maxine Greene. Contemporary theorists include David Kolb. The methodology increases student engagement, accelerates learning and retention, and sets the stage for:

- Deeper learning and transformation of experience into new knowledge;
- Promoting teamwork and communication skills;
- Developing reflective-practice habits where students learn metacognition, contemplating about their own thinking; and
- Immediately applying knowledge to boost transfer of that knowledge to other areas of study.

For 20 years, the Lincoln Center Institute for the Arts in Education pioneered experiential learning through the inspired teaching of Philosopher Maxine Greene, who emphasized breaking through habitual patterns of thought to understand the world through new ways of knowing, seeing and feeling.

How Does It Work?

Various sources on experiential learning agree that it consists of a multi-stage process, an example of which follows:



Practical Examples: How It Looks in the Classroom

1. Students experience working with or in an artistic medium.
2. As a class, the students reflect on their experience. This process may be facilitated by the classroom teacher, an arts specialist, or a teaching artist.
3. Students develop more abstract thinking about the experience. What did it mean to me? How might I apply it in the future? How does it illuminate other aspects of my studies?
4. Students continue to apply their learning in new contexts (e.g., with other media or materials, themes or ideas).

The process can be repeated to deepen learning.

Thoughts on Experiential Learning from the 2018 & 2019 Institutes

“Experiential learning invites the experience and expertise of the individual learner to meet the subject matter in a state of heightened awareness and discovery. This process allows the learner to mine his/her own genius to articulate the subject matter in a way that sticks. In the 2018 Jazz Power Institute, contextual materials related to rhythms under study; and, historical movements, such as the fight for

women's suffrage, were used as jumping-off points for individual and group exploration through improvisation and other means.

Periods of reflection through personal journaling, and small and large group reflection sealed the deal by allowing participants to recognize patterns, personal and cross-discipline connections, and further articulate what they had learned."

—Eli Yamin, Managing and Artistic Director of Jazz Power Initiative and Teaching Artist in Muse's Summer Institute for Educators: What Jazz Can Teach Us

"Learning through experience is an extended theme in the history of educational philosophy and has been important for some time in American education, both in practice and theory. For example, The LEAP Employer-Educator Compact from the Association of American Colleges & Universities explicitly states that experiential learning is required for the 21st century, calling on institutions to 'support, and expand 21st-century designs for high-quality, hands-on learning.' The work at Muse Machine is ahead of the field because it prepares both faculty and students for the future of learning by emphasizing collaboration, leadership, communication, and inclusion. Most important is the way in which Muse engages populations who traditionally would not have exposure to the benefits of experiential learning. It is no secret that the best educational resources go to the schools and students that have the greatest resources. Muse helps to level the playing field. I am such a fan of Muse Machine's approach to experiential learning by design and am confident that this effort is helping to strengthen the educational foundation of those who are poised to diversify and transform their communities and workplaces over the next 20 years."

—Dara N. Byrne, Ph.D., Associate Provost for Undergraduate Retention and Dean of Undergraduate Studies, John Jay College of Criminal Justice and Presenter at Muse's Summer Institute for Educators: What Jazz Can Teach Us

"When I first read John Dewey's *Art and Experience*, what struck me as vitally important was looking beyond the material 'work of art' to how we experience it. Even as a child, I was aware of experiencing art as I sat beside my mother during concerts in the park, or as I pored over images in her art books. Later, during teacher preparation, I wondered how I might help others heighten and prolong their aesthetic experiences when viewing and making art.

Dewey and Greene compelled me to look beyond the didactic world of arts education and see the importance of attending to the experience of the arts. Ultimately, aesthetic education theory helped me to create experiences that would allow learners to slow down their natural tendencies to classify or make judgments about art and focus on allowing the arts to live more fully in their bodies and minds. And working with educators reminds me how important it is to get adults out of their thinking heads and into the aesthetic realm to more fully experience the arts.

In professional development, I start with art-making before digging into other aspects of arts learning, such as history, culture, craftsmanship, artistry, etc. I go for the 'gold'—feeling the arts viscerally as makers and viewers, holding onto aesthetic experiences, and reflecting on those experiences for insight and personal meaning. Dewey and Greene understood that the arts are very much connected to our everyday lives and prepare us to see the aesthetic possibilities in the world around us."

—Mary Campbell Zopf, Executive Director, Muse Machine

Resources and References

Videos

David Kolb on Experiential Learning (2:40): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZeAdN4FB5A>
Teaching Tips: Experiential Learning Model (2:09):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GDchcHORheM>

Readings

Schwartz, Michelle (2012). Best Practices in Experiential Learning. Ryerson University.
<https://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/lt/resources/handouts/ExperientialLearningReport.pdf>
A relatively brief, how-to-guide.

Dewey, John (1934). *Art as Experience*. Kindle edition available at Amazon.
Art and (aesthetic) mythology, according to Dewey, is an attempt to find light in a great darkness. Art appeals directly to sense and the sensuous imagination, and many aesthetic and religious experiences occur as the result of energy and material used to expand and intensify the experience of life.

Dewey, John (1938). *Experience and Education*. Kindle edition available at Amazon.
Dewey offers a theory of education based on needing to understand the nature of experience. He argues that we must understand how experience occurs in order to design and conduct education for the benefit of individuals in society, both in the present and the future.

Kolb, David A (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (2nd Edition).
Kolb builds on the intellectual origins of experiential learning as defined by figures such as John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, and L.S. Vygotsky and models the underlying structures of the learning process based on the latest insights in psychology, philosophy and physiology. Kolb also applies experiential learning to higher education and lifelong learning, especially with regard to adult education.

Greene, Maxine (2018). *Variations on a Blue Guitar: The Lincoln Center Institute Lectures on Aesthetic Education*. Teachers College Press.
Through a series of lectures, Greene defines aesthetic education and explains how it can transform teachers, students, schools and communities. She believed that helping people see possibilities in artworks sometimes helps people to imagine possibilities in life.