

Book Review

## Erlebnispädagogik by Werner Michl

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**Bibliography of the reviewed book:** Werner, M. (2020). *Erlebnispädagogik*. Ernst Reinhardt, GmbH & Co KG Verlag. 3049. ISBN 978-3-8252-5334-9

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### Introduction

For a long time, experiential education has been used in almost all pedagogical fields of practice. In response to increasing worldwide interest in experiential education, Werner Michl, the German educationalist has produced his recent book, “Erlebnispädagogik”. It gives a thorough overview of experiential education’s situation these days; moreover, it sums up the theoretical works in this topic. The author has many publications, including books, articles, and several papers. Most of them are about experiential learning and outdoor training. He has focused on this issue for over than 30 years - no wonder he is named as “Mister Erlebnispädagogik” in his circle of admirers and critics. His works are regarded as part of modern German language experiential education. In a compact introduction of the volume, Werner answers the most important questions, including about derivation, impact, learning models, fields of action, carriers, and target groups of experiential education. It is a so-called ‘utb-Band’, which means cooperation of publishers with a common goal: to publish textbooks and learning media for successful studies. The cover of the book depicts adolescents playing outdoors to exemplify the importance of exemplary learning processes and that experiences in nature provide lasting impressions.

### Review

“For many educators and psychologists, experiential education is a silver bullet of learning, for politics and the press sometimes an expensive and overrated method” (Werner Michl, 2020, p. 7).

This is how the book begins. The reader should think about these ideas in order to build a better understanding of the topic. Several questions come up immediately: is experiential education really a silver bullet in learning(process)? If it is, why? On the other hand, why should it be just for educators and psychologists a fascinating method, and not for politics and the press? Moreover, is it a fact that this method is expensive and overrated?

The reader, no matter if they are a student or an educator, will get the answers while reading.

There are three major parts in the study. At the beginning, you can look at the contents of the book, which includes an introduction, a main part, and an appendix. The introduction is 14 pages, while the main part consists of 70 pages. Referring to the views of Michl and Bernd Heckmair, experiential education is defined a concept which the “wants to be understood as a sub-discipline of pedagogy through exemplary learning processes and through moving learning to promote personal development and to enable people to shape their living environment responsibly.” (Werner Michl-Bernd Heckmair, 2018, p. 108). Furthermore, the vector model of Ebner’s experiential education is illustrated. Here the reader can look at the dimensions of this pedagogy through visuals. It is common that models and explanations are often appear not only written, but also illustrated to demonstrate the meaning of words and to make the book more enjoyable

The main part of the study includes the following seven chapters:

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### 1. History: Where does experiential education come from?

In this chapter, important terms (such as *peripatos*, *Kairos*, or *carpe diem*) related to experiential education are defined with examples. Followed by a part discussing famous thinkers, forerunner (Rousseau, Thoreau) of experiential education.

### 2. Kurt Hahn: How does experiential therapy become pedagogy?

According to the author, Kurt Hahn is the founder of experiential education. His concepts are known worldwide: Outward Bound, The Duke of Edinburgh Award, and the United World Colleges. In other words, he wanted to heal the signs of decay with positive experiences and therefore called his pedagogical approach experiential therapy. Additionally, the writer shares Hahn's four therapies for solving current problems, such as overweight or passivity through new media.

### 3. The rediscovery of education: What has experiential education contributed to this?

This chapter emphasizes how experiential education led to the rediscovery of education. In total, there are eleven areas here, to which experiential education has contributed something new. All of them are interesting. Upon closer analysis, we see that experiential education offers a different way in sports. It focuses just on sport, exercise, good mood, or sport in nature without ambitious targets. Healthy nutrition will solve half of the problems of adolescents. The author also deals with the relationship of school and experiential education. New ideas and research results are shared here in the topic of innovative school teaching.

### 4. Learning models: burden or pleasure of learning?

“Experiential education is nothing more than efficient learning” (Werner Michl, 2020, p. 41).

This part describes learning models, which we can use by experience-oriented learning. It is represented here that unfortunately quite a few critics associate fear, danger, and physical exhaustion with experiential education and this is what the author means by burden of learning. The psychology of learning has shown that we learn little when we stay within our comfort zone. Then, there is another question, how does fear affect performance? According to Werner and brain research studies, fear makes learning impossible. Later, the author emphasizes how useful flow operates, which means learning through desire and performance. The reader can also learn about experiential learning cycle and constructivist learning.

### 5. From practice to research: How does experiential education work?

Throughout chapter five (and later in chapter six), it becomes clear that an adventure game by itself is not experiential education, but collective reflection is always necessary to enable or reinforce the learning process.

### 6. Metaphorical learning: silver bullets or deadlocks?

In the chapter entitled “Metaphorical learning: silver bullets or deadlocks”, the author urges the reader to appreciate that metaphorical learning has many advantages in the field of experiential education, but the critical reflection is not neglected either. It is noted that no one wants to process the experiences into results. Additionally, it is important to know that the book focuses only on theory. There are no instructions in it for the implementation of the methods mentioned. This chapter includes several models, but at least three dominant models of metaphorical learning. They are the following: The Mountains Speak for Themselves, Outward Bound plus and the metaphorical model according to Bacon. Before paraphrasing the models, terms, such as metaphor or isomorphism are explained.

### 7. Experiential educational activities: What and how?

The last chapter investigates the activities of experiential education. It informs us about the four action fields of experiential education. They are nature sports and wilderness pedagogy, problem-solving tasks, cooperative adventure projects, artificial facilities, self-experience, and therapy.

In addition, the work ends with an appendix consisting of two smaller parts. These are the eight-page literature and a subject index of two pages. The last one is written by the author to rediscover the connections.

### Conclusions

I would highly recommend this book to all teachers, students, and anyone who wants to get a theoretical and scientific comprehension in this topic. It contains fascinating information, terms, notes, and hand-drawn sketches. This book is designed with great care, and is very colorful and thoughtfully arranged. Comprehension is not difficult, because the use of language is moderately difficult and the important ideas are often highlighted. In summary, it is an advised book, even if you only want a quick overview of experiential education.

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### References

Werner, M. (2020). *Erlebnispädagogik*. Ernst Reinhardt, GmbH & Co KG Verlag.



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