



Rethinking Curriculum

Experiential learning evaluation framework

Delivering an expansive and inspiring curriculum for all

This evaluation framework has been developed by the Chartered College of Teaching as part of the Rethinking Curriculum project, funded by the Helen Hamlyn Trust. It is one of a series of evaluation frameworks that have been shared as part of our Rethinking Curriculum toolkits.

The framework captures some of the key ideas explored in the Rethinking Curriculum **experiential learning** toolkit and offers some key ideas for you to evaluate your school's curriculum practice on this theme. These ideas are drawn from research and evidence and from our work with schools, and include input from leading experts.

The ideas explored are not intended to provide a definitive approach to curriculum development on this theme. There may be gaps or omissions and this should be viewed as a work in progress, which we will aim to develop further as the evidence base continues to evolve. You are encouraged to consider this framework alongside the [experiential learning toolkit](#), and to undertake your own reading and research to build your understanding of the key ideas discussed prior to implementing changes in your context.

This evaluation framework has been developed in collaboration with Kath Bransby of Steiner Waldorf UK and Leeds Beckett University.



Chartered College
of Teaching

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Part 1: Building an experiential learning culture

Evaluation

Reflect on where your school is in your journey and allocate a number against each of the statements below to evaluate the extent to which it reflects current practice in your context (1–2 = low; 3–4 = medium; 5–6 = high)

Key ideas from research, theory and evidence

- ✓ Leaders and teachers establish a culture that values the *process* of learning through experience, and not just the *outcome* of that process.
- ✓ Staff are trained and provided with appropriate support to plan and deliver experiences for their classes; they understand the pedagogical benefits to the approach.
- ✓ Experiential learning is interwoven throughout the curriculum, linking high-quality learning opportunities and ensuring continuous acquisition of new skills and knowledge throughout the school life of each pupil.
- ✓ Pupils have a degree of agency over the experience and their learning; they make choices and decisions and may contribute to planning of experiences, although this may require scaffolding.
- ✓ Experiential learning activities are not viewed as stand-alone, isolated events, but are recognised as concrete experiences that are part of a larger learning process, and which enable teachers to employ a range of effective pedagogical approaches to support pupil learning.
- ✓ Immersive experiences provide opportunities for pupils to engage a range of senses; the learning environment has been carefully curated to support and facilitate this.
- ✓ The experiential opportunities provided reflect the school community. The community is utilised as both a resource and inspiration for experiential learning; however, experiences *beyond* the local community are also sought when required, ensuring breadth of opportunity across the curriculum.

Your
evaluation
(1–6)

Common barriers

What might impede improvement?

Experiential learning is not well understood or planned, leading to isolated events or experiences that are difficult for children to link to their prior or subsequent learning; planning focuses on superficial elements rather than rich, high-quality learning.

Experiences are stand-alone events and not sufficiently integrated into the curriculum.

Experiential learning opportunities are passive instead of active; children have it done 'to them' instead of with or by them.

Experiential learning is used purely as a 'hook' – a way of initially engaging children's interest in less practical learning or learning that is perceived as being less interesting.

Experiential learning is seen as being distinct from everyday pedagogy and/or teachers do not feel confident to adapt their usual pedagogical strategies into the experiential context.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What do we as leaders mean when we use the term 'experiential learning' and to what extent is this understanding shared by all staff?
2. Do we have a clear picture of how experiential learning fits into our formal curriculum? How do we ensure that experiences are more than 'one-off' moments but instead are woven into learning over time?
3. What are pupils' perceptions of their experiences? Do pupils value experiences? Do they actually enhance pupil learning? How do we know?



Part 2: Building experiential learning into the curriculum

Evaluation

Reflect on where your school is in your journey and allocate a number against each of the statements below to evaluate the extent to which it reflects current practice in your context (1–2 = low; 3–4 = medium; 5–6 = high).

Key ideas from research, theory and evidence

- ✓ Teachers are aware of the prerequisite knowledge and skills that pupils will require to access learning through planned experiences, and systematically teach these in readiness.
- ✓ Experiences are designed to be meaningful, engaging and developmentally appropriate, and build knowledge acquisition and/or skill development in a purposeful way.
- ✓ Experiences are planned carefully to ensure that they provide an appropriate level of challenge, with scaffolding for those who need it so that all students can be successful in challenging tasks.
- ✓ Teachers help pupils to make connections and draw out the learning from the experience; this may involve explicit modelling of thought processes, direct support or planned opportunities for reflection.
- ✓ Teachers use formative assessment strategies to make appropriate decisions about how and when to scaffold experiential learning, and when and how to remove this support.

Your
evaluation
(1–6)

Common barriers

What might impede improvement?

Engagement, enjoyment and 'busy participation' are mistaken for learning, yet pupils are not cognitively engaged in the experience.

Pupils are not clear about what they are learning; learning is not made explicit or drawn out; pupils remember the superficial details of an experience but not the intended learning that underpins it.

Opportunities to interweave pre- and post-learning are not planned, and children do not gain the knowledge required from the experience.

Experiential learning is planned too tightly; opportunities are missed to make connections between learning 'in the moment'.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What do we do to ensure that experiential learning is of a high quality and is purposeful? Do we have a clear understanding of what 'quality' looks like?
2. Are staff confident in adapting their pedagogical approaches to deliver them within the context of experiences? How do we (or how do we plan to) build staff understanding and expertise around experiential learning?
3. Do we have a good understanding of our strengths and/or barriers and any work to be done in relation to building experiential learning into the curriculum?

Assumptions are made about pupils with weak written (or other academic) skills and, as a result, these pupils are not challenged adequately when this barrier is removed as part of a more practical learning experience.

Learning is not adequately scaffolded and/or scaffolding is not provided or withdrawn at an appropriate time, making learning too hard or too easy and not as effective as it could be.



Part 3: Key considerations for successful implementation

Evaluation

Reflect on where your school is in your journey and allocate a number against each of the statements below to evaluate the extent to which it reflects current practice in your context (1-2 = low; 3-4 = medium; 5-6 = high)

Key ideas from research, theory and evidence

- ✓ Leaders clearly set out the vision and values that are to inform the school's work around experiential learning and the wider curriculum, ensuring that these are understood by all.
- ✓ Leaders ensure that sufficient time, resources and supporting structures are in place to enable staff to deliver experiential learning, and the wider curriculum, effectively.
- ✓ Leaders draw on research and evidence to inform curriculum development work relating to experiential learning; they gather data from their context to evaluate existing practice, and consider how they will evaluate the impact of implementing a new approach.
- ✓ Implementation and development of experiential approaches is a collaborative process, characterised by iterative cycles of development, meaningful professional learning, shared problem-solving and ongoing review.
- ✓ There are dedicated members of staff to champion this work; these champions, along with middle leaders (where appropriate), have clarity around their role and are well positioned to support colleagues and help to drive the curriculum forward.
- ✓ Teachers are supported to build their expertise so that they develop strong subject/pedagogical content knowledge, have a deep understanding of effective pedagogical approaches and are able to combine these with knowledge of the school curriculum, pupils' needs and the wider context, in order to plan and implement the curriculum effectively.

Your
evaluation
(1-6)

Common barriers

What might impede improvement?

Leaders and/or staff find it difficult to articulate vision/goals/values.

Implementation may be rushed or not well thought-through.

There is a lack of resources/time to support development of curriculum.

Curriculum changes are implemented wholesale, without sufficient consideration of context, school needs and/or capacity.

School leaders do not systematically seek staff input into curriculum development and, as a result, there may be a disconnect between the intended and enacted curriculum.

Curriculum changes are seen as a 'quick fix', with new ideas introduced with limited further development or impact evaluation.

Teachers implement new approaches too quickly, without a clear rationale or understanding of how they fit into the school context, ultimately resulting in a lack of impact on pupil learning.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Is your school ready to implement curriculum development activity in this area? Have you already evaluated existing practice using the full Rethinking Curriculum evaluation framework to ensure a strong foundation for this work?
2. Do you have a clear plan for implementation? How will you involve staff in this process?
3. Is there existing capacity and/or how will you create capacity for this work? Is there anything that you will need to de-implement to enable this to happen?