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**PEDAGOGICAL FACILITATION AND RELATIONAL DYNAMICS  
AS THE FOUNDATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR EXPERIENTIAL TEACHING  
AND THE ACHIEVEMENT OF DEEP LEARNING**

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**Summary.** The present study develops and substantially updates the concept of experiential pedagogy and experiential learning in light of the fundamental social and pedagogical transformations that have occurred since 2020, particularly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the advent of generative artificial intelligence in educational processes, and the deepening crisis of mental health among children and young people. The text terminologically anchors the concepts of experience (zážitek), lived experience (prožitok), and accumulated experiential knowledge (zkušenost) with reference to modern neuroscience and the psychology of emotions, and consistently distinguishes between experiential pedagogy as a theory and experiential learning as a method. The relationship between traditional and experiential pedagogy is analysed as an integrative continuum rather than a binary opposition, while gamification is discussed as a bridge between the two approaches. Group dynamics is introduced as a distinct pedagogical phenomenon that has hitherto not been systematically addressed in relation to experiential learning. Kolb's experiential learning cycle is situated within the context of the most recent critiques of its linearity and connected to modern educational technologies. As entirely new areas of inquiry, the study develops the transfer of experience as a pedagogical problem, the reflective practice of the teacher-facilitator, and immersive field visits to environments of the helping professions and psychiatric care. The concluding section raises the question of the indispensable value of embodied lived experience at a time of the growing capacity of artificial intelligence to simulate human encounters.

**Keywords:** experiential pedagogy, experiential learning as method, Kolb's cycle, group dynamics, transfer of experience, reflective practice of the facilitator, immersive field visits, psychological safety, artificial intelligence in education, post-pandemic pedagogy.

## 1. Introduction

Both Czech and international schools stand in 2026 before challenges that, taken together, have no historical precedent. The emergence of generative artificial intelligence in educational processes, the post-pandemic reconfiguration of instruction, the growing prevalence of mental health difficulties among children and adolescents, and the explicit curricular pressure to develop competencies that cannot be achieved through the mere transmission of information – all of these forces create an environment in which experiential pedagogy ceases to be an optional pedagogical luxury and becomes a strategic necessity. At the same time, the more proficient learners become in their use of digital tools, the more urgently the question arises of what a living teacher, a living group, and a living situation can offer as an irreplaceable added value to education.

The pandemic experience of the years 2020 to 2022 provided in this regard an eloquent empirical illustration. The forced absence of direct social contact and physical presence in the educational space confirmed what experiential pedagogy has maintained since its inception – namely, that education cannot be fully transposed into a virtual environment, because a substantial part of learning takes place through the bodily grounded experience of situations, spaces, and interpersonal encounters (Zull, 2020). Research into the secondary socialisation of pupils educated at home during the pandemic demonstrated that, despite the active efforts of parents to mediate social contacts for their children, these groups of pupils exhibited specific deficits in the domain of social learning that manifested precisely through the absence of lived experiences obtainable only in a living group situation (Šimek, Oláh and Bočková, 2021). Budayová and Pavliková (2022), in their study, document that the pandemic-forced transition to modern technologies radically transformed the conditions of educational interactions and pointed to the fact that the information society demands entirely different forms of instruction than those that had previously predominated.

Neuroscientific research of the past two decades has yielded compelling empirical evidence for why experiential learning leaves deeper and more lasting memory traces than traditional memorisation. Emotionally charged experiences activate hippocampal memory consolidation more markedly than neutrally encoded information, while lived experiences associated with physical activity, social interaction, and emotional arousal are retained with significantly greater accuracy and over a longer duration (Immordino-Yang and Damasio, 2007). Matějka (2023c) emphasises in this context that an effective educational process requires a careful selection of instructional methods that enable pupils to engage in direct contact with content, and that a key role is played by the creative approach of experiential pedagogy, which enables an open, creative process rooted in the individual competencies of pupils with diverse abilities.

Throughout the entirety of the following text, a consistent distinction is maintained between experiential pedagogy as a theory – that is, as a theoretical concept delineating the principles, aims, and philosophical foundations of this approach – and experiential learning as a method – that is, as a concrete practical application of the forms and procedures through which these principles are brought into pedagogical reality. This terminological distinction is a precondition for the scholarly credibility of the entire work and is fully consistent with Jirásek's (2004) appeal for the precise use of concepts in the domain of experiential pedagogy.

## 2. Experiential Pedagogy as Theory

Experiential pedagogy is not a homogeneous current with clearly defined boundaries, but rather a dynamic theoretical field that manifests itself at the intersection of philosophy of education, developmental psychology, social pedagogy, and neuroscience. This interdisciplinary rootedness is precisely the source of both its stimulating character and its terminological inconsistency, with which every author operating in this domain must come to terms. As a theory, experiential pedagogy offers a set of principles, assumptions, and philosophical foundations concerning the nature of learning, the role of lived experience in personal development, and the relationship between teacher and pupil, and these principles possess their own historical development, extending from Comenius, Rousseau, and Dewey through to contemporary neurobiological research. The following chapter traces this lineage from terminological delimitation, through an analysis of the relationship between traditional and experiential pedagogy, to the historical roots and their actualisation in the conditions of 2026.

## 2.1. Terminological Anchoring: Lived Experience, Experience, and Accumulated Knowledge in Contemporary Understanding

Terminological inconsistency in the field of experiential pedagogy persists as a fundamental obstacle to the development of the discipline. The concept of experiential pedagogy is not entirely clearly or precisely defined, and there exist numerous terms that certain authors equate with this concept. For example, Činčera (2007), in the publication *Work with Play*, equates this concept with the terms lived-experience pedagogy and experiential education, while other authors, such as Pelánek (2008), present them merely as similar. In contemporary scholarly pedagogical discourse, experiential pedagogy is acknowledged as the overarching concept, though this nominal unification does not preclude the substantive nuances that must be respected in scholarly work.

Central to defining the concept of experiential pedagogy is the delimitation of the terms experience (*zážitek*) and lived experience (*prožitek*). Vážanský (1992, p. 26) explains these concepts as a perception that a person correctly apprehends, notices, or perceives, or that has high qualitative value, while for the definition of the principle of experiential pedagogy the term lived experience is particularly essential, as its etymological analysis focusing on the prefix *pro* – suggests a certain enrichment. The word *prožitek* places emphasis on active participation and presence, while *zážitek* is understood as a further processing of the *prožitek*, as it constitutes an already acquired perception that has brought the individual something and continues to connect them with external reality. When lived experience is reflected upon retrospectively, it becomes a memory, which, in conjunction with the concrete resolution of a situation, gives rise to accumulated experiential knowledge (*zkušenost*).

Modern neuroscience and the psychology of emotions offer fundamental refinements in this respect. Lived experience (*prožitek*) is understood from a neurobiological perspective as an ongoing multisensory and emotionally coloured experience, during which a network encompassing the prefrontal cortex, the amygdala, and the hippocampus is activated, while the engagement of the amygdala as the centre of emotional evaluation determines the intensity of memory consolidation and the depth with which the given experience becomes inscribed in long-term memory (Immordino-Yang and Damasio, 2007). Experience (*zážitek*) then constitutes a retrospectively reflected and cognitively processed lived experience, which, through reflection, is transformed into accumulated experiential knowledge (*zkušenost*) as a functionally usable structure of knowing and acting. Matějka (2023c) confirms that a key role in this process is played by comprehension of the surrounding world through one's own activity, while each individual responds to the educational process differently and with varying degrees of intensity – and it is precisely this individualisation of response to lived experience that constitutes one of the key didactic challenges of experiential pedagogy.

The fundamental building block of experiential pedagogy as theory is the pupils' own activity, and this activity must be of such a character as to enable the pupil to obtain the most intense lived experience possible. A characteristic of experiential education is the involvement of the whole person – physically, intellectually, and emotionally, including feelings and senses, as well as the person's prior experience and subsequent processing of the experience (Andersen et al., 1995, in Franc et al., 2007, p. 20). The theoretical foundations of experiential pedagogy may be expressed along the axis of lived experience – experience – accumulated knowledge, while reflection constitutes the bridge between the individual phases of this continuum. Crucially, experience in itself does not automatically lead to learning; as Pelánek (2008, p. 21) points out, the difference between a recreational experience and a pedagogical experience lies precisely in the presence of reflection.

Jirásek (2004) delineates four main currents of experiential pedagogy as theory: leisure pedagogy, which focuses on the delimited time of educational influence; outdoor education, placing emphasis on the environment; adventure education, concentrating on the individual understanding of challenge and risk; and experiential pedagogy in the narrower sense, whose principal medium is direct experience acquired through one's own lived engagement. In the global context, a parallel discussion is conducted between the conceptions of experiential learning, holistic education, and transformative learning, which share an emphasis on the integral development of the person but differ in their accentuation of cognitive transformation, spiritual dimension, or social justice.

## 2.2. Traditional and Experiential Pedagogy as an Integrative Continuum

The relationship between traditional and experiential pedagogy was, in scholarly literature for a long time, framed as a binary opposition in which the transmissive model of direct knowledge transfer stood in counterposition to active, experiential, and reflexive education. While this binary vision serves a legitimate function in conceptual delimitation, in the context of real pedagogical practice in 2026, it is becoming increasingly apparent as insufficient and potentially counterproductive. The modern school does not require a choice between two approaches but rather their considered integration according to the current educational aim, the composition of the group, and the available resources (Hanuš and Chytilová, 2009).

The entire process in experiential pedagogy, in contrast to the directive approach of traditional pedagogy, is founded on democratic cooperation; experiential pedagogy encourages learning through one's own experience and autonomous will rather than submission to the authority of the teacher, and replaces competition and rivalrous dispositions with numerous opportunities for collaboration (Vážanský, 1992). Direct instruction by the teacher remains indispensable for the construction of the conceptual framework, while experiential methods assume the role of an activator that connects acquired knowledge with the pupil's personal experience, reinforces its emotional groundedness, and creates the conditions for transfer into real-world action (Nehyba et al., 2021).

Gabrhelová and Čepelová (2022) empirically demonstrated in their research conducted in secondary vocational schools that activating instructional methods lead to demonstrably better educational outcomes than traditional methods, with this effect being particularly pronounced in technical subjects requiring a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical application. The research further confirmed that the effectiveness of activating methods depends not solely on their selection, but above all on the pedagogical competence of the facilitator, who is capable of placing these methods within a meaningful educational context and ensuring the reflective processing of experiential experience. This conclusion resonates with Matějka's (2023d) conception of the standard of the twenty-first century teacher, who must be prepared for continuous innovation of instructional methods in accordance with the Education Strategy 2030+, which explicitly calls for a transition from a transmissive to an activating paradigm.

Gamification – the systematic use of game elements and mechanisms in a non-gaming educational context – represents one of the most significant bridges between traditional knowledge transmission and full-fledged experiential learning. It is essential to distinguish between superficial gamification and deep gamification. Superficial gamification, consisting merely of adding points, badges, and leaderboards to an otherwise unchanged transmissive content, yields only a short-term motivational effect without deeper pedagogical impact. Deep gamification, by contrast, creates meaningful game situations requiring the application of acquired theory in simulated decision-making contexts and fulfils the conditions of Kolb's cycle (Deterding et al., 2011). The didactic game in this conception ceases to be merely a motivational embellishment and becomes a methodologically refined instrument of experiential education, whose pedagogical value depends precisely on whether the game encompasses lived experience, reflection, and transfer as inseparable phases of the entire pedagogical process.

## 2.3. Historical Roots of Experiential Pedagogy and Their Contemporary Actualisation

Experiential pedagogy has been rooted in the Czech educational system since the time of Jan Amos Comenius, who in his works emphasised the holistic development of the person and in the work *Didactica Magna* the interconnection of theory with the practice of teaching subjects and the support of education grounded in the pupil's own interest (Franc et al., 2007). The spiritual father of experiential pedagogy and founder of the international organisation Outward Bound was the reform pedagogue Kurt Hahn, who pursued a holistic approach to the education of the individual and saw the highest goal in the formation and education of character (Vážanský, 1992). With this concept, he responded to the social needs of his own time, which he called the phenomena of decline: a decrease in physical fitness, a passive mode of entertainment, a decrease in overall activity, a lack of human empathy, a lack of care and responsibility, and a decline in initiative.

It is remarkable how precisely Hahn's diagnosis describes the problems that, in a markedly transformed form, afflict twenty-first century society. Digital dependencies on social networks and gaming platforms, information overload and the associated loss of the capacity for deep concentration, the shortening

of attentional capacity as a result of the consumption of fragmented content, and the decline in physical activity among children and young people are phenomena that Hahn would in all likelihood have added to his original catalogue without any conceptual tension (Spitzer, 2016). Matějka and Holeková (2023) note in this context that the modern standard of the teacher must encompass not only the necessary skills for successful functioning in a modern educational environment, but also an emphasis on motivating and supporting pupils in continuous learning. These requirements resonate with Hahn's vision of the teacher as a guide in the holistic development of the individual, even in an era in which pupils are surrounded by the temptations of the digital world.

The Outward Bound organisation builds on Hahn's work and formulates ten principles of education through experience, from which the Czech experiential-pedagogical schools also draw. The roots in the Czech context are found in the tradition of summer camps and Scouting, but the first organised group that shaped the methodology of experiential pedagogy in Czech pedagogy is the Prázdninová škola Lipnice (Holiday School Lipnice), founded in 1977 and, after 1989, established as a branch of the Outward Bound organisation. The specificity of the methodology of the Holiday School Lipnice lies in the emphasis on group and personal dynamics, emotional balance, and the deliberate dramaturgy of projects – the creation of the most varied stories and events, roles and characters, with an emphasis on action (Hanuš, 2009, p. 16). Hahn's principles find renewed relevance in the contemporary curricular context, as curricular documents across European states explicitly demand the development of competencies that are unattainable in traditional frontal instruction.

### 3. Foundations of Experiential Learning

The theory of experiential learning draws on the work of psychologists and educational theorists Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, John Dewey, and David Kolb, with the work of the last-named being of particular significance among these four. Kolb's conception of the learning cycle is regarded by some authors as the fundamental conceptual foundation of experiential learning (Bergsteiner et al., 2010; Manolis et al., 2013; Turesky and Gallagher, 2011). The history of these models in the Czech Republic extends to the beginning of the 1990s, when they began to arrive from abroad and were predominantly employed in the construction of the structure of foundational experiential training and educational programmes.

#### 3.1. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle and Its Critical Reflection

The distinctiveness and advantage of David Kolb's learning theory lies in its synthesis of the principal insights from the work of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget. The author's synthesis endeavours to offer a comprehensive model of learning that combines both experience and perception and cognition, as well as behaviour, while the domain of this theory lies in showing how learning occurs on the basis of experience. Matějka (2023c) develops this idea by emphasising that an effective educational process integrates instructional approaches, defined aims and content, organisational forms of instruction, diverse instructional methods, and teaching aids, while also noting that the quality of this process is influenced by both internal factors – such as material resources, classroom climate, and the competence of the teacher – and external influences in the form of educational policy, labour market demands, and the expectations of parents and society.

The experiential learning model, developed in 1984, is based on six premises (Kolb, 1984): learning is best conceived as a process rather than an outcome; it is a continuous process grounded in experience; it involves a decisional conflict regarding dichotomous modes of adaptation; it is a holistic process of adaptation; it is made possible by a synergistic exchange between the person and their environment; and it is a process of knowledge creation (Manolis et al., 2013, p. 45). Kolb's cycle may be represented as a sequence of four mutually connected phases, consisting of concrete experience as the representation of joint engagement with a task, observation and reflection, abstract conceptualisation as the search for the positive and negative aspects of the given activity, and active experimentation as the phase of designing plans for change (Hanuš and Chytilová, 2009).

A critical reflection of Kolb's model is indispensable for its full didactic utilisation. The model is justifiably criticised for its tendency toward linearity and sequentiality, since in the real educational process the individual phases of the cycle do not follow one another in strict succession; rather, they interpenetrate,

overlap, and repeat in iterative loops responding to the dynamics of the group and to the unpredictable stimuli of the experiential situation (Bergsteiner et al., 2010). Moon (2004) proposes a non-linear reformulation of the model in which reflection does not constitute a separate phase but rather a continuous process permeating the entire experiential situation. The experience of pandemic instruction, documented by Šimek, Oláh and Bočková (2021) through the example of the secondary socialisation of home-educated pupils, additionally yielded compelling empirical evidence that without group dynamics – that is, without the conditions under which Kolb's cycle naturally operates – measurable social and educational deficits arise, even when all other factors of instruction are optimised.

In the context of contemporary educational technologies, Kolb's cycle acquires entirely new applications, as the phase of concrete experience can be mediated through simulation technologies or serious games, while neuroscientific research confirms that visually immersive and interactively rich simulations are capable of eliciting neurobiological responses comparable to real-world experiences (Radianti et al., 2020). The digital environment therefore does not replace the bodily grounded lived experience, but extends the repertoire of situations in which Kolb's cycle can be didactically realised, while the teacher must be capable of determining which dimension of lived experience is unattainable in the virtual environment and of substituting it with a targeted direct experience.

### **3.2. Learning Styles and Their Dynamic Understanding**

Based on whether we prefer feeling or a more cognitive approach associated with logic, Kolb distinguishes four learning styles. The divergent style is defined by the terms feeling and watching, and people with this style are able to view problems from different angles, are imaginative and emotional with an interest in other persons, and prefer working in groups and listening with an open mind (Hroník, 2007). Persons with the assimilating style are able to absorb large amounts of information and create from them various concepts with a clear and logical format, preferring a logical approach over practical application. The converging style is characterised by convergent thinking directed toward the resolution of a concrete problem. The accommodating style provides its bearers with adaptability, openness to change, and willingness to take risks, with intuition in their case prevailing over logic (Hroník, 2007).

The most recent cognitive research cautions against excessive categorisation of students into fixed categories of learning styles, as meta-analytical studies call into question the empirical validity of the concept of a fixed learning style as an unchanging personality characteristic (Pashler et al., 2008) and favour a more dynamic conception in which the learner adapts their approach to learning to the current conditions and the nature of the task. For educational situations, however, it remains valid that individuals with a pronounced learning style will tend to learn more effectively the more the educational activity is oriented according to their preferences (Hroník, 2007). Matějka (2023c) therefore recommends that teachers working with groups respect the plurality of cognitive styles, alternate types of activities, and offer a diverse spectrum of approaches to the same subject matter, thereby creating conditions for every pupil to find within the educational process their optimal mode of experiencing and processing the learning encounter.

### **4. Group Dynamics as a Distinct Pedagogical Phenomenon of Experiential Learning**

Experiential pedagogy is, in its practical realisation, principally a group-based matter; nevertheless, scholarly literature has hitherto treated group dynamics as an independent pedagogical phenomenon in relation to experiential learning in a rather marginal fashion. It is precisely group dynamics that determines whether an intense lived experience occurs at all, what quality it will have, and whether it will be pedagogically fruitful. The concept of group dynamics was introduced into pedagogy by Kurt Lewin, who used it to denote the ensemble of processes and forces occurring within a group that influence the behaviour of its members, the relationships between them, their cohesion, and their productivity.

Tuckman's model (1965) describes five phases of group development, referred to as forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning, and the teacher of experiential learning must be capable of recognising these phases and consciously facilitating transitions between them, since groups in the storming phase are generally incapable of productive experiential learning, while groups in the performing phase are able to achieve lived experiences of extraordinary intensity and pedagogical value (Hanuš and Chytilová, 2009). Group cohesion – that is, the degree of attractiveness of the group

to its members and the degree of their mutual bonding – is a key predictor of the intensity of lived experience. Research in group psychology repeatedly demonstrates that in cohesive groups, participants are more willing to enter into zone situations requiring the overcoming of the comfort zone, more willing to share emotional lived experiences in the reflective phase, and more capable of receiving feedback, which is a precondition for the transformation of lived experience into accumulated experiential knowledge (Kratochvíl, 2005).

Barnová, Krásna, Gabrhelová and Barna (2024) demonstrated in their research on the resilience of teachers in secondary vocational schools that psychosocial support from colleagues and group cohesion are key protective factors against teacher burnout, and this finding may be directly transposed to the context of pupil groups in experiential education. Just as a safe working environment is an indispensable condition for the pedagogical resilience and performance of the teacher, the psychological safety of the group is an indispensable condition for the pupil's willingness to enter into experiential situations and to share their genuine inner lived experiences in the reflective phase.

The psychological safety of the group that is, the shared conviction among group members that the group is a safe place for interpersonal risk, for sharing feelings, opinions, and mistakes, is a precondition for the functioning of the reflective phase of Kolb's cycle (Edmondson, 1999). Without psychological safety, reflective discussions remain superficial, as participants share only what is safe to share rather than what they genuinely experienced. The construction of psychological safety is therefore a systematic component of the facilitative work of the experiential learning teacher and cannot be replaced by a mere appeal to openness.

### **5. The Reflective Practice of the Teacher as Facilitator of Experiential Learning**

Alongside what the pupil is to experience and reflect upon, the question of the reflective practice of the teacher as facilitator of experiential situations deserves independent treatment. Donald Schön, in his seminal work *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983), distinguishes between reflection-in-action – that is, reflection occurring in the course of a professional situation – and reflection-on-action – that is, reflection taking place after its conclusion. Both types of reflection are absolutely indispensable for the facilitator of experiential learning, since working with a living group in experiential situations produces unpredictable moments to which the teacher must respond immediately and intelligently, and from which, at the same time, they must systematically draw as a source of professional development.

Very high demands are placed upon the personality of the teacher within the concept of experiential pedagogy, not only in terms of physical fitness, but equally in terms of emotional and social intelligence and communicative competencies. Hanuš and Chytilová (2009) describe three areas of knowledge and skills that should define a quality experiential educator: the organisational domain, the programme domain, and the domain of knowledge about the human person. The experiential activities teacher should identify with various roles namely those of organiser, teacher, actor, and participant, and identification with the participant's role is a particularly important distinctive feature of experiential learning. The teacher should not stand apart from the events within the group, and in their verbal output should occupy approximately 20 % of total time, while 66 % of facilitation should be more concealed and unobtrusive in the form of support (Belz, 2001).

Matějka (2025b) draws attention, in an extensive theoretical-empirical study, to the growing psychosocial burden on teaching professionals and proposes an integrated model encompassing individual care for mental health alongside systemic changes in the organisation of the school environment, carefully analysing those dimensions that determine the satisfaction and healthy functioning of the teacher in their professional role. Unreflected frustration on the part of the teacher is transmitted from group to group and systematically undermines pedagogical work, since a facilitator who is themselves lacking in psychological safety within their working environment can hardly be expected to build this safety for others. Matějka and Holeková (2023) then specify what competencies the twenty-first century teacher should possess in the context of Education Strategy 2030+, emphasising that an innovative and creative environment and the motivation of pupils toward continuous learning are goals that require a teacher capable of continuous self-development and self-reflection.

The teacher's reflection also encompasses the systematic processing of how they selected specific experiential activities, how they responded to group tension, how they guided targeted feedback, and how they managed the ethical demands of experiential situations. This professional reflection is a precondition not only for the personal development of the teacher, but also for the quality of the entire pedagogical work with the group, since an unreflected error on the part of the facilitator is repeated and can systematically reduce the pedagogical value even of the most well-designed activities.

## **6. Elements of Experiential Pedagogy as Method**

The transition from experiential pedagogy as theory to experiential learning as method is not a mere recasting of the same content in more practical clothing, but rather a qualitative step that requires from the teacher an entirely different mode of thinking and action. Whereas theory defines why and under what conditions lived experience leads to learning, method answers the question of what concrete tools, procedures, and structures can be used to pedagogically manage and cultivate these conditions. Experiential learning as method works with several mutually interconnected elements that form its didactic backbone: motivation, which opens the pupil to the lived experience; targeted feedback, which transforms lived experience into accumulated experiential knowledge; and play as an indispensable form of safe experimentation with situations that would be difficult or impossible to create outside the play frame. Each of these elements is analysed in the following chapter both as an independent didactic category and as a component of the whole, in which it acquires meaning only in connection with the others.

### **6.1. Motivation**

The motivation of pupils for activities plays a fundamental role in experiential pedagogy as method. Appropriate motivation prepares pupils even for a very simple game, and in activities that place high demands on pupils, motivation is the most important factor. Experiential activities frequently evoke an atmosphere of learning through performed scenes, the narration of stories, or the screening of photographs or films. When a teacher presents themselves in the role of a clown, an eccentric professor, a sailor, or a film star, they thereby overcome the pupils' initial anxieties and open the possibility of establishing a personal relationship. Motivation constitutes an indispensable element of experiential pedagogy that facilitates the relaxation of pupils and teachers alike and supports the positive course of the dynamic development of the group (Pelánek, 2008).

Matějka (2025a) devotes sustained attention to the relationship between frustration and motivation in the educational process and points out that negative experiences and failure, leading to frustration, affect both the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of pupils, while the central pedagogical challenge lies in transforming potentially demotivating situations into learning opportunities that strengthen resilience and intrinsic interest in learning. This insight is particularly relevant to experiential learning, since experiential activities deliberately place pupils in unexpected and demanding situations, in which the management of initial uncertainty or failure is a key component of the entire pedagogical intention. The experiential learning teacher therefore requires a developed capacity to recognise when frustration is productive – that is, when it stimulates thinking and the search for alternatives – and when it is destructive – that is, when it blocks the learning process and elicits withdrawal from the activity.

The direct connection between motivation and group cohesion confirms the theory of Kolb's cycle: groups with a higher degree of mutual trust are better able to share the lived experience of failure, to reflect upon it without defensive reactions, and to transform it into a shared accumulated experience that strengthens motivation for further learning. The teacher facilitating experiential activities must therefore work with motivation not only at the individual level, but also at the group level, and must be aware that the group atmosphere either multiplies or weakens the motivation of each individual in ways that are not directly accessible to individual pedagogical intervention.

### **6.2. Targeted Feedback and the Transfer of Experience**

The essence of experiential learning lies in the processing of lived experiences and the subsequent anchoring of the acquired experiential knowledge into reality, and this process is mediated by targeted feedback. Reitmayerová (2007, p. 123) defines targeted feedback as a process in which the group verbally processes the experience of a preceding activity under the guidance of the instructor, who determines

the aim and course of the feedback and maintains control over the parameters of the activity itself. The teacher should not only provide information observed from the course of the activity, but should also moderate the feedback discussion and direct it according to the importance of information and the functional influencing of the group.

The transfer of experience from the experiential situation to the everyday life of the pupil is the Achilles' heel of the entire field of experiential pedagogy and merits attention as an independent pedagogical problem. Practice demonstrates that even an exceptionally well-executed experiential activity can end in what Pelánek (2008) calls experiential consumption – a state in which participants depart enthusiastic but after a few weeks remember nothing that has changed their behaviour or thinking. Transfer is conditioned by the intensity of the lived experience itself, by the quality of the reflective phase in which the acquired experience is named and generalised, and by the presence of situations in everyday life that activate the lived experience and which pupils are able to connect with the acquired knowledge. The deliberate construction of a bridge between the experiential situation and the real life of the pupil is therefore a key didactic competency of the facilitator.

### **6.3. Play Within the Concept of Experiential Pedagogy as Method**

Play has from childhood been a significant medium of the cognitive development of the person, and many authors agree that play belongs also in the process of instruction, as it offers possibilities for the practical acquisition of knowledge and skills that the mere transmission of information cannot achieve (Fontana, 1997). Play within experiential pedagogy as method provides space for the creation of a model world in which pupils acquire new experiences through role-playing and experimentation, while the fictional world of games is connected to reality through emotions, cognitive processes, and communicative and social relationships (Franc et al., 2007). The deeper and more intense the lived experience in play, the more intense the impact of the aims and themes of the game on the group.

Budayová and Šimek (2022), in their joint study devoted to play as a motivational method in upbringing and education, demonstrated that play as a pedagogical tool transcends a purely entertainment function and fulfils a fundamental socialising and educational role, since through the game situation the natural acquisition of social norms, the development of cooperation, and the building of group cohesion take place. Their research showed that a suitably designed game is capable of overcoming barriers of communication and integration that would otherwise be difficult to overcome through frontal methods. The authors emphasise that the pedagogical value of play lies not only in the course of the game situation itself, but above all in the reflective processing of the game experience, which transforms the lived experience of the game into genuine accumulated experience transferable to the real educational and life context.

The rules of a game are always explained in advance, and pupils must be given space for their own questions and clarification of the rules. The rules should not change during the course of the game, so as to avoid disrupting the safe environment of trust and cooperation, since such a change elicits unnecessary feelings of unfairness and the lived experiences of the activity tend to be entirely different from the planned intention (Franc et al., 2007). For the smooth course of the game and the functionality of activities, physical, psychological, and emotional safety must be ensured, since if a pupil feels fear of the game, they are unable to leave their comfort zone and no learning or transfer of experience occurs.

## **7. Examples of the Practical Application of Experiential Learning**

Theory without practice remains speculation, and practice without theory easily transforms into a merely entertaining programme devoid of educational intention. It is precisely the tension between these two poles that constitutes the productive space in which experiential pedagogy as method finds its justification and demonstrates its efficacy. The following chapter presents concrete examples of the practical application of experiential learning in diverse pedagogical contexts – from preventive programmes aimed at classroom climate and bullying, through didactic games and managerial development, to field visits and immersive encounters with the world of the helping professions. Each of these examples is a choice rather than an inventory; each was included because it illustrates a different aspect of the didactic potential of experiential learning and a different type of relationship between lived experience, reflection,

and transfer. Special attention is devoted to immersive field visits to environments of psychiatric care, crisis intervention, and care homes for the elderly, which represent the most pedagogically demanding, and simultaneously most valuable, form of the pupil's direct encounter with a reality that was hitherto known to them only indirectly.

### **7.1. Experiential Learning in Bullying Prevention and the AKTIF Programme**

Experiential learning contributes to the development of the pupil's personality in the sense of fostering self-confidence and the capacity for self-reflection, places emphasis on cooperation and group cohesion, and always takes place in an environment that is physically and psychologically safe for all pupils. These very principles of experiential pedagogy can have a positive influence on classroom climate, which may be perceived as one of the factors preventing the emergence of bullying. Strmisková (2013) recommends expanding school education with experiential courses within the framework of personal-social and ethical education, as both a diagnostic tool for class teachers and a component of the minimum preventive programme of every school.

Budayová and Šimek (2022) demonstrated in their research on play as a motivational method that the systematic use of game activities in the pedagogical process reduces social tension in the group, strengthens mutual empathy, and creates preconditions for pupils to accept one another as equal partners regardless of social status or educational achievement. This finding has direct relevance for preventive programmes directed at bullying, since bullying typically arises in environments where group hierarchy and the asymmetry of social relations are perceived as unchallengeable, and play as a pedagogical method deliberately disrupts these asymmetries.

The AKTIF experiential programme takes place within the framework of the preventive activities of the Salesian Youth Centre in Brno-Líšeň. The name of the programme is derived from the initial letters of the Czech words Aktivizace Třídního Kolektivu Interaktivní Formou, meaning Activation of the Class Community in Interactive Form. The programme consists in the creation and implementation of courses for classes at the lower secondary level, with a total time allocation of ten hours for these courses. The course methodology is grounded in the principles of experiential pedagogy as formulated by the Outward Bound organisation and focuses on self-knowledge of the individual and group collaboration through physically demanding, relaxation-based, and creative activities.

### **7.2. The Didactic Game as a Method of Experiential Learning**

Hrazdilová (2020) proposes, in her work, a game as a method of experiential learning in the teaching of accountancy and economics, and the didactic game she designed, entitled The Confectionery Shop, allows pupils in an innovative manner to revise and apply learned theory in a practical model situation. The game was trialled within instruction at the Obchodní akademie Hovorčovická in Prague, where pupils trade with one another from the positions of manufacturers and sellers of confectionery boxes, and the aim is for them, through an artificially created game situation, to experience how commercial transactions take place in a simplified form in real-world practice. Through oral and questionnaire-based feedback from both pupils and teachers, it was confirmed that pupils accept this form of activation and revision of subject matter positively, and the motivational effect of the game was manifest not only in the direct course of the activity, but also in the quality of the subsequent reflective discussions.

### **7.3. The Development of Managerial Competencies Through Experiential Learning**

In recent years it has become evident that one of the most effective methods directed at the development of managers is one grounded in learning from experience. Managers acquire knowledge and skills for the performance of their own work more readily from the outcomes of their own experiences than from formal instruction, and this process is influenced by appropriate guidance, channelling, and coaching on the part of the facilitator. Learning from experience tends to be most effective in conditions in which a demanding challenge takes the manager beyond the limits of personal capacity (Folwarczná, 2010, p. 42). In this context, we speak of stepping outside the comfort zone, which is followed by the learning process. Bolcková (2013) investigates in detail, in her work, how the theory of experiential learning can be utilised for the purposes of managerial development, and demonstrates that experiential approaches are not only more effective, but also more economically advantageous from the perspective of investment in human resource development.

#### **7.4. Field Visits as a Form of Experiential Learning**

Field visits unambiguously belong among the forms of experiential learning, since the exceptionality of a field visit lies in the environment in which it takes place – pupils, through field visits, become acquainted with the possibility of learning in environments other than the school setting. Excursions and field visits are such organisational forms of instruction as take place in natural, social, or production environments, and pupils here acquire knowledge about objects and phenomena from the given domain in natural conditions (Nelešovská and Spáčilová, 2005, p. 185). Bedřichová (2013) demonstrated in her work that the use of natural environments facilitates easier memorisation of new information and the formation of a more positive relationship to the taught subject among pupils.

#### **7.5. Immersive Field Visits to Environments of the Helping Professions and Psychiatric Care**

Among the most powerful, and simultaneously the most methodologically demanding forms of experiential learning, belongs the direct encounter of students with environments of the helping professions, mental health care, and social care, since these environments offer lived experiences that cannot be simulated by any textbook or digital model. Practical experience with the realisation of this form of education was acquired within the framework of instructional activities encompassing visits to the Institute of Counselling Psychology and Education, workplaces of the Activity Institute, non-restrictive care homes for the elderly, and a psychiatric outpatient clinic.

Budayová and Pavliková (2022) documented in their study on the impact of modern technologies on education in a pandemic situation that the classical forms and methods of instruction are becoming outdated in the information society and that educational aims are undergoing radical transformation, while the conditions of educational interactions – spatial, temporal, resource-related, and subject-related – change in ways for which school education is not always prepared. This finding underscores the pedagogical intention of immersive field visits: whereas digitally mediated education can transmit information about psychiatry, crisis intervention, or gerontology, it is incapable of offering the bodily grounded lived experience of encounter with real situations and people, which is an indispensable precondition for genuine change of attitude and the development of empathy as a professional competency.

##### **7.5.1. Institute of Counselling Psychology and Education**

A visit to the Institute of Counselling Psychology and Education introduces students to the dimension of interpersonal encounter with real psychological practice through direct participation in a psychological interview and diagnostic work. Students had the opportunity to observe the course of a counselling interview conducted by an experienced psychologist and to actively engage in selected standardised psychological tests directed at personality characteristics and cognitive functions. The personal experience of testing – in which the student finds themselves in the role of the person being tested – constitutes a pedagogically extraordinarily valuable moment in which the pupil naturally and without any didactic compulsion becomes aware of both the power and the inherent limitations of psychometric instruments. The destigmatising dimension of the encounter is equally valuable, since research confirms that direct contact with the environment of mental health care is among the most effective instruments for reducing stigmatising attitudes (Thornicroft et al., 2022).

##### **7.5.2. Activity Institute – encounter with Crisis Intervention**

The workplaces of the Activity Institute offer students the opportunity to be direct witnesses of processes of crisis intervention and psychological accompaniment in situations in which people find themselves at the limits of their personal and social resources. Students observed the course of crisis intervention and psychological interviews, and this form of direct observational learning constitutes a full component of experiential education (Bandura, 1997), since the observing individual undergoes an intensive internal cognitive and emotional processing of the observed events. Šrobárová (2019), in an analysis of the work of social curators and outreach workers in the domain of social and legal protection of children in the Slovak Republic, documented that these professionals perceive crisis intervention as a demanding combination of specialist knowledge and emotional regulation, while the manner of its implementation differs markedly depending on the target group and the institutional context. The direct encounter of students with real-world crisis practice enables a confrontation of previously held – often dramatised or oversimplified – conceptions of crisis intervention with the everyday reality

of this demanding profession, thereby contributing to a realistic and respectful perception of the work of helping professionals.

### **7.5.3. Non-restrictive Care Homes for the Elderly – an Intergenerational Lived Experience**

Visits to care homes for the elderly operating on the principle of a non-restrictive approach offer students the dimension of intergenerational encounter, which is extraordinarily stimulating from the perspective of the development of social competencies. Matějka (2023b) demonstrates in a review study of intergenerational exchanges in education that intergenerational interaction and communication across generations offers the potential for synergies between life experiences and learning, and that it constitutes an essential dimension of social capital transcending traditional forms of education. The author emphasises that, for the effective realisation of intergenerational exchange, the adaptability and flexibility of educational programmes and strategies is crucial, and these must ensure that the needs of different generations are comprehensively addressed.

Budayová, Cintulová and Buzalová (2022), in their monograph on the historical development and transformation of senior social services in Slovakia, analyse in detail the principles of modern care for elderly persons, which are grounded in respect for the autonomy and dignity of older people as fully-fledged social actors. A direct conversation with a senior that the student themselves initiates and conducts fulfils Hahn's principles of self-knowledge and the acceptance of responsibility in a manner that is nearly unattainable in the ordinary school environment, and strengthens pupils' empathic capacities in a manner that has been empirically documented in programmes of intergenerational education.

### **7.5.4. Psychiatric Outpatient Clinic – destigmatisation as a Pedagogical Aim**

The encounter with the environment of a psychiatric outpatient clinic under the expert guidance of an experienced psychiatrist constitutes the pedagogically richest part of the entire set of immersive field visits. Psychiatry remains in the lay and student population an area surrounded by extraordinarily strong prejudices and myths, whose disruption through direct authentic encounter with a physician has a lasting and demonstrable impact on the pupil's value framework. The physician acquainted students with the everyday reality of outpatient psychiatric practice, explained the structure of the diagnostic process, the specificity of the therapeutic relationship, and the limitations of outpatient psychiatric care.

Thornicroft et al. (2022) demonstrated in an extensive international study that educational programmes incorporating direct contact with the environment of psychiatric care achieve statistically significantly better results in the area of reducing stigmatising attitudes than purely informational programmes, and that the effect is particularly pronounced among groups of future teachers and specialist workers in the helping professions. This knowledge has a direct impact on the willingness of future teachers to cooperate with school psychologists in addressing the problems of pupils with mental health difficulties, and thereby on the overall pro-inclusive culture of the school.

### **7.5.5. Ethical Conditions and Methodological Principles for the Realisation of Immersive Field Visits**

All of the above-described forms of experiential education share a common ethical framework, the observance of which is an absolute condition of their realisation. The key ethical principles are: the informed consent of all parties involved; the preservation of confidentiality concerning specific cases and persons; the rigorous maintenance of boundaries between the role of observer and the role of the specialist; and the careful preparation of the group, encompassing both factual information and emotional readiness for encounter with demanding situations. Budayová, Svoboda and Kóša (2022), in the context of lifelong learning and the development of social workers, point to the fundamental role of direct practice as a precondition for the transfer of specialist education into everyday professional activity, while emphasising that the education and educational level of social workers directly influences the quality of social work as a profession that assists people in adverse situations. This finding underscores the necessity of conscious pedagogical work with the lived experiences arising from immersive field visits, rather than merely organising the visit: the reflective processing of the experience, guided by a qualified facilitator, determines whether the lived experience passes into the category of pedagogically valuable knowledge or remains merely an emotional imprint without educational transfer (Reitmayerová, 2007). Corrigan and Shapiro (2010) confirmed, furthermore, that it is precisely direct contact, supplemented by structured reflection, that brings a deeper and more lasting change in attitudes than any other interventional educational strategy.

## 8. Experiential Pedagogy in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

Generative artificial intelligence is transforming education at a speed that has no historical precedent, and experiential pedagogy must respond to this transformation in a conscious and deliberate manner. Matějka (2023a) analyses the central paradox of the integration of artificial intelligence into the educational process – namely, the tension between the passive reception of ready-made solutions and the development of critical thinking – and identifies the phenomenon of cognitive outsourcing as a key risk, in which mental work is delegated to algorithms, thereby threatening the suppression of the processes of synthesis and analysis that are essential for genuine understanding. These very processes of synthesis and analysis, along with the associated development of the capacity for creative judgement, are those which experiential pedagogy systematically cultivates.

The response of experiential pedagogy to the challenges of artificial intelligence lies in the philosophy of embodied cognition, according to which knowledge is inseparable from bodily presence in space, from haptic, proprioceptive, and vestibular perceptions, from the regulation of the autonomic nervous system in situations of physical challenge or emotional encounter, and from the sharing of biologically conditioned signals with other human beings through facial expression, gesture, and voice (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1991). Artificial intelligence can imitate the content of these encounters, but not their bodily and neurobiological substrate, and it is precisely in this substrate that the pedagogical value resides which cannot be digitally substituted. Šimek, Oláh and Bočková (2021) empirically demonstrated that even the most advanced digitally mediated communication cannot replace the social lived experiences arising in direct physical contact, and this finding acquires an even more urgent pedagogical dimension in the context of the contemporary expansion of generative AI.

Matějka (2023b), in the context of intergenerational education, points out that the synergistic potential of sharing experiences across generations transcends traditional forms of education and creates a unique type of social learning that is by its very nature irreplaceable by digital tools, since its value lies precisely in the authenticity of personal encounter and living relationship. Experiential pedagogy in the digital age therefore does not mean the rejection of technologies, but rather the conscious discrimination between situations in which digital simulation is pedagogically sufficient or advantageous, and situations in which bodily presence in real space is pedagogically irreplaceable.

## 9. Conclusions

Experiential learning is a way of learning from action, through experience, a way of extracting maximum benefit from one's own accumulated experience and acquiring knowledge directly tailored to the individual (Zahrádková, 2009, p. 135). This method of learning is principally founded on group learning, mediates the possibility of different perspectives on a given situation or problem, develops the capacity for cooperation, and is conditioned by the presence of reflection – since, as Pelánek (2008) repeatedly emphasises, the difference between a recreational and a pedagogical experience lies precisely in reflection.

The present study has contributed, beyond an updating of the terminological apparatus and the historical roots of experiential pedagogy, four key extensions to existing scholarship. The first is the conceptualisation of group dynamics as a distinct pedagogical phenomenon, without whose understanding it is impossible to consciously facilitate experiential learning. The second is the positioning of the transfer of experience at the centre of pedagogical attention as a deficient component of experiential education. The third is the reflective practice of the teacher-facilitator as a precondition for the quality of the entire pedagogical work. The fourth is the formulation of the question of the indispensable value of bodily grounded lived experience at a time of the growing capacity of artificial intelligence to simulate human encounters, and the answer to this question is found in the philosophy of embodied cognition and in the neurobiological facts that empirically confirm this philosophy.

Experiential pedagogy as theory and experiential learning as method therefore do not in 2026 diminish in their relevance; on the contrary, they deepen it, since precisely in an era in which information ceases to be a scarce resource and becomes a commodity available immediately and without cost, what can never be replaced by information gains in value: the bodily grounded, emotionally charged, and socially shared experience that cannot be understood without having been lived.

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