

Theory and Practice of Experiential Education. Karen Warren,
Denise Mitten, and T. A. Loeffler (Editors).
Boulder, CO: Association for Experiential Education, 2008.

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Experiential education (EE) as a practice, research focus, and philosophy spans multiple disciplines and contexts. Practitioners from a variety of settings including outdoor education, therapeutic recreation, after-school programs, and even business training programs employ EE as a tool to provide novel and meaningful experiences. Individuals working in the area of EE created a professional organization, the Association for Experiential Education (AEE), to improve and promote the industry. Since its inception in the early 1970's AEE has grown into an organization boasting nearly 1600 members from countries across the globe. The 4th edition of *Theory and Practice of Experiential Education*, published by AEE, represents a selection of work produced by EE researchers and professionals over the last 30 years. The book is edited by Karen Warren, Denise Mitten, and T. A. Loeffler, and provides both historical and contemporary perspectives of topics central to EE and offer a rich body of knowledge for both established practitioners and those just entering the field.

The text is organized into topic areas addressing key definitions; historical, philosophical, psychological, and educational foundations; issues related to spirituality, ethics, and social justice; and a concluding section devoted to translating theory into practice. Articles are purposively selected to highlight both established and contemporary perspectives from the field. Although outdoor recreation/education is principle component of EE, the editors make an effort to include content designed to appeal to EE researchers and practitioners regardless of particular sub-fields. For example, a variety of non-outdoor chapters exist including the application of EE practices in traditional classroom and workshop settings.

A main strength of this book is the broad scope of application addressed. The work is clearly a standalone reference for the most important EE issues. The diverse range of topics and voices in this text will appeal to individuals from a broad range of backgrounds. Core EE practices and issues such as group processing and the transfer of learning experiences are intermingled with newer topics such as brain-based learning and personal intelligence models. The flow of the content provides readers with a sound foundation of EE issues before exploring more ancillary topics like spirituality and ethics. For example, the authors provide an excellent history of the field providing readers with a sense EE's historical and philosophical evolution. This provides individuals unfamiliar with EE the context to process and assess the movement's current and future directions. The combination of both seminal and new material organized into a sequentially progressive framework make this collection especially well suited for use in EE related courses.

Additionally, the editors and contributors, though strong proponents of the efficacy and importance of EE, do not shy away offering critical assessments of the field. Accepted assumptions and practices related to cultural sensitivity, the ap-

appropriate role of challenge, diversity, challenge courses research, ethics and group processing are examples of a few issues directly critiqued in the book. The inclusion of frank evaluations of current EE practices and techniques fosters an overall picture of field open to change and one that actively facilitates its continued development through the acceptance and promotion of honest introspection. These perspectives should also benefit practitioners by providing insights regarding potential adaptations designed to promote program quality improvement.

Although this text offers an broad picture of EE, it relies heavily on previously published material. Although this pre-existing content contains key perspectives and voices from the field of EE, the book might have offered a stronger contribution by balancing established literature more equally balanced with new content. *Theory and Practice of Experiential Education* includes 37 chapters previously published in the *Journal of Experiential Education* and only 8 chapters of unique material. The text does a good job of outlining the historical and philosophical foundations of EE but a field that prides itself on progress and innovation should not have to lean so heavily on older theoretical and best practice pieces. Even if the previously published material represents seminal contributions, it should have stimulated new ideas, reactions, developments, and perspectives, and these are the types of content a work of this nature should include. In other words, more time spent contemplating future directions for the field and less on where it has already been.

While the quality of content is high throughout the collection, the general complexity and focus on philosophical and theoretical foundations may make some chapters fairly inaccessible to non-academic audiences. The gap between academics and practitioners is an unfortunately well-established barrier to translating theory and research into practice. The editors note EE's practice based origin and subsequent, purposive development of theoretical footings, that being said, the journey into research and theory need not leave practitioners behind. The seven chapters that deal directly with merging theory and practice provide a variety of valuable insights geared towards practitioner applicability but they have been placed in the final section of the text and are greatly outnumbered by more philosophically and theoretically focused preceding chapters. As with the balance between old and new content, it would be nice to see a more equal treatment of both theory *and* practice.

The overreliance on previously published material and an unequal treatment of theory and practice notwithstanding, *Theory and Practice of Experiential Education* represents a well articulated picture of EE. The breadth and depth of the text makes it a natural fit for undergraduate and graduate courses dealing with EE related issues. The variety of topics covered provides readers, both those new to and well versed with the field, a rich perspective of EE. Additionally, the broad scope of the topics and contexts dealt with in the book is bound to appeal to a diverse audience from school teachers to river guides to researchers. Although AEE's history dates back only to the early 1970's, EE's roots run back much further and its applicability and efficacy remain as strong or stronger today as ever before. The richness and complexity of the field is well served by the 4th edition of *Theory and Practice in Experiential Education*.