

Experiential Teaching Style

A Modern Approach to the Teacher-Student Interaction in the Instructional Process

Camelia Mădălina Răducu*ⁱ

*Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest, Romania

Abstract

Introduction: *The profound renewals in the field of learning have had considerable effects on educational sciences, implicitly the status and role of teachers. The didactic activity of the modern teacher goes beyond making use of one's personal qualities, appreciated in terms of vocation, talent and mastery; it also implies the acquisition of a complex system of theoretical knowledge, the formation of abilities, competences and qualities, and taking on particular roles, in a rigorous and controlled manner, all of which highlight one's wide range of skills and professionalism.*

Objectives: *The aim of this study was to explore the link between the Educator's Role Profile and the results obtained by fourth grade students in the state-standardized PIRLS test, in order to help teachers better understand their own approach to educating and identify ways of optimizing results.*

Methods: *The study, conducted in Romania, included as participants 35 primary school teachers, evaluated with D. Kolb's self-assessment instrument in order to identify their Educator Role Profiles, and 375 of their students, who underwent a standardized form of testing called PIRLS. The study sought to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the students' performances and ultimately raised the hypothesis that these differences could be due to the impact of their mentors' style of teaching, according to their Educator Role Profiles. This work also outlines the Experiential educator role profile as the one which unifies all four roles of the teacher, helping the learner go through the entire learning cycle.*

Results: *This study found that the most common Educator Role Profile in Romanian schools is the Evaluator role profile, followed by the Expert, the Facilitator and, finally, the Coach. Regarding the association between the teachers' role profiles and the results obtained by students in the PIRLS test, the study showed that the Facilitator role profile was associated with statistically significant greater mean scores in the students' overall performance, followed by the Coach, the Expert and lastly, the Evaluator.*

Conclusions: *This paper concludes that the Experiential teaching role profiles ought to be considered important additions to the school reform model, in order to increase students' performance on standardized examinations.*

Keywords: *Experiential Learning, Educator Role Profile, performance, teaching style*

ⁱ Corresponding author: Camelia Mădălina Răducu, PhD student, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest, Panduri 90, Sector 5, 050663, Bucharest, Romania, email: camelia_10i@yahoo.com.

I. Introduction

In the educational process, the shift from theory to practice, from memorization to reasoning, from traditional learning methods to creative, engaging learning methods, and the introduction of technology at all levels of teaching (audio-visual multimedia systems, computer-assisted learning, internet use etc.) has led to a change in the role and functions of the traditional teacher. The modern teacher is a counsellor and facilitator of acquiring knowledge and skill, guiding and stimulating the desire to learn in children, young people and adults.

The development of learning is a unique process. It leads to the acquisition of adaptive skills, while also allowing the student and his teacher to experience the roles of actor and witness, in the Experiential learning process, with developmental effects. As an actor, the student lives, feels, and experiences freely. As a spectator, he observes, learns to look at a phenomenon from different perspectives (social roles), thinks creatively and evaluates. The teacher-mentor is an actor when he facilitates learning and an observer when he continuously evaluates the student's evolution in the developmental process, providing adequate, mature and healthy feedback. He is simultaneously involved in a process of self-development, as an actor, and in self-evaluation as a witness to his performance.

The concept of Experiential education gained space at the beginning of the 21st century and has spread in various fields, bringing multiple benefits in domains like: action learning (Francis et al., 2011), service learning (Bielefeldt et al., 2011; Brower, 2011), problem-based learning (Bethell & Morgan, 2011; Gurpinar et al., 2011), adventure education (Fuller, 2012; Timken & McNamee, 2012), and simulation and gaming (Schaefer et al., 2011; Shields et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2012). In the educational field, Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) has been used and delivered instructional programs in K-12 education.

In primary schools from Romania, Experiential learning is still in its infancy, being implemented locally with the help of pilot projects and demonstrating its effectiveness through a micro-study which showed that the experiential methodology applied to primary school students can produce better results in standardized TIMMS and PIRLS tests in fourth grade students (Răducu, 2019).

1.1. Experiential Learning: matching the teaching style with the learning style

As we have indicated in the previous article (op. cit., 2019), learning experience, according to D.

Kolb's six principles, is based on process and involves a cycle of conflicts and resolutions. All learning moments are actually relearning, as, through such process, are gained competences fostering the adaptation to the world. Also new knowledge is created through learning, which will further be assimilated and integrated into existing structures. Moreover, Kolb's theory of teaching and learning depicts a cyclic process that transcends four stages: concrete experience, reflection and observation, abstract conceptualization, and experimenting with novel situations (Peterson, 2012).

Kolb describes learning styles as the unique ways that individuals experience during the learning cycle. There are nine different learning modes. Every student uses the style that is appropriate to his genetic imprint, personal experience and present demands:

- The Initiating style: initiating action to deal with experiences and situations.
- The Experiencing style: finding meaning from deep involvement in experience.
- The Imagining style: imagining possibilities by observing & reflecting on experiences.
- The Reflecting style: connecting experience and ideas through sustained reflection.
- The Analyzing style: integrating ideas into a concise model and system through reflection.
- The Deciding style: using theories and models to decide on problem solutions and courses of action.
- The Acting style: a strong motivation for goal-directed action that integrates people and tasks.
- The Balancing style: adapting by weighing the pros and cons of acting versus reflecting & experiencing versus thinking.

The educational process is holistic; it helps develop the person as a whole because it addresses not only cognitive knowledge, but also the development of social and emotional maturity. Learning flexibility is a feature that indicates the development of a more holistic and sophisticated learning process (Kolb et al., 2014).

1.2. The Experiential Educator as a Facilitator

Becoming an Experiential educator can be a challenging and frustrating experience, but also a surprising one, as it is full of novelty, creativity, enthusiasm and innovation. Despite the fact that facilitation in the learning process has been described as a blind guide program, Kolb (et al., 2014) argues that facilitation techniques such as debriefing learning experiences, drawing out and building on the prior knowledge of learners, and facilitating a climate of trust

and open communication are but one facet of a holistic process of learning from experience, process that also includes expert knowledge input, evaluation, and coaching on learning strategies. Cronbach (1957) launched the idea that student-centered learning should be tailored to meet the needs of students.

The concept of facilitation has its main roots in Carl Rogers' non-directive approach to counselling. Rogers' five basic principles concerning the learning process have been synthesized by Heim (2012) and consist of:

- A non-directive approach to leadership that facilitates learners to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Setting a growth-promoting climate that is psychologically safe.
- Non-judgmental facilitation that patiently accepts the group's level of achievement.
- Reflective listening that restates what a person is saying in order to understand its meaning.
- Positive regard that values and respects learners and their contributions.

Regarding the Experiential learning in relationship, Kolb suggests that educating is not something one does to students through the implementation of a set of techniques. Rather, it is something educators do with learners in the context of meaningful relationships and shared experiences.

In their study, *On becoming an Experiential educator, The Educator Role Profile*, A. Kolb, D. Kolb, A. Pasarelli & G. Sharma (2014, p. 227) proved that "individual learning styles can be an entry point through which learners enter a particular learning space, but most learning requires that they continue to actively move around the learning cycle using other learning styles to acquire increasingly complex knowledge and skills and capacity to adapt to the wider demands of a given learning environment".

1.3. The Educator Role Profile

The Educator Role Profile (ERP) was created by David Kolb as a means of supporting the educator and helping him apply the concepts of Experiential education, in order to go through the learning cycles. As the studies show, teachers tend to organize the educational activity the same style in which they learn themselves, thus preventing students from completing all the learning cycles. In order to help students move around the learning cycle, teachers must adapt their role, moving from Facilitator to Subject Matter Expert, Standard-Setter/ Evaluator and Coach:

- The Facilitator Role – teachers help students get in touch with their own personal experience and reflect on it. The style is warm, motivating and self-knowledge centered. The educator creates a personal relationship with the student.
- The Subject Expert Role – the educator helps the student organize and connect his reflections to the knowledge base of the subject matter. The style is authoritative and reflective. The educator teaches by modelling and encouraging critical thinking through lectures and texts.
- The Standard-Setter/ Evaluator Role – the educator helps the student master the application of knowledge and skills in order to meet performance requirements. The style is results-oriented and creates performance activities.
- The Coaching Style – educators help students apply knowledge to reach their goals. The style is collaborative and encouraging, with teachers assisting students in the creation of a personal developments plan and providing ways of getting feedback on performance.

Most teachers adopt one or two favorite roles because of their own educational philosophy, teaching style, personal learning style or because it is the most appropriate role for the subject they teach.

Table 1. Examples of Beliefs, Goals, Styles, and Practices Associated With Educator Roles.

Educator role	Beliefs: "Learning occurs best when . . ."	Goals: "My students develop . . ."	Style: "As a teacher, I prefer to be . . ."	Practices: "Instructional forms I often use include . . ."
Facilitator	It begins with the learners experience	Empathy and understanding of others	Creative, warm, affirming	Class discussion, journals, personal stories
Expert	New concepts are integrated into existing mental frameworks	Analytic and conceptual abilities	Logical, authoritative	Lectures, readings, written assignments
Evaluator	Clear standards and feedback are provided	Problem-solving skills	Structured, outcome-oriented, objective	Laboratories, graded homework assignments
Coach	It takes place in a real-life context	Ability to work productively with others	Applied, collaborative, risk-taking	Field projects, role-plays, simulations

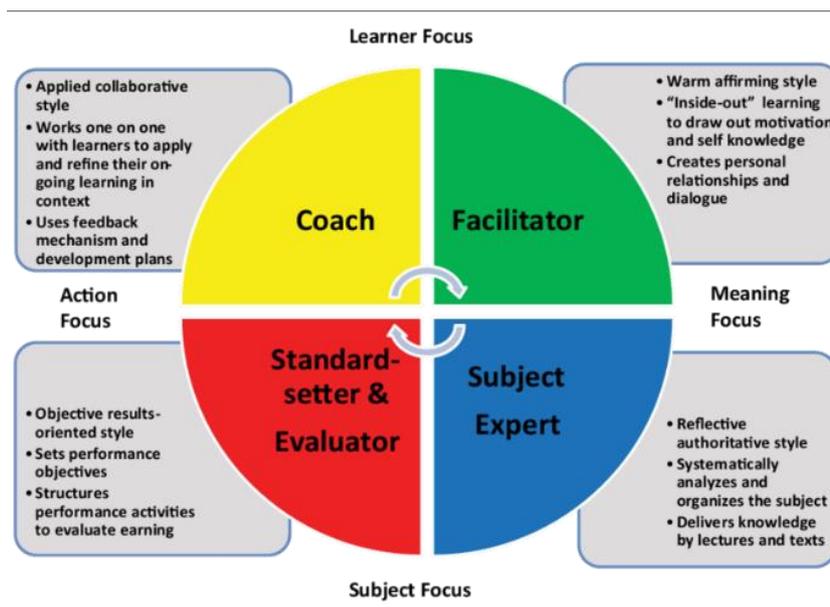


Figure 1: The four stages in Kolb's Experiential Learning Model and the Educator Role Profile (source: source: Kolb et al., 2014, p. 220, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270671768>)

As described in the ERP, the educator's role includes not only a teaching style, but also beliefs about teaching and learning, goals for education and practical training (Table 1, source: Kolb et al., 2014, p. 227, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270671768>).

II. Methods – the current study

The aim of this study was to assess the impact of the Educator's Role Profile (Facilitator, Subject Expert, Standard-Setter/ Evaluator and Coach, according to D. Kolb's self-assessment instrument called the Educator Role Profile) on the performances of fourth grade students from three Romanian schools at state-standardized tests, such as Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), by comparing the students' test results.

The present study aimed to answer two main research questions, as provided below:

Research question 1: What are the most common Educator Role Profiles of primary school teachers?

Research question 2: Is there any statistical difference between students' overall mean scores on PIRLS exams depending on the role profile of the educator?

Participants

The Educator Role Profile was administered to 35 teachers; their students' PIRLS test results were collected and evaluated accordingly.

Instruments

As mentioned, the instruments for this research were the ERP (Educator Role Profile) and PIRLS (an international assessment tool that monitors trends in students' achievement in reading). These standardized examination methods were applied to students at the end of the fourth grade. The two instruments are briefly described below.

The ERP (Educator Role Profile) is a self-assessment instrument designed by D. Kolb (et al., 2014) to assist the educator in the process of applying the Experiential Learning Theory concepts. The ERP presents the four educator roles – Facilitator, Subject Expert, Standard-Setter/ Evaluator and Coach. ERP consists of a forced choice paired comparison series of 30 items. Each item corresponds to one of the four educator roles – Coach, Facilitator, Expert and Evaluator (see above).

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS): since 2001, PIRLS was carried out every 5 years. PIRLS documents worldwide trends in the reading knowledge of 4th-graders, as well as school and teacher practices related to instruction. Fourth-grade students complete a reading assessment and a questionnaire that address students' attitudes towards reading and their reading habits. In addition, questionnaires are handed out to teachers and school principals to gather information about students' school experiences in developing reading literacy.

Procedure

The main stages of the research were as follows:

1. Administration of the ERP Self-Assessment tool to 35 teachers from primary schools (zero grade to fourth grade).
2. Examination of their students (15 fourth grade classes – 375 students) using the PIRLS test, according to the indicated examination standards.

Experimental design

The independent variable is the teachers' role profile and the dependent variable refers to student achievement.

III. Results

To establish if a difference in student achievement exists among using the four Educator Role Profiles, and to identify the significance of the difference in means, both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis were applied in the research. This study contains one independent variable and one dependent variable. Therefore, a t-test was the most appropriate in determining the significance of the difference in mean scores among the Educator's Role Profiles effects.

Question 1: What are the most common Educator Role Profiles of primary school teachers?

The results depicted in Figure 2 demonstrate that the most common role profile found in this micro-study is the Evaluator/ Standard-Setter (40%), being followed closely by the Expert (36.67%). The least common role profiles were the Facilitator (13.33%), and the Coach (10%).

Question 2: Are there any statistically significant differences between students' overall mean scores on PIRLS exams, differences that would ultimately reflect the influence of their teachers' role profiles?

The results in Table 2 indicated a group mean test score value of 9.32 for the Facilitator role profile, 8.96 for the Coach role profile, 8.40 for the Evaluator role profile, and 8.30 for the Expert role profile. The results of independent-sample median test depicted in Table 4 produce an output with a p value ≤ 0.025 . For this analysis, $p \leq 0.05$ rejects the null hypothesis. A p value ≤ 0.05 is an indication that the difference in mean scores was not a result of chance and could be attributed to actual differences in instructional methodologies, due to different educator role profiles experienced by students.

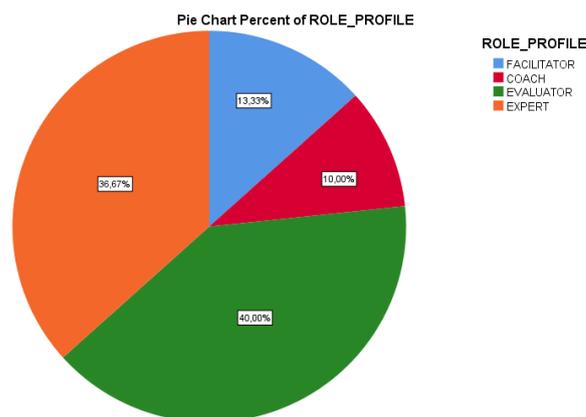


Figure 2. Educator Role Profile – distribution of educator role profile in several Romanian schools

Table 2. Report of mean values at PIRLS test depending on the Educator's Role Profile

Student PIRLS test results			
Role profile	Mean	Number	Std. Deviation
FACILITATOR	9.3275	4	.22692
COACH	8.9600	3	.23065
EVALUATOR	8.4050	4	.47641
EXPERT	8.3000	4	.61628
Total	8.7340	15	.58735

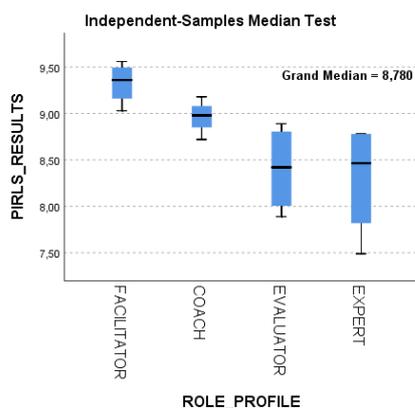
Table 3. Hypothesis Test Summary

Hypothesis Test Summary			
Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
The medians of PIRLS_RESULTS are the same across categories of ROLE_PROFILE.	Independent-samples Median Test	.025	Reject the null hypothesis.
Asymptotic significances are being displayed. The significance level is .050.			

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for the PIRLS scores depending on the Educator's Role Profile Independent-Samples Median Test Summary

Independent-Samples Median Test Summary	
Total N	15
Median	8.780
Test Statistic	9.308a, b
Degree of Freedom	3
Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)	.025
a. More than 20% of the cells have expected values less than 5.	
b. At least one cell has an expected value less than 1.	

Figure 3. Descriptive statistics for the Median PIRLS scores depending on the Educator's Role Profile



IV. Discussion

With the formal launch of the “education for all” paradigm, after 1990, the strategic directions that imposed a greater responsibility and flexibility within the Romanian educational services consisted in the democratization of the school and in multiple actions with the purpose of equalizing the chances of all the students, assigning the teachers a new status and a variety of roles.

The role of the teacher in transmitting information is by no means as important and central as it is in facilitating children’s access to knowledge. Consequently, the way the teacher connects children to culture should reflect children’s age and characteristics. His purpose is to challenge the child to research further. Thus, teachers’ role is more focused on generating new questions, activating the desire to learn as much as possible, rather than simply offer prefabricated answers. The teacher aims, on the other hand, to provide very precise and easy-to-use tools to help children find their answers, to create cultural products by themselves, and to discover relationships between things, facts and phenomena.

In contrast, the Facilitator role is to enthusiastically review, support and validate the solutions and alternatives that children conceive to different problems, discouraging the unrealistic ones. It also implies providing emotional support, improving the adaptive capacities of the children in different situations and boost their self-esteem.

We observe, as described above, that the roles of the Experiential and modern teacher merge, becoming a new prototype of flexible, available, creative, containing teacher, present in the didactic reality, who is a guide and a facilitator. The personal qualities required of a teacher are intertwined with those of a mentor, creating a harmonious didactic personality

model, capable to a greater extent to achieve the fundamental objective of education, namely the creative restructuring of the personality, the re-assignment of lived experiences, the change of perspectives on life events and self, and extension of self-awareness.

The findings of this study showed that the role of the educator could significantly influence the results obtained by Romanian fourth grade students in the PIRLS evaluation. The best results were obtained by students who had a Facilitator type teacher, followed by those who had a Coach style teacher, Evaluator style teacher, and finally those who had an Expert style teacher. This has a very important meaning in the context of a society in constant search of effective solutions for common difficulties encountered in the current educational system and substantiates the claim that the Experiential teacher does have a positive impact on students’ learning outcome.

The Educator Role Profile tool was designed to help educators go through all learning cycles. The Experiential Educator is the one that goes through all the cycles of learning in a balanced way, given that in the educational process the emphasis falls equally on concrete experience, reflection and observation, abstract conceptualization, and experimenting with novel situations – thus teachers must modulate their style.

The first part of the study shows that Romanian educators tend to teach as Evaluators. This means they believe that the best way of learning happens when they mainstream new information, set clear standards and provide feedback. They also focus on problem-solving competences and on conceptual and analytical skills. The teaching style is authoritative, logical, structured, and results-focused. The main training methods are the verbal transmission of information, readings, exercises and graded homework assignments.

As we can observe in the second part of the study, despite the performance orientation of this role profile, the Expert-Evaluator correlates with poor results in the PIRLS test. This may be due to the incomplete course of the learning cycle. Assimilation is achieved through abstract conceptualization and reflective observation; in other words, students learn from the experience of teachers and reflective observation. However, the teachers do not go far enough through the stages of active experimentation and specific experiences particular to the profiles of Facilitator and Coach roles, hence students do not try what they have learned and do not gain concrete experience.

The role of the Facilitator-Coach is oriented towards practical experimentation; their beliefs are that the

best learning happens when it starts with the experience of the learners, and this must be linked to a real-life context. The purpose of learning resides in empathy and understanding of others and of the surrounding world, but also in the development of the ability to work productively with others. The teaching style is calm, collaborative, affirmative, but also applicative and risk-taking. The main training methods are purely experiential: class discussions, journals, personal stories, but also role-plays, group projects and simulations.

The Experiential educator is the one who knows how to intersect the four roles to give their students a complete learning experience. The added value of this role is given by the orientation towards a unified, balanced learning model.

Thus, the model of Experiential learning intertwined with the role of the Experiential educator develops the student as a whole: he/ she slowly becomes capable of knowing, using, exemplifying, mastering both the knowledge, acquired skills and aptitudes, as well as his own feelings, states and experiences.

V. Implications for practice and conclusions

From the previous Experiential vs Traditional study (Răducu, 2019) we have learned that the Experiential learning methodology produces better results in TIMMS and PIRLS standardized tests of fourth graders. The present study notes that the Expert-Evaluator role is dominant in Romanian schools despite the fact that Facilitator and Coach roles are correlated with better results in standardized assessments. This means that the trend in the primary education system is to focus on the transmission of the information and on setting performance standards at the expense of practical experimentation and collaborative learning. Thus, the two studies incorporate the idea of the need to train teachers in order to complete the learning cycle, namely to move from concrete experience, to observation, conceptualization and then to active experimentation. This study takes a step further in deepening the analysis of the link between the learning methodology, the training cycle and the students' performance in standardized tests.

This study brings added value in the field of education that has undergone countless changes in recent decades: from new techniques, instruments and means of re-conceptualizing the teaching notion, redefining the role of the teacher and integrating them as an active part, not only in the process of transmitting information, but in assimilating and integrating them.

The role of the teacher has transited various stages and orientations: the teacher as an expert of the

teaching-learning act, as a motivator who triggers and maintains interest and desire for learning activity, as a leader of a group of students, as a counsellor who is a sensitive observer of the behavior of the students, as a persuasive guide and adviser, as an exemplary model for students through his/ her personality, actions, behavior, as a reflexive professional who always strives to understand and reflect on the unique events in the classroom and finally as a manager who oversees the entire activity in the classroom and ensures consensus with other teachers, parents and other factors. The teacher therefore assumes a plethora of roles, the exercise of which is dependent on their personality.

This paper sought to identify the role profile of the most common educator in Romanian schools and whether there is any measurable difference between the results obtained by fourth grade students in the PIRLS test, according to the role profile of their respective educator. The findings in this study could significantly contribute to the national policy of reforming the education system.

As this study showed, there is a need for professional training programs for teachers so that they can develop their teaching skills corresponding to all types of educator role profiles. It is the Experiential educator who helps students through all learning cycles. This study highlights the need for inspectors and leaders tasked with innovation in education to consider Experiential Learning Theory as a viable solution to the current impasse of the Romanian educational system.

As regards the adequacy of further research, this study was a quantitative research that compared the effectiveness of the role profile of educators, using the students' standardized test results. It is recommended to carry out additional studies to identify which other factors contribute to enhancing students' performance in standardized tests.

The second recommendation for a future study is based on studying the role of the educator's profile in other teaching orientations such as Step by step, Waldorf or Montessori.

The third recommendation aims at the replicability of this study in different environments, on larger samples and other types of standardized tests.

In conclusion, as we have observed, the Experiential methodology, focused on completing all the learning cycles and suitable for the all learning styles, braided with a theory of the Experiential teacher's role profile produces a strong, comprehensive educational model, fitted to produce measurable transformations in education.

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