

CERTAIN ASPECTS OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

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Abstract

Experiential learning is a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with students in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values. David Kolb is best known for his work on the experiential learning theory and published this model in 1984. Teachers can help create environments where students can learn and have experiences at the same time. Teachers who understand learning theories can better optimize their classroom and help more students learn in ways that work for them. Being a successful teacher means focusing on how best to help students succeed. It encourages the idea that learning is a lifelong process and that we needn't stick to traditional learning methods to develop personally or professionally.

INTRODUCTION

Experiential learning is a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with students in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values. Learning by doing is the basis for the experiential learning theory. By engaging students in hands on experiences and reflection, they are better able to connect theories and knowledge learned in the classroom to real world situations. This type of learning exist in a variety of courses and non-course based forms and may include community service, service learning, undergraduate research, study abroad/away, and culminating experiences such as internships, student teaching, and capstone projects, to name a few.

When students participate in experiential education opportunities, they gain:

- A better understanding of course material
- A broader view of the world and an appreciation of community
- Insight into their own skills, interests, passions, and values
- Opportunities to collaborate with diverse organizations and people
- Positive professional practices and skill sets
- The gratification of assisting in meeting community needs

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- Self-confidence and leadership skills

Teachers can help create environments where students can learn and have experiences at the same time. Teachers who understand learning theories can better optimize their classroom and help more students learn in ways that work for them. Being a successful teacher means focusing on how best to help students succeed.

KOLB'S EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THEORY

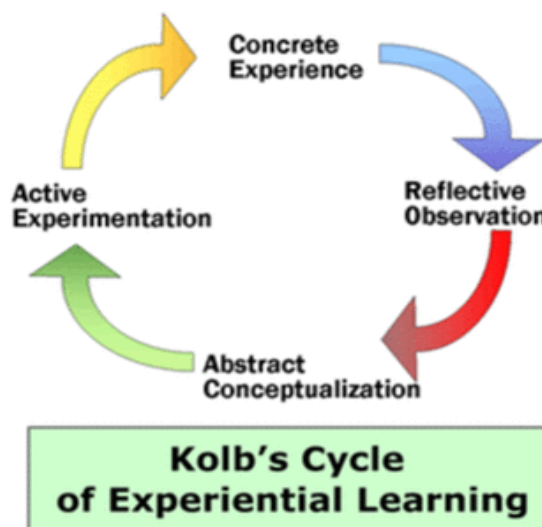
David Kolb is best known for his work on the experiential learning theory or ELT. Kolb published this model in 1984, getting his influence from other great theorists including John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget. The experiential learning theory works in four stages:

- Concrete learning
- Reflective observation
- Abstract conceptualization
- Active experimentation

The first two stages of the cycle involve grasping an experience, the second two focus on transforming an experience. Kolb argues that effective learning is seen as the learner goes through the cycle, and that they can enter into the cycle at any time.

Concrete learning is when a learner gets a new experience, or interprets a past experience in a new way. Reflective observation comes next, where the learner reflects on their experience personally. They use the lens of their experience and understanding to reflect on what this experience means.

Abstract conceptualization happens as the learner forms new ideas or adjusts their thinking based on the experience and their reflection about it. Active experimentation is where the learner applies the new ideas to the world around them, to see if there are any modifications to be made. This process can happen over a short period of time, or over a long span of time.



An example: Learning to ride a bicycle

- *Reflective observation* - Thinking about riding and watching another person ride a bike.
- *Abstract conceptualization* - Understanding the theory and having a clear grasp of the biking concept.
- *Concrete experience* - Receiving practical tips and techniques from a biking expert.
- *Active experimentation* - Leaping on the bike and have a go at it.

An example: Learning to coach

- *Concrete experience* - Having a coach guide you in coaching someone else.
- *Active experimentation* - Using your people skills with what you have learned to achieve your own coaching style.
- *Reflective observation* - Observing how other people coach.
- *Abstract conceptualization* - Reading articles to find out the pros and cons of different methods.

PRINCIPLES OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

- Real authentic experience which includes real consequences where the learner makes a choice to participate and involve in examining, exploring and playing
- Experience is an hands on feeling and doing interaction
- Direct experience with focus on reflection and builds on past knowledge and experiences. It requires active involvement in construction of meaning and encourages collaboration

- Reflects on that experience through individual thought, group discussion, questioning, processing or writing in a journal
- Draw conclusions and make sense of what the learner has experienced

KOLB'S EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE MODEL

The experiential learning cycle rests on the idea that each person has a specific type of learning tendencies, and they are thus dominant in certain stages of experiential learning. For example, some learners will be more dominant in concrete learning and reflective observation, while others will be dominant in abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. The four learning styles are:

Diverging. The diverging learning style is full of learners who look at things with a unique perspective. They want to watch instead of do, and they also have a strong capacity to imagine. These learners usually prefer to work in groups, have broad interests in cultures and people, and more. They usually focus on concrete learning and reflective observation, wanting to observe and see the situation before diving in.

Assimilating. This learning style involves learners getting clear information. These learners prefer concepts and abstracts to people, and explore using analytic models. These learners focus on abstract conceptualization and reflective observation in the experiential learning style.

Converging. Converging learners solve problems. They apply what they've learned to practical issues, and prefer technical tasks. They are also known to experiment with new ideas, and their learning focuses on abstract conceptualization and active experimentation.

Accommodating: These learners prefer practicality. They enjoy new challenges and use intuition to help solve problems. These learners utilize concrete learning and active experimentation when they learn.

EXAMPLES OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

There are many ways that experiential learning is used every day. Some examples include:

- Going to the zoo to learn about animals through observation, instead of reading about them.
- Growing a garden to learn about photosynthesis instead of watching a movie about it.

- Hoping on a bicycle to try and learn to ride, instead of listening to your parent explain the concept

BENEFITS OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

There are many benefits of experiential learning for teachers and students, including:

- Opportunity to immediately apply knowledge. Promotion of teamwork. Experiential learning often involves working in a team, so learning in this setting allows students to practice teamwork.
- Improved motivation. Students are more motivated and excited about learning in experiential settings. Experiments are exciting and fun for students, and they will be passionate about learning.
- Opportunity for reflection. Students using the experiential model are able to spend time reflecting about what they are experiencing and learning. This is valuable as they are able to better retain information when they can think about what's happening to them.
- Real world practice. Students can greatly benefit from learning that helps them prepare for the real world. Experiential learning is focused on using real situations to help students learn, so they are then better prepared for their future.

OPPORTUNITIES TO INCLUDE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING ACTIVITIES IN THE CLASSROOM

It's important for current and aspiring teachers to work to include experiential learning opportunities in their classroom. There are many ways teachers can work to include these learning activities in their class including:

- Field trips
- Art projects
- Science experiments
- Mock cities and trials
- Role playing
- Reflection and journaling
- Internship opportunities
- Interactive classroom games

Tips to understand steps of experiential learning

- Suppose there is an experience to teach a lesson.
- Reflect on the experience. Think about what went well, or not so well in the lesson.
- Critically analyse the experience. Identify what it was that made the lesson good or bad. Was it the activity, instructions, subject knowledge, or something else?
- Plan future actions based on what is learnt. Once decided what the problem was, make a plan to improve and then try the same activity again with another class. This may include creating a new plan or brushing up the knowledge.

Some ways to reflect

- Keep a learning diary of what went well or not so well in a lesson
- Ask your learners for feedback on a lesson or activity
- Make notes in your course book after each lesson
- Talk through your lessons with another teacher
- Ask a colleague to sit in and observe your lesson
- Record yourself teaching
- Use online journal to keep reflective practices in one place like notes, videos, documents.

Other places to apply experiential learning theory

- Sports coaching
- Workplace training
- Research field trip
- Learning new skills
- Internship

TYPES OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Types of experiential learning that students may be exposed to through Experience Learning include:

- Apprenticeships- *Provide students an opportunity to try out a job, usually with an experienced professional in the field to act as a mentor.*

- Clinical experiences- *Provide hands-on experiences of a predetermined duration directly tied to an area of study, such as teacher education students participating in day care and classroom settings.*
- Fellowships- *Provide tuition or aid to support the training of students for a period of time. They are usually made by educational institutions or corporations to assist individuals pursuing a course of study or research.*
- Field work- *Allows students to explore and apply content learned in the classroom in a specified field experience away from the classroom. Field work experiences bridge educational experiences with an outside community.*
- Internships- *Provide students with an opportunity to test the waters in a career field and also gain some valuable work experience.*
- Practicum- *Often a required component of a course of study and place students in a supervised and often paid situation.*
- Service-learning- *Distinguished by being mutually beneficial for both student and community. Service-learning is considered a part of experiential education by its nature of learning, performing a job, and reflection by the student.*
- Simulations and gaming/role-playing- *When used as part of a course, simulations and gaming/role-playing aim to imitate a system, entity, phenomenon, or process.*
- Student teaching- *Provides candidates with an opportunity to put into practice the knowledge and skills they have been developing in the preparation program.*
- Study abroad- *Offer students a unique opportunity to learn in another culture, within the security of a host family and a host institution carefully chosen to allow the transfer of credit to a student's degree program.*
- Undergraduate research- *Is common at universities across all disciplines. The goal is to involve students with actively contested questions, empirical observation, cutting-edge technologies, and the sense of excitement that comes from working to answer important questions.*
- Volunteering- *Allows students to serve in a community primarily because they choose to do so. Many serve through a non-profit organization sometimes referred to as formal volunteering.*

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING STYLES

The Kolb Experiential Learning Profile (KELP) describes nine different ways of navigating the learning cycle by learning styles.

Experiencing: When using the Experiencing style, you are engaged, connected, warm and intuitive. One may excel in teamwork and establish trusting relationships with others.

Imagining: When using the Imagining style, you are caring, trusting, empathetic and creative. We demonstrate self-awareness and empathy for others.

Reflecting: When using the Reflecting style, we are to be patient, careful and reserved, allowing others to take center stage.

Analyzing: We plan ahead to minimize mistakes, integrate information to get the full picture, and use critical thinking to understand situations.

Thinking: When using the Thinking style, you are skeptical, structured, linear and controlled. We have to know how to communicate ideas effectively and make independent judgments.

Deciding: When using the Deciding style, one should be realistic, accountable and direct. You find practical solutions to problems and set performance goals.

Acting: When using the Acting style, we are on time, assertive, achievement oriented and courageous.

Initiating: When using the Initiating style, we actively seize opportunities and participate without holding back.

Balancing: When using the Balancing style, we identify blind spots in a situation and bridge differences between people.

CONCLUSIONS

Whether a teacher, student or something completely different, experiential learning can be extremely valuable. It encourages the idea that learning is a lifelong process and that we needn't stick to traditional learning methods to develop personally or professionally.

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