

**Theoretical Foundations and Objectives of Experiential Learning  
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**Presentation Notes**

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The title of this presentation is “Theoretical Foundations and Objectives of Experiential Learning”. The information in the presentation is summarized or adopted from the list of references presented in the last slide of the presentation. During this relatively short presentation I will discuss the following topics:

**1. Outline**

- ❖ Learning from Experience
- ❖ Foundational Scholars of Experiential Learning Theory
- ❖ Definition of Experiential Learning
- ❖ Experiential Learning Cycle
- ❖ Theoretical Contributors to Experiential Learning
- ❖ References

Many researchers suggest that experience is central in the learning process. For example, Cohen and Walker suggest that experience is the foundation of, and stimulus for, learning and that learners actively construct their experience. moreover, learning is influenced by the social cultural context in which it happens.

**2. Learning from experience: According to Cohen and Walker (1997):**

- ❖ Experience is the foundation of, and stimulus for, learning.
- ❖ Learners actively construct their experience
- ❖ Learning is a holistic process
- ❖ Learning is socially and culturally constructed
- ❖ Learning is influenced by socio-emotional context in which it occurs.

One of the most important advocates of learning from experience who has influenced the development of Experiential Learning Theory is John Dewey who, relatively early in the twentieth century emphasized the role of experience in learning. While acknowledging the importance of experience in learning, Dewey emphasized that we do not learn from experience but from reflecting on experience. In addition, he asserted that learning is an active, constructive, and continuous process that involves learning to think through the application of real problems.

However, according to him some experiences are *educative* while others are *miseducative*. "Good/educative experiences " motivate, encourage, and enable students to go on to have more valuable learning experiences, whereas, "poor/miseducative experiences" tend to lead towards a student closing off from potential positive experiences in the future

### 3. **John Dewey**

- ❖ We do not **learn** from experience... we **learn** from reflecting on experience.”
- ❖ Education is not an affair of 'telling' and being told, but an active and constructive process.
- ❖ The real process of education should be the process of learning to think through the application of real problems.
- ❖ People learn *experientially*. However, some experiences are *educative* while others are *miseducative*.
- ❖ All experiences are understood to be *continuous*, that is, each experience influences each future experience.
- ❖ "Good/educative experiences " motivate, encourage, and enable students to go on to have more valuable learning experiences, whereas, "poor/mis-educative experiences" tend to lead towards a student closing off from potential positive experiences in the future.

Kolb developed his Theory of Experiential Learning based on the work of Dewey and other scholars. In addition to Dewey, these scholars included William James, Jean Piaget, Kurt Lewin, Lev Vygotsky, Carl Rogers, Paulo Freire, and others.

### 4. **Foundational Scholars of Experiential Learning Theory according to Kolb**

Because of his dependence on many theoretical frameworks, Kolb maintained that the Experiential Learning Theory is eclectic. Moreover, he emphasized that knowledge is obtained by understanding, transforming and reflecting on experience. He emphasized that the Experiential Learning Theory refers to the process of acquiring knowledge as a dynamic cycle composed of four modes of learning: **experiencing**, **reflecting**, and **thinking and acting in a recursive manner** (involves the repeated application of a rule, definition, or procedure to successive results).

### 5. **Definition of Experiential Learning:**

- ❖ According to Kolb (1984):
  - The Experiential Learning Theory is eclectic
  - Knowledge can be obtained by grasping and transforming experience.
  - Reflection is a critical learning ability, by means of which it becomes possible to receive and internalize information.
- ❖ The Experiential Learning Theory refers to the process of acquiring knowledge as a dynamic cycle composed of four modes of learning: experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting in a recursive manner

Kolb's ideas regarding experiential learning were presented in his book entitled "Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development" which was first published in 1984 and appeared in 2014 in a second edition. In this book, Kolb suggested that experiential learning is a four stage process during which learners are asked to **engage** themselves in a new experience, **actively reflect** on that experience, **conceptualize that experience** and **integrate** it with past experiences.

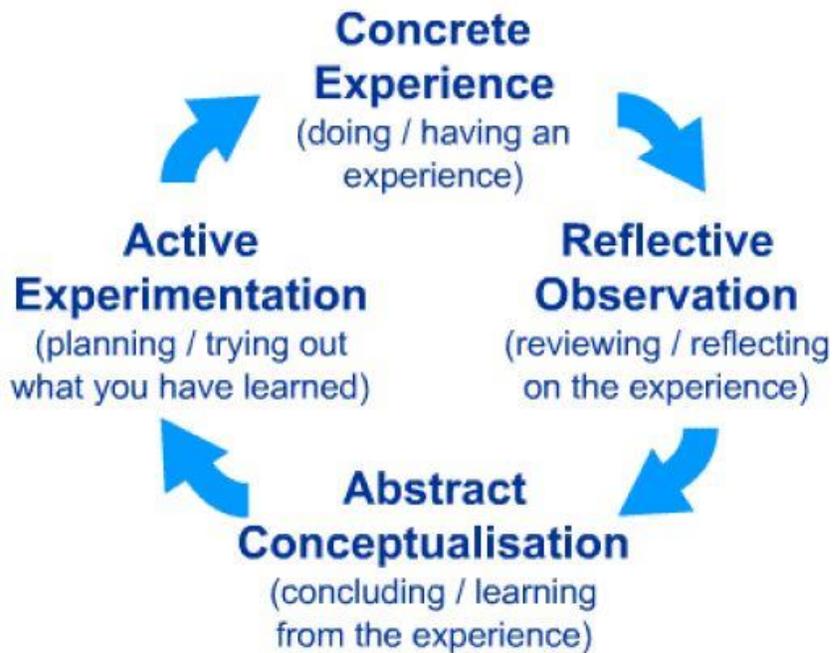
### 6. **Kolb's Articulation of Experiential Learning**

- ❖ Kolb's 1984 book on experiential learning is one of the more influential works linking theory to actual practice (Book Title: *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*)
- ❖ Kolb describes experiential learning as a four-stage process, where learners are asked to engage themselves in a new experience, actively reflect on that experience, conceptualize that experience and integrate it with past experiences.
- ❖ Kolb's experiential learning style theory is typically represented by a four-stage learning cycle

Kolb's **Experiential Learning Theory** is typically represented by a four-stage learning cycle that involves:

- ❖ **Concrete Experience:** a new experience or situation is encountered, or an existing experience is reinterpreted.
- ❖ **Reflective Observation on the New Experience:** of particular importance in this stage are any inconsistencies between experience and understanding.
- ❖ **Abstract Conceptualization:** reflection produces a new idea, or a modification of an existing abstract concept: This means that the person has learned from their experience).
- ❖ **Active Experimentation** - learners apply their "new" idea(s) to the world around them to test what happens.

## 7. Experiential Learning Cycle



## 8. Experiential Learning Cycle

- ❖ Concrete Experience: a new experience or situation is encountered, or a reinterpretation of existing experience.
- ❖ Reflective Observation on the New Experience: of particular importance in this stage are any inconsistencies between experience and understanding.

- ❖ Abstract Conceptualization: reflection produces a new idea, or a modification of an existing abstract concept: This means that the person has learned from their experience).
- ❖ Active Experimentation - learners apply their “new” idea(s) to the world around them to test what happens.

For Kolb, effective learning happens when individuals are actively and progressively involved in the four stages of the process with the help of a teachers who plays different roles at different stages such as facilitator, subject expert, standard setter and evaluator, and coach.

Kolb views learning as an integrated process with each stage being mutually supportive of and feeding into the next.

### **9. Experiential Learning Cycle**

- ❖ Effective learning is seen when a person progresses through a cycle of four stages:
  - Having a concrete experience followed by
  - Observation of and reflection on that experience which leads to
  - The formation of abstract concepts (analysis) and generalizations (conclusions) which are then
  - Used to test a hypothesis in future situations, resulting in new experiences.

Now, what are a number of the important theoretical contributions to the Experiential Learning Theory? To answer this question, I will discuss three of these theories, namely constructivism, adult leaning theory, and learning styles.

### **10. Theoretical Contributors to Experiential Learning**

- ❖ Constructivism
- ❖ Adult learning theory
- ❖ Learning styles

According to constructivists learning is a process during which learners actively construct their knowledge with the support of a teacher who is a **facilitator** who provides experiences to enable students to construct meaning.

### **11. Constructivism**

- ❖ Constructivists believe that learning is an active process during which learners construct their own knowledge based on their prior knowledge.
- ❖ The teacher acts as a facilitator providing experiences which enable students to construct meaning.
- ❖ Based on the work of psychologist like jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky.

Constructivist teaching practice involves five elements:

- ❖ **Activating prior knowledge:** Since learning involves relating what one is learning to what one already knows, activating prior knowledge is essential for successful learning.
- ❖ **Acquiring knowledge.** If students are to develop understandings, they need to see the big picture and its related parts. Understanding does not result when content is experienced as isolated bits of information – it does not result when depth is sacrificed for breadth.

- ❖ **Understanding knowledge.** Once students have been exposed to new content or skills, the process of understanding begins.
- ❖ **Using knowledge:** Providing students with activities that allow them to use the knowledge they have acquired extends and refines their knowledge and makes their knowledge **functional**.
- ❖ **Reflecting on knowledge:** students need to acquire knowledge, understand it, and use it but they also need to **reflect upon it**.

## 12. Constructivism: Five Elements of Constructivist Teaching Practice (1)

- ❖ **Activating prior knowledge:** Since learning involves relating what one is learning to what one already knows, activating prior knowledge is extremely important for successful learning.
- ❖ **Acquiring knowledge.** If students are to develop understandings, they need to see the big picture and its related parts. Understanding does not result when content is experienced as isolated bits of information – it does not result when depth is sacrificed for breadth.
- ❖ **Understanding knowledge.** Once students have been exposed to new content or skills, the process of understanding begins.
- ❖ **Using knowledge:** Providing students with activities that allow them to use the knowledge they have acquired extends and refines their knowledge and makes their knowledge **functional**.
- ❖ **Reflecting on knowledge:** students need to acquire knowledge, understand it, and use it but they also need to **reflect upon it**. Activities here include journal writing, teaching what one knows to others, concept mapping, ... – **that is meta-cognition**.

The second theoretical contributor to the Experiential Learning Theory is Knowles Adult Learning Theory (Andragogy ) which emphasizes that adults come to the learning environment with rich experiences that can be used to motivate learning. These learners expect to be actively involved in the learning process and be able apply what they have learned.

- ❖ Adult learners come to a learning environment with vast experience which educators can draw on as a rich resource.
- ❖ Adults expect to be involved as part of the decision on what and how they will be educated.
- ❖ Adult learners expect to have active participation in designing and implementing educational programs.
- ❖ Adults need to be able to experience and apply new learning.
- ❖ Adult learners need to be involved in how their learning will be evaluated.
- ❖ Adult learners assume that their feedback on program progress will be seriously considered and acted upon.
- ❖ The Third theoretical contributor to the Experiential Learning Theory are Learning styles. Kolb's learning theory identifies four distinct learning styles, which are based on a four-stage learning cycle. He explains that different people naturally prefer a certain learning style.

- ❖ Knowing a person's learning style enables learning to be orientated according to the preferred method.
- ❖ However, everyone responds to and needs all types of learning styles to some extent. It is a matter of matching the learning style with specific learning situations.

**The four learning styles are:**

- ❖ **Diverging style people** prefer to watch rather than do, tending to gather information and use imagination to solve problems.
- ❖ People with the **Assimilating learning style** prefer concise, logical approaches to solving problems. Ideas and concepts are more important than people.
- ❖ People with a **converging learning style** can solve problems find solutions to practical issues. They prefer technical tasks, and are less concerned with people and interpersonal aspects
- ❖ People with the **Accommodating learning style** are hands-on, they rely on intuition rather than logic. These people use other people's analysis, and prefer to take a practical, experiential approach.

**13. Learning Styles**

- ❖ Diverging style people prefer to watch rather than do, tending to gather information and use imagination to solve problems. They are best at viewing concrete situations from several different viewpoints.
- ❖ The Assimilating learning preference involves a concise, logical approach. Ideas and concepts are more important than people.
- ❖ People with a converging learning style can solve problems and will use their learning to find solutions to practical issues. They prefer technical tasks, and are less concerned with people and interpersonal aspects
- ❖ The Accommodating learning style is 'hands-on,' and relies on intuition rather than logic. These people use other people's analysis, and prefer to take a practical, experiential approach.
- ❖ In summary, experiential learning is not just learning from life experiences as compared to lecture-based learning
- ❖ It is not experience in which the learner is directly in contact with the realities being studied as compared to only reading, hearing, talking, and writing about them
- ❖ It is not learning from everyday examples as compared to academic knowledge produced and transmitted by experts.
- ❖ The emphasis in the above is on direct sense experiences and in-context learning as the primary sources of learning while minimizing the role of thinking, reflection, analysis and academic knowledge.

**14. Experiential Learning is not ...**

- ❖ A particular form of learning from life experiences as compared to lecture-based learning.
- ❖ An experience in which the learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied as compared to only reading, hearing, talking, and writing about it.

- ❖ A lesson acquired from ordinary life and work as compared to academic knowledge generated by systematic observation and analysis by experts and transmitted by authorities.

In the above views of experiential learning, the emphasis is on direct sense experience and in-context action as the primary sources of learning while downplaying a role for thinking, analysis and academic knowledge.

Experiential learning is a four-stage dynamic process, during which learners are asked to engage themselves in a new experience, actively reflect on that experience, conceptualize that experience and integrate it with past experiences in preparation for action.

- ❖ Educators should ensure that activities are designed and carried out in ways that offer each learner the chance to engage in the manner that suits her or his best.
- ❖ Also, individuals can be helped to learn more effectively by the identification of their lesser preferred learning styles and the strengthening of these through the application of the experiential learning cycle.
- ❖ Ideally, activities and material should be developed in ways that draw on abilities from each stage of the experiential learning cycle and take the students through the whole process in sequence.

#### **15. Experiential Learning is...**

- ❖ A four-stage dynamic process, where learners are asked to engage themselves in a new experience, actively reflect on that experience, conceptualize that experience and integrate it with past experiences in preparation for action.