Experiential Learning 101

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1. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

A 4-stage cycle of learning through experience, pairing each stage with a guiding question and a corresponding action. Learning is a continuous cycle where experience is transformed into knowledge and applied again.

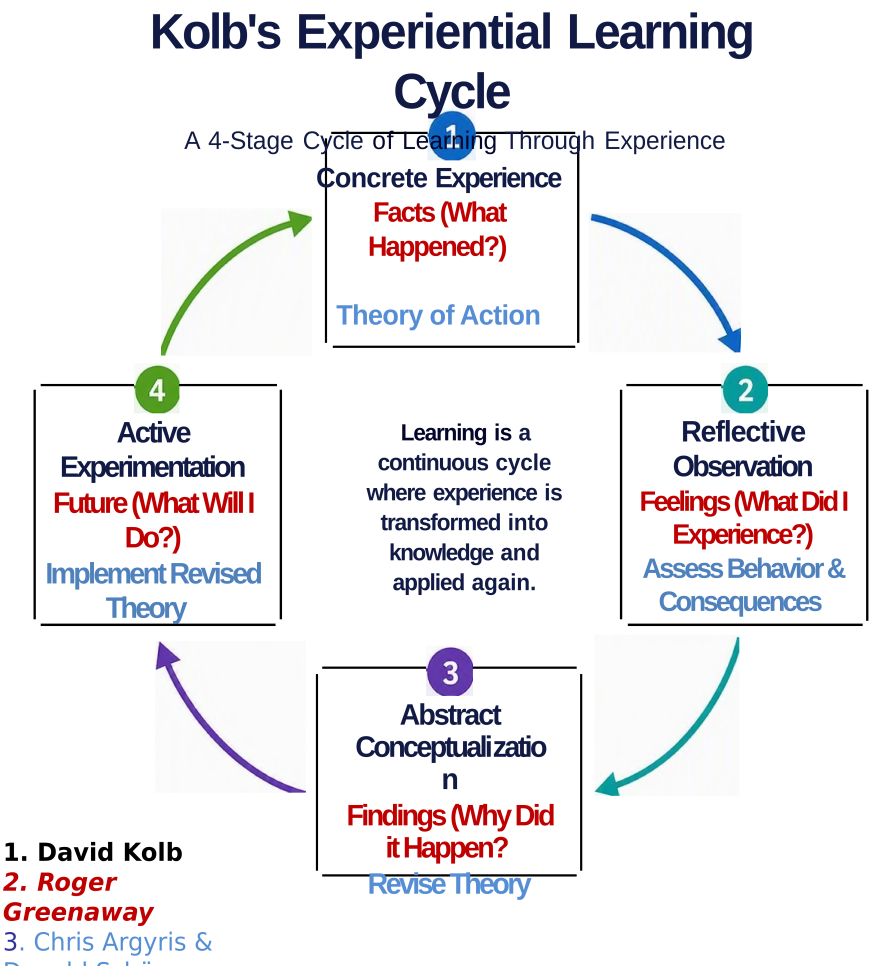


Figure 1. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984)

Table version:

Stage	Kolb Term	Core Question	Action
1	Concrete Experience (CE)	*Facts (What Happened?)*	Theory of Action
2	Reflective Observation (RO)	*Feelings (What Did I Experience?)*	Assess Behavior & Consequences
3	Abstract Conceptualization (AC)	*Findings (Why Did It Happen?)*	Revise Theory
4	Active Experimentation (AE)	*Future (What Will I Do?)*	Implement Revised Theory

Note. Kolb, D. A. (1984). Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development. Prentice-Hall. Adapted with reference to the work of Roger Greenaway, and Chris Argyris & Donald Schön.

Sources: 1. David Kolb · 2. Roger Greenaway · 3. Chris Argyris & Donald Schön

2. The Power and Purpose of Experiential Learning

> *"Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience."* **— Kolb (1984)**

The Power of Experiential Learning

> *"Experiential learning…helps students both to bridge classroom study and life in the world and to transform inert knowledge into knowledge-in-use. [It provides] a process whereby the learner interacts with the world and integrates new learning into old constructs."* **— Janet Eyler (2009)**

Why Experiential Learning Now?

> *"Experiential learning has received a groundswell of interest worldwide recently, in response to demands for employability and better educational outcomes."* **— Gallagher, S. (2020)**
>
> *"Students work on real-world projects that enable them to apply their academic knowledge, while learning professional skills and technical skills.*
>
> *Being able to practice their skills in a supportive environment while engaging in reflection gives them the opportunity to increase their belief that they can accomplish professional and career related tasks and mindsets.*
>
> *In other words, students are able to develop their self-efficacy—which is important for all learners, but it has been identified as especially important for women and students of color in the STEM workforce pipeline."* **— Gallagher & Thompson (2020)**

Experiential Learning Is…

- Engaged learning process
- Students "learn by doing" and reflecting on the experience
- Well-planned, supervised, and assessed
- Promotes interdisciplinary learning

Adapted from Boston University's Center for Teaching and Learning.

Experiential Learning Integrates…

Component	Description
Knowledge	Concepts, facts, and information.
Activity	Application of knowledge.
Reflection	Analysis and synthesis of knowledge and activity; creates new knowledge.†

Adapted from Boston University Center for Teaching & Learning. † Adapted from Indiana University (2006).

3. Eight Principles of Experiential Learning

The How of Experiential Learning — principles of good practice for designing and delivering experiential learning.

Principle	Description
Intention	Learning experiences are guided by clear purposes and intentional outcomes.
Preparedness and Planning	Experiences are carefully designed, planned, and supported to promote learning.
Authenticity	Activities are meaningful and connected to real-world contexts and situations.
Reflection	Learners engage in structured reflection to deepen understanding from experience.
Orientation and Training	Learners receive adequate preparation, guidance, and skill development prior to participation.
Monitoring and Continuous Improvement	Educators consistently observe and adjust the experience to enhance learning quality.
Assessment and Evaluation	Learning outcomes and processes are assessed to determine effectiveness and growth.
Acknowledgement	Learners' efforts, accomplishments, and contributions are recognized and validated.

Note. Adapted from the Eight Principles of Good Practice for Experiential Learning (National Society for Experiential Education [NSEE], 1998).

4. Defining Features of Experiential Learning

Meyer (2024) identifies seven features that distinguish experiential learning from other instructional approaches.

Feature	Description
Learner Agency	Opportunities to make decisions for themselves.
Fluid Affordances for Learning	Functional opportunities offered by the environment to achieve tasks.
Flexible Pedagogy	Application of fluid affordances to instructional process (can't be prescriptive).
Direct, Personal Connection to Learning	"Personal experience" is paramount for fostering engagement.
Ways of Knowing	Learning through one's senses interwoven with learning through one's (internal) thoughts.
Freedom	Opportunities to explore ideas on one's own.
Precision	Corollary to freedom; development of self-discipline.

5. Program Design Elements

Experiential learning experiences can be characterized across four design dimensions: the type of experience, how students participate, the duration of the experience, and the level of institutional oversight and integration.

Types • Community-Based Learning • Field Experiences • International Medical Elective • Internships • Research Projects • Service Learning • Practicum	**Participation** • Voluntary • Required • Course-Based • Co-Curricular • Individualized
Duration • Single Day • Select Days • Weekly • Semester • Across Program	**Oversight and Integration** • Levels: None, Low, Middle, and High • Community or Placement Partners • Faculty • Professional Staff