

# Experiential learning of famous persons

People



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

ideas • thinkers • practice david a. kolb on experiential learning David A. Kolb's model of experiential learning can be found in many discussions of the theory and practice of adult education, informal education and lifelong learning. We set out the model, and examine its possibilities and problems.

contents: • introduction • david a. olb • david kolb on experiential learning • david kolb on learning styles • issues • developments - jarvis on learning • a guide to reading • links • how to cite this piece As Stephen Brookfield (1983: 16) has commented, writers in the field of experiential learning have tended to use the term in two contrasting senses. On the one hand the term is used to describe the sort of learning undertaken by students who are given a chance to acquire and apply knowledge, skills and feelings in an immediate and relevant setting.

Experiential learning thus involves a, 'direct encounter with the phenomena being studied rather than merely thinking about the encounter, or only considering the possibility of doing something about it. ' (Borzak 1981: 9 quoted in Brookfield 1983). This sort of learning is sponsored by an institution and might be used on training programmes for professions such as social work and teaching or in field study programmes such as those for social administration or geography courses.

The second type of experiential learning is 'education that occurs as a direct participation in the events of life' (Houle 1980: 221). Here learning is not sponsored by some formal educational institution but by people themselves. It is learning that is achieved through reflection upon everyday experience and is the way that most of us do our learning. Much of the literature on experiential learning, as Peter Jarvis comments (1995: 75), 'is actually about

learning from primary experience, that is learning through sense experiences'.

He continues, 'unfortunately it has tended to exclude the idea of secondary experience entirely'. Jarvis also draws attention to the different uses of the term, citing Weil and McGill's (1989: 3) categorization of experiential learning into four 'villages': Village One is concerned particularly with assessing and accrediting learning from life and work experience.... Village Two focuses on experiential learning as a basis for bringing change in the structures... of post-school education.... Village Three emphasizes experiential learning as a basis for group consciousness raising....

Village Four is concerned about personal growth and self-awareness. These 'villages' of approaches retain a focus on primary experience (and do not really problematize the notion of experience itself). Jarvis (1995: 77-80) makes the case for a concern for secondary or indirect experience (occurring through linguistic communication). While there have been various additions to the literature, such as the above, it is the work of David A. Kolb (1976; 1981; 1984) and his associate Roger Fry (Kolb and Fry 1975) that still provides the central reference point for discussion.

Following on from Kolb's work there has been a growing literature around experiential learning and this is indicative of greater attention to this area by practitioners - particularly in the area of higher education. David Kolb's interest lay in exploring the processes associated with making sense of concrete experiences - and the different styles of learning that may be involved. In this he makes explicit use of the work of Piaget, Dewey and

Lewin. David A. Kolb David A. Kolb is Professor of Organizational Behavior in the Weatherhead School of Management.

He joined the School in 1976. Born in 1939, Kolb received his Bachelor of Arts from Knox College in 1961, his MA from Harvard in 1964 and his PhD from Harvard in 1967. Besides his work on experiential learning, David A. Kolb is also known for his contribution to thinking around organizational behaviour (1995a; 1995b). He has an interest in the nature of individual and social change, experiential learning, career development and executive and professional education. David Kolb on experiential learning David A.

Kolb (with Roger Fry) created his famous model out of four elements: concrete experience, observation and reflection, the formation of abstract concepts and testing in new situations. He represented these in the famous experiential learning circle that involves (1) concrete experience followed by (2) observation and experience followed by (3) forming abstract concepts followed by (4) testing in new situations (after Kurt Lewin). It is a model that appears time and again. Kolb and Fry (1975) argue that the learning cycle can begin at any one of the four points - and that it should really be approached as a continuous spiral.

However, it is suggested that the learning process often begins with a person carrying out a particular action and then seeing the effect of the action in this situation. Following this, the second step is to understand these effects in the particular instance so that if the same action was taken in the same circumstances it would be possible to anticipate what would follow from the action. In this pattern the third step would be understanding the general principle under which the particular instance falls.

<https://assignbuster.com/experiential-learning-of-famous-persons/>

Generalizing may involve actions over a range of circumstances to gain experience beyond the particular instance and suggest the general principle. Understanding the general principle does not imply, in this sequence, an ability to express the principle in a symbolic medium, that is, the ability to put it into words. It implies only the ability to see a connection between the actions and effects over a range of circumstances. (Coleman 1976: 52). An educator who has learnt in this way may well have various rules of thumb or generalizations about what to do in different situations.

They will be able to say what action to take when say, there is tension between two people in a group but they will not be able to verbalize their actions in psychodynamic or sociological terms. There may thus be difficulties about the transferability of their learning to other settings and situations. When the general principle is understood, the last step, according to David Kolb is its application through action in a new circumstance within the range of generalization. In some representations of experiential learning these steps, (or ones like them), are sometimes represented as a circular movement.

In reality, if learning has taken place the process could be seen as a spiral. The action is taking place in a different set of circumstances and the learner is now able to anticipate the possible effects of the action. Two aspects can be seen as especially noteworthy: the use of concrete, 'here-and-now' experience to test ideas; and use of feedback to change practices and theories (Kolb 1984: 21-22). Kolb joins these with Dewey to emphasize the developmental nature of the exercise, and with Piaget for an appreciation of cognitive development.

He named his model so as to emphasize the link with Dewey, Lewin and Piaget, and to stress the role experience plays in learning. He wished to distinguish it from cognitive theories of the learning process (see Coleman 1976). David Kolb on learning styles David Kolb and Roger Fry (1975: 35-6) argue that effective learning entails the possession of four different abilities (as indicated on each pole of their model): concrete experience abilities, reflective observation abilities, abstract conceptualization abilities and active experimentation abilities.

Few of us can approach the 'ideal' in this respect and tend, they suggest, to develop a strength in, or orientation to, in one of the poles of each dimension. As a result they developed a learning style inventory (Kolb 1976) which was designed to place people on a line between concrete experience and abstract conceptualization; and active experimentation and reflective observation. Using this Kolb and Fry proceeded to identify four basic learning styles. Kolb and Fry on learning styles (Tennant 1996) Learning style Learning characteristic Description

<p>Converger</p>	<p>Abstract conceptualization + active experimentation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strong in practical application of ideas</li> <li>• can focus on hypo-deductive reasoning on specific problems</li> <li>• unemotional</li> <li>• has narrow interests</li> </ul>
<p>Diverger</p>	<p>Concrete experience + reflective observation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strong in imaginative ability</li> <li>• good at generating ideas and seeing things from different perspectives</li> <li>• interested in people</li> <li>• broad cultural interests</li> </ul>
<p>Assimilator</p>	<p>Abstract conceptualization + reflective observation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strong ability to create theoretical models</li> <li>• excels in inductive reasoning</li> <li>• concerned with abstract concepts rather than people</li> </ul>

Accommodator Concrete experience + active experimentation • greatest strength is doing things • more of a risk taker • performs well when required to react to immediate circumstances • solves problems intuitively In developing this model Kolb and Fry have helped, along with Witkin (1950), have helped to challenge those models of learning that seek to reduce potential to one dimension such as intelligence (Tennant 1997: 91). They also recognize that there are strengths and weaknesses associated with each style (and that being 'locked into' one style can put a learner at a serious disadvantage).

However, there are a number of problems with the model. Issues Here I want to note six key issues that arise out the Kolb model: It pays insufficient attention to the process of reflection (see Boud et al 1983). While David A. Kolb's scheme 'has been useful in assisting us in planning learning activities and in helping us to check simply that learners can be effectively engaged', they comment, 'it does not help... to uncover the elements of reflection itself' (ibid. : 13), see reflection. The claims made for the four different learning styles are extravagant (Jarvis 1987; Tennant 1997).

As Tennant (1997: 91) comments, even though the four learning styles neatly dovetail with the different dimensions of the experiential learning model, this doesn't necessarily validate them. David Kolb is putting forward a particular learning style. The problem here is that the experiential learning model does not apply to all situations. There are alternatives - such as information assimilation. There are also others such as memorization. Each of these may be appropriate to different situations (see Jarvis below). The

model takes very little account of different cultural experiences/conditions (Anderson 1988).

The Inventory has also been used within a fairly limited range of cultures (an important consideration if we approach learning as situated i. e. affected by environments). As Anderson (1988, cited in Tennant 1996) highlights, there is a need to take account of differences in cognitive and communication styles that are culturally-based. Here we need to attend to different models of selfhood - and the extent to which these may differ from the 'western' assumptions that underpin the Kolb and Fry model. The idea of stages or steps does not sit well with the reality of thinking.

There is a problem here - that of sequence. As Dewey (1933) has said in relation to reflection a number of processes can occur at once, stages can be jumped. This way of presenting things is rather too neat and is simplistic - see reflection. Empirical support for the model is weak (Jarvis 1987; Tennant 1997). The initial research base was small, and there have only been a limited number of studies that have sought to test or explore the model (such as Jarvis 1987). Furthermore, the learning style inventory 'has no capacity to measure the degree of integration of learning styles' (Tennant 1997: 92).

The relationship of learning processes to knowledge is problematic. As Jarvis (1987) again points out, David Kolb is able to show that learning and knowledge are intimately related. However, two problems arise here. David Kolb doesn't really explore the nature of knowledge in any depth. In chapter five of *Experiential Learning* he discusses the structure of knowledge from what is basically a socialpsychologyperspective. He doesn't really connect

<https://assignbuster.com/experiential-learning-of-famous-persons/>



with the rich and varied debates about the nature of knowledge that raged over the centuries within philosophy and social theory.

This means that I do not think he really grasps different ways of knowing. For example, Kolb focuses on processes in the individual mind, rather than seeing learning as situated. Second, for David Kolb, learning is concerned with the production of knowledge. 'Knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it' (Kolb 1984: 41). Here we might contrast this position with Paulo Freire. His focus is upon informed, committed action (praxis). Given these problems we have to take some care approaching David Kolb's vision of experiential learning.

However, as Tennant (1997: 92) points out, 'the model provides an excellent framework for planning teaching and learning activities and it can be usefully employed as a guide for understanding learning difficulties, vocational counselling, academic advising and so on'. Developments - Peter Jarvis on (experiential) learning Jarvis (1987, 1995) set out to show that there are a number of responses to the potential learning situation. He used Kolb's model with a number of different adult groups and asked them to explore it based on their own experience of learning.

He was then able to develop a model of which allowed different routes. Some of these are non-learning, some non-reflective learning, and some reflective learning. To see these we need to trace out the trajectories on the diagram he produces. reproduced from Jarvis 1994 Non-learning: Presumption (boxes 1-4). This is where people interact through patterned behaviour. Saying hello etc. Non-consideration (1-4). Here the person does not respond to a potential

learning situation. Rejection (boxes 1-3 to 7 to 9). Non-reflective: Pre-conscious (boxes 1-3 to 6 to either 4 or 9).

This form occurs to every person as a result of having experiences in daily living that are not really thought about. Skimming across the surface. Practice (boxes 1-3 to 5 to 8 to 6 to either 4 or 9). Traditionally this has been restricted to things like training for a manual occupation or acquiring particular physical skills. It may also refer to the acquisition of language itself. Memorization (boxes 1-3 to 6 and possibly 8 to 6 and then either to 4 or 9) Reflective learning: Contemplation (boxes 1-3 to 7 to 8 to 6 to 9). Here the person considers it and makes an intellectual decision about it.

Reflective practice (boxes 1-3 (to 5) to 7 to 5 to 6 to 9). This is close to what Schon describes as reflection on and in action. Experiential learning (boxes 1-3 to 7 to 5 to 7 to 8 to 6 to 9). The way in which pragmatic knowledge may be learned. While this represents a useful addition to our thinking about learning, a number of problems remain. There is still an issue around sequence - many things may be happening at once, but Jarvis' model falls into trap of stage thinking. As with Kolb's work there is a limited experimental base to support it.

We can also ask questions as to whether these are different forms or routes - or can they grouped together in a different and more compact way. Further reading and references The literature around this area can be pretty dire. We have picked one or two of the better collections/explorations plus a couple 'standards'. Boud, D. et al (eds. ) (1985) Reflection. Turning experience into learning, London: Kogan Page. 170 pages. Good collection of readings which examine the nature of reflection. The early chapters make particular use of <https://assignbuster.com/experiential-learning-of-famous-persons/>

Dewey and Kolb. Boud. D. and Miller, N. eds. ) (1997) Working with Experience: animating learning, London: Routledge. Useful collection of pieces exploring experiential learning. The editors focus on animation (not so much in the French and Italian senses as 'breathing life into' - to activate, enliven, vivify. Includes introductory and closing pieces by the editors: Brookfield on breaking dependence on experts; Smyth on socially critical educators; Heron on helping whole people learn; Tisdell on life experience and feminist theory; Harris on animating learning in teams; and Mace on writing and power.

Fraser, W. (1995) Learning From Experience. Empowerment or incorporation, Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education. Examines APL / APEL and asks what is lost and gained in the translation of private experience into the public sphere. Based on the experience of various courses. Jarvis, P. (1987) Adult Learning in the Social Context, London: Croom Helm. 220 pages. Peter Jarvis uses Kolb's model to explore the process of learning in context. The result is a better appreciation of context and the ability to approach memorization, contemplation, practice etc.

However, he also inherits a number of problems e. g. around stages. The model is revisited and summarized in P. Jarvis (1995) Adult and Continuing Education. Theory and practice 2e, London: Routledge. Johnson, D. W. and Johnson, F. P. (1996) Joining Together: Group theory and group skills, 6e. , Boston, Mass. : Allyn and Bacon. 612 pages. Rightly popular practical groupwork guide with plenty of examples and exercises, plus some good foundational chapters. It was one of the first texts to pick up on Kolb and to link experiential learning with the work around groups by Lewin and others.

Chapters on group dynamics; experiential learning; group goals and social independence; communications within groups; leadership; decision making; controversy and creativity; conflicts of interest, the uses of power; dealing with diversity; leading learning and discussion groups; leading growth and counselling groups; and team development, team training. Keeton, M. T. (ed. ) (1976) *Experiential Learning*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Ageing but still useful collection. See, in particular, Coleman's contrasting of information assimilation with experiential learning. Kolb, D.

A. (1984) *Experiential Learning*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ. : Prentice Hall. 256 pages. Full statement and discussion of Kolb's ideas concerning experiential learning. Chapters deal with the foundation of contemporary approaches to experiential learning; the process of experiential learning; structural foundations of the learning process; individuality in learning and the concept of learning styles; the structure of knowledge; the experiential learning theory of development; learning and development in higher education; lifelong learning and integrative development. Mezirow, J. 1991) *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. 247 + xix pages. Develops a comprehensive theory of how adults learn by making meanings of their experiences. Particular focus on perspective transformation. Weil, S. Warner & McGill, I. (eds. ) (1989) *Making Sense of Experiential Learning. Diversity in theory and practice*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press. The texts on experiential learning tend to be rather atheoretical (and often precious). This text doesn't totally escape this - but has a number of useful contributions. References

Anderson, J. A. (1988) 'Cognitive styles and multicultural populations', *Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(1): 2-9. Brookfield, S. D. (1983) *Adult Learning, Adult Education and the Community* Milton Keynes Open University Press. Borzak, L. (ed. ) (1981) *Field Study. A source book for experiential learning*, Beverley Hills: Sage Publications. Dewey, J. (1933) *How We Think*, New York: Heath. Houle, C. (1980) *Continuing Learning in the Professions*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Jarvis, P. (1994) 'Learning', ICE301 Lifelong Learning, Unit 1(1), London: YMCA George Williams College.

Jarvis, P. (1995) *Adult and Continuing Education. Theory and practice 2e*, London: Routledge. Kolb, A. and Kolb D. A. (2001) *Experiential Learning Theory Bibliography 1971-2001*, Boston, Ma. : McBer and Co, <http://trgmcberrygroup.com/Products/learning/bibliography.htm> Kolb, D. A. (1976) *The Learning Style Inventory: Technical Manual*, Boston, Ma. : McBer. Kolb, D. A. (1981) 'Learning styles and disciplinary differences'. in A. W. Chickering (ed. ) *The Modern American College*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Kolb, D. A. (with J. Osland and I.

Rubin) (1995a) *Organizational Behavior: An Experiential Approach to Human Behavior in Organizations 6e*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall. Kolb, D. A. (with J. Osland and I. Rubin) (1995b) *The Organizational Behavior Reader 6e*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall. Kolb, D. A. and Fry, R. (1975) 'Toward an applied theory of experiential learning;', in C. Cooper (ed. ) *Theories of Group Process*, London: John Wiley. Schon, D. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner*, New York: Basic Books Tennant, M. (1997) *Psychology and Adult Learning 2e*, London: Routledge. Witkin, H. and Goodenough, D. 1981) *Cognitive Styles, Essences and Origins: Field dependence and field independence*, New York:

Links Experiential learning: helpful review of sites by Tim Pickles.  
Experiential Learning Theory Bibliography: Prepared by Alice Kolb and David Kolb, this is an extensive bibliography of on experiential learning theory from 1971-2001. Acknowledgement: The workshop picture representing experiential learning is from the EFEO Action Workshops in 2008. It was taken by devilarts and is copyrighted. It is reproduced here under a Creative Commons licence (Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share Alike 2. Generic) flickr: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/devilarts/2458317215/>. How to cite this article: Smith, M. K. (2001). 'David A. Kolb on experiential learning', the encyclopedia of informal education. Retrieved [enter date] from <http://www.infed.org/b-explrn.htm>. © Mark K. Smith 1996, 2001. infed is a not-for-profit site [about us] [disclaimer] provided by the YMCA George Williams College. Give us feedback; write for us. Check our privacy policy and, when copying, our copyright notice. Join us on Facebook and Twitter. Hosting by Memset Dedicated Servers [CarbonNeutral®].