8 Things to Know About the Experiential Learning Cycle

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EXPERIENCE BASED LEARNING SYSTEMS

EBLS Press publishes an e-book series on applications of ELT in education and personal development and a scholarly monograph series on the theory of experiential learning. The first of the monograph series: DKTE: William James' Dual Knowing Theory of Experience – The first Principle of Experiential Learning Theory is currently in preparation.

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INTRODUCTION

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) was created to provide an intellectual foundation for the practice of experiential learning responding to John Dewey's call for a theory of experience to guide educational innovation. ELT is a synthesis of the works of those great 20th century scholars who gave experience a central role in their theories of human learning and development. We have come to call them the "foundational scholars of experiential learning" – William James, John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Carl Jung, Mary Parker Follett, Carl Rogers and Paulo Freire.

The experiential learning cycle is the most widely recognized and used concept in ELT (ELT-Kolb 2015, Kolb & Kolb 2017). The simplicity and usefulness of the four-stage cycle of *Experiencing*, *Reflecting*, *Thinking* and *Acting* are the main reason for its popularity. It is an adaptable template for the creation of educational programs that actively engage learners in the learning process, providing an alternative to the overused and ineffective traditional information transmission model.

In a typical application of experiential learning the educator provides a direct concrete experiencing event, such as a field trip, a lab experiment, or a role play, and then organizes personal or group reflection on the experience. The conceptualization phase focuses on understanding the meaning of the experience often with the addition of related subject matter lectures or reading. Learners are then asked to apply what they have learned in their own life and work context.

There have been countless applications of the learning cycle concept in educational programs ranging from individual class sessions, to courses and training programs, to degree programs, to the total school and university curriculum, and even to national curricular policies and standards in places like New Zealand (NZ Ministry of Education 2004) Singapore (Singapore Ministry of Education 2015) and Vietnam (Uyen et. al. 2022).

Some, however, have criticized the learning cycle for this simplicity and usefulness; calling it "laughable" that a process as complex as learning could be described in four stages. The learning process is indeed complex, described by Duch (2021) as multiple layers of factors that influence learning from genes and proteins to neurotransmitters to neurons, to neural networks to sensory-motor activity to cognition and finally to learning styles which he considers as a useful high-level organizing typology of the learning process.

In our own work we have met a number of colleagues who have used the learning cycle in their teaching for many years based on a cursory understanding and what they have learned about it from popular reports. When we explained the deeper foundations of the learning cycle in ELT to them, they saw new perspectives on their practice and discovered new ways to improve their teaching with experiential learning.

https://youtu.be/46UkXjbAqG8

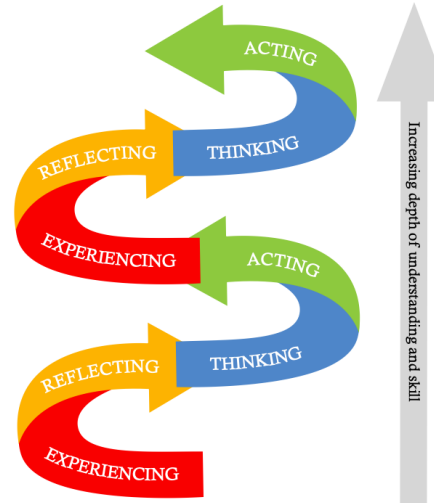
In this book, and accompanying video, we have identified eight things to know about this simple, practical learning cycle to enhance your understanding and appreciation of the holistic nature and rich concepts included in ELT.

LEARNING IS AN ENDLESSLY RECURRING CYCLE NOT A LINEAR PROCESS

1

The first thing to know is that the learning cycle is an endlessly recurring process of exchange between the learner's internal world and the external environment. Learning is like breathing; a lifelong process of taking in and putting out. For educators it about impression and expression–impressing learners with the knowledge necessary to live and work in today's world and coaching them to express what they have learned in highly skilled ways.

The learning cycle describes the learning process as a recursive circle or spiral as opposed to the linear, traditional information transmission model of learning used in most education where information is transferred from the teacher to the learner to be is stored in declarative memory for later recall. Paulo Freire called this the "banking concept of education" where ideas are deposited in the minds of passive learners.



In the linear model the learner is a passive recipient of information whereas in the cycle of learning learners receive information through concrete experiences and transform it through reflection and conceptualization and then transform it again through their actions to change the world, including what information they choose to attend to in the new experience. They are both receivers of information and creators of information.

A Google image search of "learning cycle" or "experiential learning cycle" produces a seemingly endless array of reproductions and variations of the cycle from around the world adapted to different contexts and educational situations. Many are modifications of the ELT learning cycle while others vary in their number of stages in the process and their labels for them. There are two stage cycles – e.g. experience and reflect; three stage cycles – e.g.do, review and plan other four stage models – e.g.do it, what, so what, and now what.

And there are five stage cycles – engage, explore, explain, elaborate and evaluate; six stage cycles – e.g. establish desired outcomes, define the questions, collect and organize data, make meaning of the data, take action, assess and evaluate options; and an eight-stage cycle – connect, attend, imagine, inform, practice, extend, refine and perform; and one with more stages than we can count.

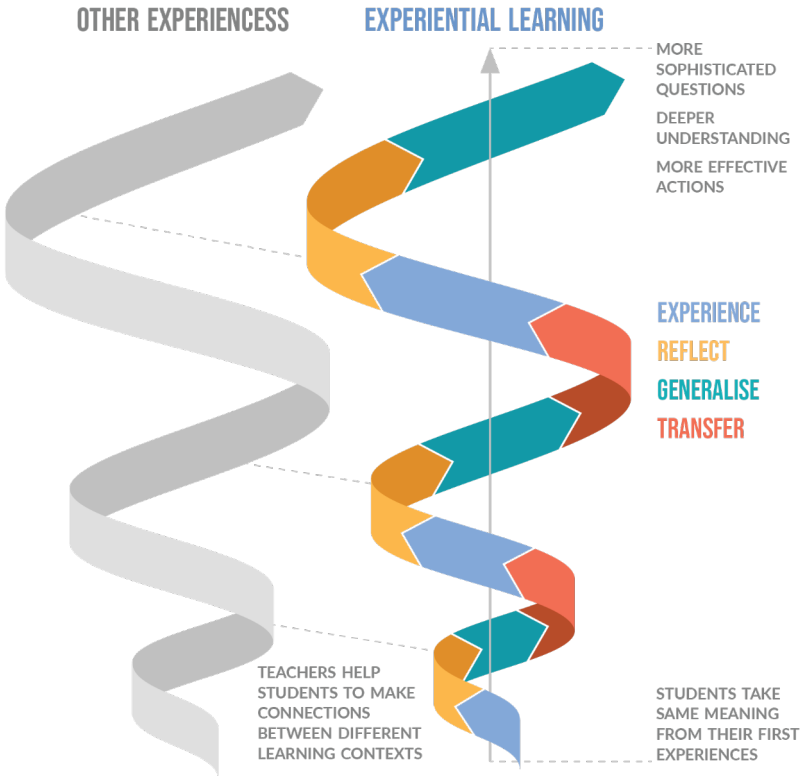
Viewed holistically, all of these cycles emphasize an important point – that learning is not a linear stimulus-response process but the cybernetic feedback loop process that in different ways they describe. Yet, nearly all do not include experiencing in their cycle or see the relevance of experience for learning.

A number of the cycles seem to equate experiencing with doing while others have no place for experiencing at all. The experiencing mode of the ELT learning cycle is widely misunderstood; however, as you will discover next, it is a central component in this theory and has particular significance for learning.

Organize your course or curriculum as a series of learning cycles to form a deepening spiral of learning that expands in complexity and application. The learning modes are revisited, and students' understanding is developed further each time. They discover more about the practical limits and the wider applications of their new knowledge by taking what they have learned in one situation and using it in another.

Educator TIPS

The New Zealand Ministry of Education organized its middle school around this learning cycle spiral.



EXPERIENCING IS NECESSARY FOR LEARNING

2

William James and John Dewey highlight key differences between two kinds of experience: James' concept of pure experience—in the moment perceptual experiencing of the world "just as it is" without conceptual interpretation (1912), and Dewey's concept of empirical experience—the on-going, often unexamined, daily flow of experience that is laden with cultural interpretation and is conservative, tradition bound and prone to conformity and dogmatism (1933).

The culture laden flow of empirical experience produces rote or surface learning, a preoccupation with unreflective strategies, such as memorizing without understanding and uncritically following teachers' instructions or an intention to learn facts in order to pass a course with a lack of interest and engagement.

Experiencing, on the other hand, stimulates a deep learning approach as obstacles and surprises promote intrinsic interest in understanding by gathering information, relating ideas to each other and drawing conclusions (Marton & Saljo, 1976; Ramsden, 1992; Biggs, 1987; Entwistle, 1981)

Everyday experience and behavior are notoriously conservative and automatic, being habitual and culturally mediated by many previous trips around the learning cycle. Experience can appear fresh and new but it is saturated with the interpretations of past generations.

"The people who 'learn by experience' often make great messes of their lives, that is, if they apply what they have learned from a past incident to the present, deciding from certain appearances that the circumstances are the same, forgetting that no two situations can ever be the same. We must put everything we can into the fresh experience...We integrate our experience, then the richer human being that we are goes into the experience--again we give ourselves and always by giving rise above the old self."
– Mary Parker Follett, Creative Experience (1924)

John Dewey emphasized that to initiate reflection and learning this normal flow of experience must be interrupted by deep experiencing, such as when we are "stuck" with a problem or difficulty or "struck" by the strangeness of something outside of our usual experience. William James called this "pure experience".

The great Japanese Zen philosopher Kitaro Nishada defined pure experience this way

"What we usually refer to as experience is adulterated with some sort of thought, so by pure I am referring to the state of experience just as it is, without the least addition of deliberative discrimination. The moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound, for example, is prior not only to the thought that the color or sound is the activity of an external object or that one is sensing it, but also to the judgment of what the color or sound might be. In this regard, pure experience is identical with direct experience. When one directly experiences one's own state of consciousness, there is not yet a subject or an object, and knowing and its object are completely united. This is the most refined type of experience." (1990:3)

While many have stressed that critical reflection is of primary importance for learning from experience; we see here that a concrete "pure" experience that violates the expectations of previous convictions and habits of thought is necessary to activate such reflection in the first place; suggesting that experience short of habit and cultural interpretation is necessary for learning anything new.

While some learning probably occurs from everyday experience, it is probably the kind that reinforces previous conclusions or refines thought or behavior in small ways. For bigger changes in beliefs and behavior a "shock" that disrupts life may be required.

As educators it is important to create learning experiences such as field projects, role plays and other experiential exercises where learners are experiencing and not just going through the motions of a class exercise.

The experiential approach places the subject to be learned in the center to be experienced by both the educator and learner.

Parker Palmer put it this way, "The subject-centered classroom is characterized by the fact that the third thing (the subject) has a presence so real, so vivid, so vocal, that it can hold teacher and students alike accountable for what they say and do."

"In such a classroom there are no inert facts. The great thing is so alive that teacher can turn to student or student to teacher, and either can make a claim on the other in the name of that great thing."

"Here teacher and students have a power beyond themselves to contend with– the power of a subject that transcends our self-absorption and refuses to be reduced to our claims about it." (Palmer 1998: 117)

The "vivid presence" of Parker Palmer's subject-centered classroom is a powerful solution to what has become a crisis of student engagement in schools all around the world. Teachers are teaching, but students are disengaged.

A recent Grattan Institute report suggested that as many as 40% of Australian students are consistently disengaged in class, and that these students are one to two years behind their peers in academic performance. The report also identified that the majority of disengaged students do not actively disrupt the class, but rather tend to be unmotivated and off-task without attracting the teacher's attention (Mann, 2018, p. 169). Gross measures of student disengagement such as non-attendance, disruptive behavior and poor performance can be traced in part to a failure to productively engage in the learning process itself.

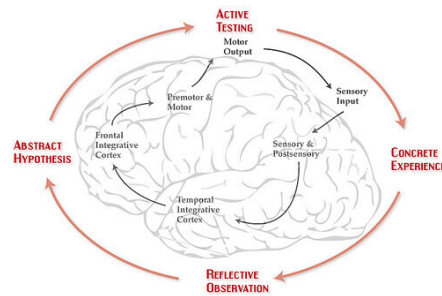
Engaging students in learning is proving even more difficult in online learning. Yet, a number of recent studies are showing that social, cognitive and teacher presence, experiential learning and active participation can increase online engagement in learning (Martin et al., 2018; Dunlap et al., 2016; Krassmann et al., 2019). The 4-item short Experiencing Scale can be a useful guide and monitoring device to gauge the ongoing level of experiencing in an online session reminding learners to be fully present with focused attention in the here-and now and to participate in the class.

With Karen Stock we have developed *The Experiencing Scale: An Experiential Learning Gauge of Engagement in Learning*. In an earlier study (Stock, 2014) first examined the role of experiencing in a study of participants in an equine-assisted management development program.

The findings indicated that experiencing significantly mediated the relationships between program characteristics--learner centered facilitation, psychological safety and the natural setting–and post-program outcomes of increased critical reflection and creativity. Encouraged by these findings, we set out to build a more rigorous Experiencing Scale derived from the broader literature on experiencing. We identified four distinct traditions of experiencing research–Focusing, Flow, Mindfulness and Absorption. Each of these traditions has generated a large body of scholarly research and Focusing, Flow and Mindfulness, in particular, have seen many programs of practical application aimed at developing a state of experiencing.

THE BRAIN IS BUILT FOR LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

3



A number of studies have examined the relationship between the learning cycle and brain functioning (Eagleton 2011, Duch 2021, McCarthy1987), but the most systematic examination of the neurological basis of the learning cycle is James Zull's research reported in his two great books *The Art of Changing the Brain* (2002) and *From Brain to Mind* (2011).

Zull's aim was to understand how Piaget's concept of constructivism in learning could be understood in neurological terms. His basic idea was that knowledge resides in networks of neurons in the neo-cortex constructed through learning from experience. Learning from experience results in modification, growth, and pruning of neurons, synapses and neuronal networks; thus learning physically changes the brain and educating is the art of changing the brain.

Zull saw a parallel between the learning cycle and the structure of the nervous system that creates the neuronal networks. "...concrete experiences come through the sensory cortex, reflective observation involves the integrative cortex at the back, creating new abstract concepts occurs in the frontal integrative cortex, and active testing involves the motor brain."

"In other words, the learning cycle arises from the structure of the brain." (Zull 2002: 18-19; 2011).

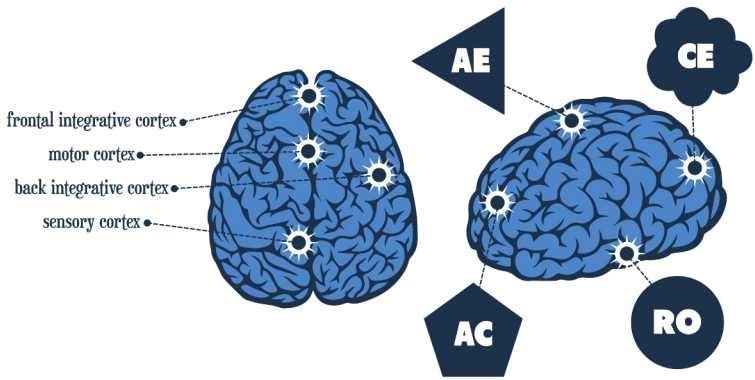
Concrete experience (CE) and sensing in the sensory cortex. The sensory cortex receives information from the outside world through the senses.

Reflective observation (RO) and remembering in the back integrative cortex. The back integrative cortex integrates sensory information to create images and meaning.

Abstract conceptualization (AC) and theorizing in the front integrative cortex. The frontal integrative cortex uses short term memory to choose, plan, problem solve and make decisions to accomplish a goal.

Active experimentation (AE) and acting in the motor cortex. Action closes the learning cycle and reconnects the processing inside the brain with the world. It generates consequences that create new experiences that begin the cycle anew.

While acknowledging the greater complexity of brain functioning, Zull proposed that these regions of the brain were heavily, but not exclusively involved in the modes of the learning cycle. Their respective functions, sensing, remembering, theorizing, and acting he called the four pillars of learning.



Building curricula with the 4 pillars.

There have been many educational applications of the 4 pillars model including a team at the University of Strathclyde's Center for Lifelong Learning who built their curriculum with the pillars naming them Gathering, Reflecting, Creating & Testing.

Tips on the art of changing the brain.

Zull's books are filled with implications and recommendations for educators and learners. Here are a few related to experiential learning.

- Learning how to learn should be a focus of education.
- The opportunities for deep learning are enhanced with a balanced use of all four learning modes and their corresponding parts of the brain.
- The learning cycle's four modes give four times the chance to remember since it is a metacognitive process and produces episodic memories that aid transfer of learning.
- "Sense-luscious" real experiences that flood all the senses are the best for learning. Rich experiences, such as those which change and surprise are more memorable.
- Physical changes occur in the brain when we learn. Begin with existing neuronal networks which are the physical form of prior knowledge and build on it.
- Emotion influences thinking more than thinking influences emotion. Positive emotions (joy) enhance learning.
- Be careful to not overload the limited capacity of working memory. Shoving information in at one end only pushes out information at the other.
- Always provoke an active reaction from learners. A safe environment for failure can support this norm.

THE DIALECTIC POLES OF THE LEARNING CYCLE ARE WHAT MOTIVATE LEARNING

4

What makes the learning cycle go? What motivates us to learn? The answers to these questions lie in the dialectic poles of opposing modes of the learning cycle: Experiencing – Thinking and Reflecting – Acting

Concrete sensory experience and abstract thinking are two fundamentally different ways of understanding experience. William James (1977) called these percepts and concepts.

Perception exists in here and now; conceptions point to the past or future. James uses the analogy of a pair of scissors–in the same way we need both blades to cut, we need both concrete experience and abstract thinking to make sense of the world.

Because of the dialectic competition between experiencing and thinking, how deeply one is engaged in experiencing depends on both the thinking and experiencing modes.

In the experiencing mode of grasping or understanding the world, we understand the world immediately and directly through an exquisite system of perceptual senses that include the big five senses of vision, hearing, touch, taste and smell, plus a host of lesser-known senses of direction and balance, kinesthetic proprioception, pain, and internal body functions including feelings and emotions.

"In this regard, pure experience is identical with direct experience." (Nishida, 1990, p.3)

This is in contrast to the thinking mode where understanding of the world is grasped through remembered ideas and concepts.

The idea that experiencing and thinking are dual modes of understanding the world is consistent with a number of contemporary dual processing theories in cognitive psychology (Evans, 2008); most notably Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011).

Kahneman says we have two selves, an experiencing self that lives briefly in each moment of perception and a remembering/thinking self that is constructed through remembered memories of concrete experiences that have been given meaning through cognitive interpretation. Unlike the experiencing self, the remembering/thinking self is relatively stable and permanent.

"It is a basic fact of the human condition that memories are what we get to keep from our experience, and the only perspective we can adopt as we think about our lives is that of the remembering/thinking self." (Kahneman & Riis, 2005, p. 286).

The learning cycle integrates the experiencing self and thinking self through the transformation dimension of reflection and action.

Reflecting and acting are similarly opposing ways of transforming this understanding. The great educator Paulo Freire, by stressing the importance of naming one's own experience in dialogue with others, gives emphasis to praxis, the transformative dialectic between reflection and action–reflection informed by action and action informed by reflection,

"As we attempt to analyze dialogue as a human phenomenon.Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed, even in part, the other immediately suffers. When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter, into verbalism, into an alienated and alienating 'blah'. When action is emphasized exclusively, to the detriment of reflection, the word is converted into activism. The latter action for action's sake negates the true praxis and makes dialogue impossible." (1992:75-78)

Just as the classic dialectic process of thesis-antithesis-synthesis results in new integrative insights, so the meeting of direct experience and abstract thought motivates a search for integration of the two perspectives on one's experience.As Dewey said, the "shock and awe" of an intense experience can cause reconsideration of an entrenched belief, while a new idea can reshape the way we experience things.

These opposing dialectic poles give us a "stereo" perspective that motivates learning. When one pole dominates the other, learning ceases. Hyper-activity or withdrawal into reflection both inhibit learning. Reflection on the consequences of action can serve to correct errors and refine future actions while acting on reflections can inform incessant rumination. Dogmatic beliefs that are closed to new experience or total immersion in experience clouds clear thought.

This can be thought of as an internal conversation between the perspectives of the experiencing and thinking selves.

Use the dialectics to motivate learning.

- Design educational programs to engage the dialectic polarities of the cycle. For example, to a concrete and active internship program add systematic reflection and conceptual analysis.
- Activities that stimulate curiosity and active problem solving are great motivators for learning.
- Avoid designs that only emphasize one learning mode such as lecture or field trips with no de-briefing.

5

LEARNING STYLES ARE DIFFERENT WAYS OF GOING AROUND THE LEARNING CYCLE

Learning style is another popular concept in Experiential Learning Theory (ELT). It is important because it emphasizes that individuals learn in different ways and that educators can better facilitate their students' learning if they understand these unique differences. The idea is much discussed in education today and there is considerable confusion about its usefulness, in part because there has been a proliferation of over 100 learning style instruments that vary widely in their conceptual basis and psychometric soundness. Criticism of the concept has tended to lump all these approaches together (Scott 2010), resulting in some misunderstanding of the unique nature of the ELT learning style concept.Perception exists in here and now; conceptions point to the past or future. James uses the analogy of a pair of scissors–in the same way we need both blades to cut, we need both concrete experience and abstract thinking to make sense of the world.

Learning styles describe a way of using the learning cycle as a familiar, steady state, emphasizing strengths in some learning modes and underutilization of opposite modes. The recognition that a style preference is a habitual way of using the process of learning opens development potentialities and the challenge of full cycle learning–to develop the ability to engage all modes of the learning cycle in a holistic and fluid manner.

As a result, Experiential Learning style has been mischaracterized as a static trait and not a dynamic state in the learning cycle process. Styles in ELT are habitual preferences for the interdependent poles of action and reflection and experiencing and thinking. Learning style is a habit of learning that is formed when one or more of the learning modes are preferred over others to shape experience. Seen this way learning style loses its static stereotype prone character. (Kolb & Kolb 2021, Peterson & Kolb 2017)

The Kolb Experiential Learning Profile (KELP) describes the unique ways individuals spiral through the learning cycle based on their preference for the four different learning modes–Experiencing, Reflecting, Thinking & Acting). In the KELP a person's learning style is defined by their unique combination of preferences for the four learning modes defining a "kite" shape profile of their relative preference for the four phases of the learning cycle. Because each person's learning style is unique, everyone's kite shape is a little different.

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 and reflecting on experiences.

The Reflecting style - Connecting experience and ideas through sustained reflection.

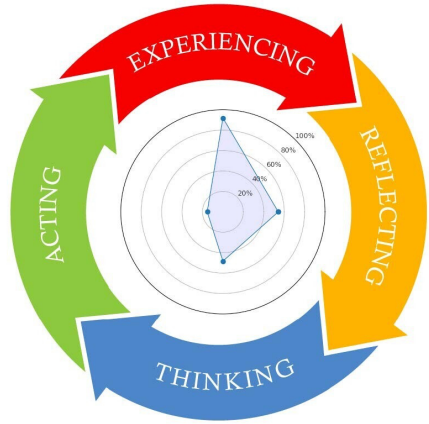
The Analyzing style - Integrating ideas into concise models and scenarios.

The Thinking style - Disciplined abstract and logical reasoning.

The Deciding style - Using theories and models to decide on problem solutions and courses of action.

The Acting style - Goal-directed action that integrates people and tasks.

The Balancing style - Adapting by weighing the pros and cons of acting versus reflecting and experiencing versus thinking.



We have identified 9 typical kite shapes that define 9 learning styles emphasizing different phases of the learning cycle.

Because of the dialectic dynamics of opposing learning modes and learning style differences in the way individuals apply the learning modes, the learning cycle should be considered an idealized depiction of the learning process that can vary widely in application. Learners with different styles may begin with their preferred style and engage the learning modes in their own way regardless of the educator's plan.

Although the idea that learning must always begin with concrete experience and proceed through the other stages around the cycle is not an iron law; a number of our experiential educator friends are strong advocates of beginning learning experiences with a direct concrete experience, and they have strong arguments for the practice.

They argue that beginning with a shared direct experience "brings the subject into the room" democratizing the learning process between educator and learners. In addition, the puzzles or problems presented by direct experience involve learners and motivate inquiry and reflection, initiating the learning cycle.

FULL CYCLE LEARNING INCREASES LEARNING FLEXIBILITY AND DEVELOPMENT

6

When one can engage all learning styles in their learning process they are using the most powerful form of learning that we call full cycle learning. Full cycle learning is the ability to engage all the learning style types in a holistic and fluid manner, allowing learners to engage all modes of the learning cycle as the situation dictates.

This requires learning flexibility. Many individuals feel that their learning style accurately describes how they learn most of the time. They are consistent in their approach to learning. Others, however, report that they tend to change their learning approach depending on what they are learning or the situation they are in. They may say, for example, that they use one style in the classroom and another at home with their friends and family. These are flexible learners.

Learning flexibility is supportive of learning in different contexts and personal and professional development over time. By building strengths in non-preferred styles and parts of the cycle, learners develop a more holistic approach to life.

Learners with high learning flexibility show greater overall flexibility in life. They see more possibilities in any given moment, they experience less conflict and stress, and they can handle more complexity. Flexible people are more self-directed, so they are more likely to make changes that help them adapt to unexpected situations.

Studies show that some learners can flex their learning styles according to the demand of different learning tasks and to match the demands of a discipline. Several studies suggest that in fact students can shift their learning style to match the learning demands of a particular discipline.

Since a specialized learning style represents an individual preference for only one or two of the four modes of the learning cycle, its effectiveness is limited to those learning situations that require these strengths. Learning flexibility indicates the development of a more holistic and sophisticated learning process.

Following Jung's theory that adult development moves from a specialized way of adapting toward a holistic integrated way, development in learning flexibility is seen as a move from specialization to integration.

When planning educational activities, it is useful to consider the specific learning style skills that you want to develop in students for each activity to increase their learning flexibility and full cycle learning capacity. The KELP includes a measure of learning flexibility and identifies the "back-up" learning styles that individuals use to learn different things. This can be useful information for learners to know in order to set meaningful learning flexibility developmental goals.

The Institute for Experiential Learning has developed a guide of suggested strategies educators can use to help learners adopt all learning styles and their associated capabilities: https://experientiallearninginstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Educator-Learning-Style-Fleibility-Strategies.pdf

Invite and allow space and time for question-asking by learners, not just question-answering. Pedrosa de Jesus et al (2007) found that when "stuck or struck" by different learning environments, learners who are confident and comfortable in the learning space will initiate questions. By forming and asking questions, learners are cycling around the learning cycle and engaged in learning. The content of these questions reveals the learner's stage of development: acquisition (to secure knowledge, using 2 modes of learning), specialization (to generalize into a meaningful pattern, using 3 modes of learning), or integration (to reorganize concepts into novel patterns and applications, using 4 modes of learning).

TEACHING AROUND THE LEARNING CYCLE WITH DYNAMIC MATCHING OF TEACHING ROLE

7

The confusion in the learning style literature has resulted in an over-simplified prescription for educators to match their teaching style and methods to the learning styles of the learner. The dynamic matching model of ELT is a more complex but more realistic model for guiding educational practice. In addition to considering the relationship between educator and learner one must also consider the match of learning approach with the subject matter. Matching teaching style with learning style has been shown to be important initially to connect with and engage learners, 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.

We have created an educator role framework to assist educators in the application of the ELT concepts of the learning cycle and learning style in the dynamic matching model of teaching around the learning cycle.

It describes four common educator roles– *Facilitator*, *Subject Expert*, *Standard-Setter/ Evaluator* and *Coach*. Most of us adopt each of these roles to some extent in our educational and teaching activities. While the role profile model depicts an idealized sequential progression through the educator roles and the learning cycle, in most cases a curriculum design will be based on a dynamic or unique sequence of activities and instructional techniques that fits the subject matter and learning objectives that may or may not occur in such an orderly progression.

The Coaching Role

In the coaching role, educators help learners apply knowledge to achieve their goals. They adopt a collaborative, encouraging style, often working one-on-one with individuals to help them learn from experiences in their life context. They assist in the creation of personal development plans and provide ways of getting feedback on performance.

The Facilitator Role

When facilitating, educators help learners get in touch with their personal experience and reflect on it. They adopt a warm affirming style to draw out learners' interests, intrinsic motivation, and self-knowledge. They often do this by facilitating conversation in small groups. They create personal and trusting relationships with learners.

The Subject Expert Role

In their role as subject expert, educators help learners organize and connect their reflections to the knowledge base of the subject matter. They adopt an authoritative, reflective style. They often teach by example, modeling and encouraging critical thinking as they systematically organize and analyze the subject matter knowledge. This knowledge is often communicated through lectures and texts.

The Standard-Setter/Evaluator Role

As a standard-setter and evaluator, educators help learners master the application of knowledge and skill in order to meet performance requirements. They adopt an objective results-oriented style as they set the knowledge requirements needed for quality performance. They create performance activities for learners to evaluate their learning.

Using the Educator Role framework to guide learners around the learning cycle is a high art; and you the educator are its prime instrument. How can we best promote learning for our students?

Should we be learner-centered and love our students into learning by creating hospitable learning spaces to draw out their budding interests?

Should be we subject-centered and fully deliver the richness and depth of our special knowledge, developing learners' capacity for reflective thinking about our field?

Should we focus on the pragmatic applications and implications of the ideas we present for the learner and the world; or

Should the emphasis be on the deep meaning of these ideas and concepts, their origins and connections to other ideas and fields of study?

In the abstract we would probably answer all four questions affirmatively, and in a practical context there are very real constraints that require trade-offs between the learner and subject focus and the action and meaning focus–time limitations, learner needs, the amount of subject matter to be "covered", its complexity and required evaluation standards to name a few and your own teaching role preferences and skills.

Our Turkish colleagues Ilke Gencel and Mustafa Erdogan. (Gencel, Erdogan, et. al. 2021 have developed the first comprehensive rubric for assessing the quality of an educational experience in two dimensions. One of these components is the concept of Learning Spaces, and the other is the concept of Educator Roles.

Learning spaces refer to the learning habitat that is necessary for an experiential learning-based curriculum. Unless this habitat is built holistically, the learning process in it will not be entirely experiential.

The Kolb Educator Role Profile (KERP-2011) roles suggest a framework for teaching around the learning cycle with dynamic matching, shifting roles to help learners complete the learning cycle.

For this reason, while learning spaces define the ecosystem of the curriculum, educator role profiles emphasize the roles that the educators play in this ecosystem.

The Gencel-Erogan rubric is below, showing the sub-components of Learning Space and Educator Roles and the quality criteria for assessing them.

LEARNING SPACES	EDUCATOR ROLES
Creating a hospitable learning space	***Facilitator***
Getting to know each other Group dynamic Basic rules	Experience related to the topic Participants' own experiences Reflection
Creating a learner-centered space	***Subject Matter Expert***
Expectations & contributions Methodology Participant assessment	Collecting knowledge and analyzing it Associating knowledge Knowledge sources
Creating a ludic learning space	***Standard Setter & Evaluator***
Energizers Learning games Having fun	Setting the standards Feedback Self-assessment
Creating a conversational learning space	***Coach***
Discussion Analysis Natural development of conversation	Coaching Learning plan Real life application
Creating a space for reflective thinking	
From dualism to multiplicity From multiplicity to relativism From relativism to commitment	
Creating spaces to develop & maintain deep learning	
Learning flexibility Development stages	

THE LEARNING CYCLE CAN BE A RUBRIC FOR HOLISTIC, AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

8

Authentic assessment means learners should demonstrate knowledge and skills in their real-life context. The goal of authentic evaluation is to draw education close to real life. If we want our assessment of students to be authentic, the subject centered question, "what should my students know?" can only be appropriately addressed in conjunction with the learner-centered question "How can I help my students learn skills and knowledge and be able to transfer what they have learned in real life context?"

The multidimensional teaching and learning strategies of experiential learning require equally diverse and complex assessment methods that adequately and fairly evaluate students' integrated functioning in the learning process. Assessment becomes holistic when the focus is on all four of the learning modes. In contrast to lecture-based traditional education which relies primarily on the one-size-fit-all evaluation of the abstract dimension of performance, experiential learning is holistic based upon students' effective integration of the affective, perceptual, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of learning.

A Tip for Educators. Try using the Personal Application Assignment available at: https://learningfromexperience.com/research-library/evaluating-experiential-learning-the-personal-application-assignment/

The Personal Application Assignment (PAA) is an essay/journal based holistic, authentic assessment rubric using the learning cycle framework. In the PAA participants:

- Select an experience, occurring either in or out of the training session, and chronicle the actual events of the experience.
- Review their thoughts and feelings about the experience, making observations about it from a fresh perspective.
- Develop concepts or theories that make sense of the experience.
- Create future action plans based on what they have learned from the experience.

The rubric includes a scoring system for grading the essays.

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EXPERIENCE BASED LEARNING SYSTEMS

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