Kolb’s Model of Experiential Learning: A framework for Collaboration

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Dr. Michael Manning
Pedagogy

- Pedagogy – “the art and science of teaching children” (Knowles, 1980, p. 40).
  - Characterized by the transfer of knowledge – usually by such traditional methods as long lectures, memorization, drills, examinations etc.
  - Experience is largely disregarded as irrelevant to the transfer of knowledge

(Knowles, 1980)
Andragogy

- Andragogy - “the art and science of helping adults learn” (Knowles, 1980, p. 43).

- The Four Basic Assumptions of Andragogy include:
  - Adults are self-directed
  - Adults have significant experience that aids in learning
  - Adults are mature and ready to learn
  - Adults are motivated to learn – for immediate application (Knowles, 1980)
Tacit Knowledge

- Tacit knowledge is usually acquired without direct help from others (Greenberg & Barron, 2003, p. 101).

- Marcia Conner describes knowledge gained this way as "impromptu opportunities" (Goldsmith, et.al., 2004, p. 94).

- Dewey argues not all tacit knowledge gained through experience is valuable “…discriminate between experiences that are worth while educationally and those that are not” (Dewey, 1938, p. 33).
How We Think

- The best opportunity to learn is when students see things in a new light or from a different perspective. Chaharbaghi & Newman call this Transformational Learning: "creative ideas and making models where people see the world differently" (Lim & Chan, 2004, p. 102).

- Argyris (1991) explains that we all have cognitive rules that we process information through – it is our frame of reference. Reflection allows an opportunity to “reprogram” those rules. We move beyond what he calls Single Loop learning into Double Loop.
How We Think

- **Single Loop Learning**
  - Commonly repeated responses to situations based on our programming; i.e.: learning how to keep from suppressing conflict
  - “…we learn to maintain the field of constancy by learning to design actions that satisfy existing governing variables”

- **Double Loop Learning**
  - Learning how to discover why conflict arises
  - “changes the governing variables”

(Argyris & Schön, 1974, p. 19)
How We Think

- Ortenblad (2002) proclaims that an interpretive perspective of organizational learning holds that “Knowledge is context dependent” and that “learning starts in relationships” (p. 90).

- Reed echoes this sentiment as he describes experience impacting learning “As a human being, my own growth cannot be isolated from the activities, experiences, and growth of other people. On the contrary, my growth is intricately and immensely indebted to collective experience, collectively obtained resources, and complex networks of interaction” (1996, p. 43).
David A. Kolb

- Professor of Organizational Behavior
  - Weatherhead School of Management Case Western Reserve University
  - He holds Ph.D. in Social Psychology from Harvard University

- Prolific Author
  - Over a dozen books and monographs
  - Dozens of Journal Articles
  - Contemporary Educational Theorist

- Founder and Chairman of Experience Based Learning Systems, Inc. (EBLS)

- While the model is frequently referred to as “Kolb’s Model of Experiential Learning” David Kolb always credits Kurt Lewin for the development of the model

(Kolb, 1975, 1984, 2006)
Kolb’s Model of Experiential Learning

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  - participation in concrete experiences

(Kolb, 1975)
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The elements of Kolb’s model includes:

- participation in concrete experiences
- observation and reflection about the experiences
- forming abstract concepts
- testing those concepts in new situations

(Kolb, 1975)
Kolb’s Model of Experiential Learning

- Kolb identified four specific types of skills or abilities required for experiential learning:
  - An openness and willingness to involve oneself in new experiences
  - Observational and reflective skills so these new experiences can be viewed from a variety of perspectives
  - Analytical abilities so integrative ideas and concepts can be created from their observations
  - Decision-making and problem-solving skills so these new ideas and concepts can be used in actual practice” (Merriam, & Caffarella, 1999, p. 224).
Kolb’s Model of Experiential Learning

(Kolb, 1975)

1. **Concrete Experience**
2. **Reflective Observation**
3. **Abstract Conceptualization**
4. **Active Experimentation**
Participation in Concrete Experiences

- Not every experience is good
  - “Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience” (Dewey, 1938, p. 25).
  - “Not all experience is good, and some can be downright bad” (Reed, 1996, p. 125).

- Elements Necessary for a good Concrete Experience
  - continuity and interaction:
  - ‘The principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after.’” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p.223).
Reflective Observation

- Looking for a conclusion (Dewey, 1933).
- Turning it over in your mind. “Searching, hunting, inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose the perplexity” (Dewey, 1933, p. 12).
- “I shall argue… that the professional schools must …accommodate the reflective practicum as a key element of professional education” (Schön, 1990, p.18).
- The central function of reflection is finding meaning. (Dewey, 1910).
Forming Abstract Concepts

- Bridging the Gap
- Consecutive Ordering
  - Processing the reflections (Dewey, 1933).
Testing Concepts in New Settings

- On the Spot Experimentation
  “Reflection gives rise to on-the-spot experiment. We think up and try out new actions intended to explore the newly observed phenomena, test our tentative understandings of them, or affirm the moves we have invented to change things for the better” (Schön, 1990, p. 28).

- Transfer of concepts to new situations – it becomes the next concrete experiment
B.G. Barnett, an educational practitioner, adds the “planning for action” phase to the model saying “it moves people in a concrete way toward a commitment to action, and it provides a mechanism for further learning and subsequent action” (Merriam, & Caffarella, 1999, p. 225).
Kolb’s Model of Experiential Learning

- Kolb’s model is cyclical and allows each aspect to build on the other (Merriam, & Caffarella, 1999; Manning, 2006).
- With active experimentation every time a student applies concepts to a new situation, a new concrete experience is formed.
Application of the Model

- Form small groups of two or three as directed
- Fashion Challenge or Alternative Exercise
- Debriefing
  - What did you learn about communicating/teaching a concept?
  - What did you observe?
  - What did you learn about leadership? Listening? Communicating?
Experiential Influencers

- A History of Experience in Education
  - John Dewey
  - Kurt Lewin
  - Jean Piaget

- Kolb’s model of experiential learning was shaped by those that went before him.

(Kolb, 1984)
John Dewey

*Experience and Education* (1938)

- John Dewey (1859-1952) was one of the foremost philosophers, reformers, and theorists and as the author of over 30 books on educational philosophy he shaped American educational history. (Shields, Aaron, & Wall, 2001; Dewey, 1910).

- Kolb proclaims that as a strong advocate of experience, “The legacy of John Dewey” is experiential learning in higher education (1984, p. 4).
Kurt Lewin

- Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) a social psychologist that completed extensive work in group dynamics
- Lewin’s research with experiential learning emphasized the “immediate personal experience as the focal point for learning” (Kolb, 1984, p. 21-22).
Jean Piaget

- Jean Piaget (1896-1980) was a French developmental psychologist and genetic epistemologist (the study of the development of knowledge) (Boeree, 2006; Kolb, 1984).

- “the aim of this work is not to pose experiential learning theory as a third alternative to behavioral and cognitive learning theories, but rather to suggest experiential learning theory a holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behavior” (Kolb, 1984, p. 20).
Edward Reed

“It is on firsthand experience – direct contact with things, places, events and people – that all of our knowledge and feeling ultimately rest” (Reed, 1996, p. 3).

“Yet we have organized our world to undermine primary experience. In those activities in particular to which we devote most of our time – work, school, leisure – we now emphasize learning about things (using secondhand experience), and we limit our opportunities for primary experience” (Reed, 1996, p. 4).
Discussion

- What are some practical experiences you utilize in the classroom?
- With accelerated format terms how can we promote reflection?
- Do you provide opportunities for your students to test concepts in new situations?
References


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References


