CHAPTER – 2

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

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2.11 Summary
2.1 Introduction:

David Kolb's experiential learning theory is one of the best known educational theories in higher education (Kolb and Fry 1975, Kolb 1984) and is frequently cited in the literature on geography in higher education in the UK. However, judging from the published literature and the responses we received to an inquiry we put out on the International Geographical Union Commission on Geographic Education (IGU-CGE) list serve, the theory appears to be less well known among geographers in North America and elsewhere. This is somewhat surprising given that Kolb is an American organizational psychologist, whose work has attracted a lot of attention in North America, particularly in the education, management and psychology literature (Smith and Kolb 1986). Since the publication of his seminal Experiential Learning in 1984, Kolb's ideas have had an increasing impact on the work of teachers and trainers, particularly those involved with students of 16 years and upwards (Fielding 1994; Robotham 1995).

Kolb is one of the most influential researchers in the field because he provides a firm theoretical base, which is lacking in the work of many other writers (Holman et al. 1997). According to Kolb (1984) "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (author's italics). The theory presents a way of structuring and sequencing the curriculum and indicates, in particular how a session, or a whole course, may be taught to improve student learning. It suggests that learning is cyclical, involving four stages, sometimes referred to as sensing/feeling, watching/reflecting, thinking, and doing (Fielding 1994). An important feature of the theory is that the different stages are associated with distinct learning styles. Individuals differ in their preferred learning styles and recognizing this is the first stage in raising students' awareness of the alternative approaches possible and helping them to become more flexible in meeting the varied demands of learning situations (Gibbs 1988). Teachers also need to recognize their own learning styles as a basis for the development of effective teaching and learning strategies. Learning may suffer
where there is marked mismatch between the style of the learner and the approach of the teacher (Fielding 1994).

With the expansion of higher education in many countries and the increasing emphasis on access, diversity, retention rates and life-long learning there is good reason to explore the nature of different learning styles. Indeed given the increased recognition within geography of recognizing and valuing gender and cultural diversity, the theory is particularly relevant as "it is rooted in a theory of learning that affirms all major aspects of active learning, usefully accounting for an array of individual and … culturally derived … differences" (Anderson and Adams 1992).

The theory appears to offer a valid and plausible framework to many people and it is often the main or only theory referred to in many papers and books on experiential learning (Henry 1989) and geography in higher education (at least in the UK). Some of the appeal of the theory is that it provides a rationale for a variety of learning methods, including independent learning, learning by doing, work-based learning and problem-based learning, which have recently received much attention within higher education (Gibbs 1992, Henry 1989) and geography (Gold et al. 1991, Gravestock and Healey 1998). Moreover, the theory has a wide range of applications in geography, including helping students to become self-aware (Bradbeer 1999, Geography for the New Undergraduate, 1999); assisting staff to become reflective teachers (Burkill et al 2000); identifying students' learning styles to select mixed groups (Hertzog and Lieble1996); developing and teaching key skills (Chalkley and Harwood 1998, Haigh and Kilmartin 1999); designing group project work (Brown 1999, Mellor 1991); deciding how resource-based learning and information and communications technology (Healey 1998, Shepherd 1998) can support the learning process in geography; and developing the overall geography curriculum (Jenkins 1998).

In summary we believe that the particular strengths of Kolb's theory are that it:

- provides ready pointers to application;
• directs us to ensure that a range of teaching methods are used in a course; provides a theoretical rationale for what many of us already do as teachers and then points us as to how to improve on that practice (in particular ensuring effective links between theory and application);
• makes explicit the importance of encouraging our students to reflect and providing them with feedback to reinforce their learning;
• support us in developing a diverse aware classroom;
• makes us aware of the way in which different learning styles have to be combined for effective learning;
• can be readily applied to all areas of the discipline, from a GIS laboratory exercise to a feminist analysis of a landscape;
• can be used by individuals and course teams.
• can be applied widely from a single classroom session to a whole degree programme.

2.2 Experiential Learning: Historical Underpinnings

2.2.1 A Pragmatic Philosophy

Experiential learning "offers the foundation for an approach to education and learning as a lifelong process that is soundly based in the intellectual traditions of social psychology, philosophy, and cognitive psychology" (Kolb, 1984). A discipline needs a philosophic position that describes the nature of their reality, truth, and value in order to be able to systematically and coherently develop solutions to issues that plague their profession (Miller, 1994). Experiential learning as a discipline and a profession is grounded in pragmatism. It has its roots in the pragmatic methods of William James, John Dewey, and F. C. S. Schiller. It is the "philosophical rationale for the primary role of personal experience in experiential learning" (Kolb, 1984).

From the Greek word meaning “practical; dealing with practice; matter-of-fact” (The Oxford English dictionary, 1989) the concept of pragmatism had its birth when C. S. Peirce published a series of essays on “truth” in Popular Science
Monthly in 1878. The essay, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” (Peirce, 1878), is generally considered to be the beginnings of the idea of pragmatism as published material (James, 1907; Dewey, 1925/1984). However, James, and Peirce with others in the Metaphysic Club had discussed the concept throughout 1870’s (James, 1907; Peirce 1905). Even though Peirce does not actually use the word pragmatism in the article the concept is developed and defined; "thus, we come down to what is tangible and practical, as the root of every real distinction of thought, no matter how subtle it may be" (Peirce, 1878,). As was mentioned he never used the word in writing at the time, he did use it in his discussions at James’ house and others in the Metaphysic Club (Peirce, 1905). Peirce considered "the most striking feature of the new theory was its recognition of an inseparable connection between rational cognition and rational purpose", ideas and action, reflection and experience.

James (1907) and others (Dewey, 1934/1964, Schiller, 1907) carried the concept or method as they identified it, further than Peirce intended (Pierce, 1905). However, it is James’ concept of pragmatism that is the basis of experiential learning today. A pragmatist "turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad priories, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action and towards power" (James, 1907). What influences our practice or action? In what way would the world be different if one alternative or another were true? If nothing would change, then that point has no sense of purpose. "It is astonishing to see how many philosophical disputes collapse into insignificance the moment you subject them to this simple test of tracing a concrete consequence" (James, 1907). Another way to explain the concept would be to think of physics as professor W. S. Franklin put it "the science of the ways of taking hold of bodies and pushing them" rather than "the science of masses, molecules, and the ether" (cited in James, 1907). Consider the ‘actions’ of the science rather than the theories, concreteness rather than abstractness.
Pragmatism, like all new ideas, was not readily accepted. Even Peirce changed the name of his concept to “pragmatisms” to differentiate between his original ideas and that of James (Carus, 1908; Peirce, 1905). Paul Carus, editor of The Monist in 1908, wrote a scathing editorial that claimed James to be unscientific and uncritical, and he felt that James even had a dislike for science. "I would deem it a misfortune if his philosophy would ever exercise a determining and permanent influence upon the national life of our country" (Carus, 1908). As noted, it has survived to influence our learning theories.

2.2.2 John Dewey’s Influence

From these chaotic beginnings, Dewey applied the pragmatic method to education. He felt that pragmatism places *action* as an intermediary between thought and application. "In order to be able to attribute a meaning to concepts, one must be able to apply them to existence" (Dewey, 1925/1984). James, he felt, "wished to establish a criterion which would enable one to determine whether a given philosophical question has an authentic and vital meaning or whether, on the contrary, it is trivial and purely verbal". Also, he felt that James "claimed the right of a man to choose his beliefs not only in the presence of proofs or conclusive facts, but also in the absence of all proof". The keyword here is "beliefs." James referred to a person’s "right to believe." Dewey felt that James considered the personal aspect of beliefs and motives. He claimed that "Peirce wrote as a logician and James as a humanist".

Dewey believed that reason was orderly and effective action, that ideas result from action and ideas help in obtaining better control of that action. He believed that education “is a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (Dewey, 1897/1972). "The educational end and the ultimate test of the value of what is learned is its use and application in carrying on and improving the common life of all" (Dewey, 1934/1964). Dewey believed that education transmits culture and provides other views of the world and allows students to explore them through their own experiences (cited in Bruner, 1966).
Thus, James and Dewey understood experience to have a primary role in learning. Dewey believed in the relationship between the process of life experience and the process of education (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984). As Keeton and Tate (1978) express it, experiential learning involves direct encounter with the phenomenon being studied rather than merely thinking about the encounter or only considering the possibility of doing something with it.

### 2.2.3 A Humanist Tradition

James, Dewey, and Schiller established the roots of experiential learning solidly as a humanist concept, not a behaviorist tradition. "The emphasis on the process of learning a supposed to the behavioral outcomes distinguishes experiential learning from the idealist approaches of traditional education and from the behavioral theories of learning created by Watson, Hull, Skinner, and others" (Kolb, 1984). Human experiences cannot be neatly classified into behaviorist categories. "Ideas are not fixed and immutable elements of thought but are formed and re-formed through experience". In experiential learning there is an integration of the cognitive learning processes and emotional experiences that promote understanding of the material being covered (Kolb & Fry, 1975).

Kolb (1984) stresses that humans are not the 'empty-organism' that behaviorist theories of learning assume. They have past experiences that they bring with them to a learning activity. Rogers’ (1961) & Maslow’s (1954) humanistic psychology "emphasized the uniqueness of human experience and human interpretation of the world" (Burnard, 1989). Experiential learning stresses humanistic values in emphasizing that feelings are part of the learning process as well as cognition. "The humanistic approach to experiential learning pays particular attention to the emotional aspect of the individual's experience" (Burnard, 1989). This humanistic scientific process "stimulated the modern participative management philosophies" (Kolb, 1984). Humanist theory suggests that learning can occur only where “personal values and organizational norms
support action based on valid information, free and informed choice, and internal commitment” (Kolb, 1984)

2.3 Definitions Of Experiential Learning:

“Experiential learning is a philosophy and methodology in which educators purpose fully engage with students in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values” (Association for Experiential Education).

Experiential learning is also referred to as learning through action, learning by doing, learning through experience, and learning through discovery and exploration, all which are clearly defined by these well-known maxims:

\[*I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand.*\]

~ Confucius, 450 BC

\[*Tell me and I forget, teach me and I remember, involve me and I will learn.*\]

~ Benjamin Franklin, 1750

\[*There is an intimate and necessary relation between the process of actual experience and education.*\]

~ John Dewey, 1938

Teaching for Experiential Learning, wringer and Carlson (2010) found that most college faculty teaches by lecturing because few of them learned how to teach otherwise. Although good lecturing should be part of an educator’s teaching repertoire, faculty should also actively involve their students “in the learning process through discussion, group work, hands-on participation, and applying information outside the classroom”. This process defines experiential learning
where students are involved in learning content in which they have a personal interest, need, or want.

Learning through experience is not a new concept for the college classroom. Notable educational psychologists such as John Dewey (1859-1952), Carl Rogers (1902-1987), and David Kolb (b. 1939) have provided the groundwork of learning theories that focus on “learning through experience or “learning by doing.” Dewey popularized the concept of Experiential Education which focuses on problem solving and critical thinking rather than memorization and rote learning. Rogers considered experiential learning “significant” as compared to what he called “meaningless” cognitive learning. Kolb also noted that concrete learning experiences are critical to meaningful learning and is well known for his Learning Style Inventory (LSI) which is widely used in many disciplines today to help identify preferred ways of learning. A key element of experiential learning, therefore, is the student, and that learning takes place (the knowledge gained) as a result of being personally involved in this pedagogical approach.

Principles of Experiential Learning (EL) unlike traditional classroom situations where students may compete with one another or remain uninvolved or unmotivated and where the instruction is highly structured students in experiential learning situations cooperate and learn from one another in a more semi-structured approach. Instruction is designed to engage students in direct experiences which are tied to real world problems and situations in which the instructor facilitates rather than directs student progress. “The focus of EL is placed on the process of learning and not the product of learning” (UC Davis, 2011). Proponents of experiential learning assert that students will be more motivated to learn when they have a personal stake in the subject rather than being assigned to review a topic or read a textbook chapter. What is essential in EL, however, “that the phases of experiencing (doing), reflection and applying are present? In addition, “the stages of reflection and application are what make experiential learning
different and more powerful than the models commonly referred to as “learn-by-doing” or “hands-on-learning” (UC Davis, 2011).

2.4 Principals Of Experiential Learning:

The following is a list of experiential learning principles as noted from the (Association for Experiential Education, 2011):

- Experiential learning occurs when carefully chosen experiences are supported by reflection, critical analysis and synthesis.
- Experiences are structured to require the student to take initiative, make decisions and be accountable for results.
- Throughout the experiential learning process, the student is actively engaged in posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious and solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative and constructing meaning.
- Students are engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially, soulfully and/or physically. This involvement produces a perception that the learning task is authentic.
- The results of the learning are personal and form the basis for future experience and learning.
- Relationships are developed and nurtured: student to self, student to others and student to the world at large.
- The instructor and student may experience success, failure, adventure, risk-taking and uncertainty, because the outcomes of the experience cannot totally be predicted.
- Opportunities are nurtured for students and instructors to explore and examine their own values.
- The instructor’s primary roles include setting suitable experiences, posing problems, setting boundaries, supporting students, insuring physical and emotional safety, and facilitating the learning process.
The instructor recognizes and encourages spontaneous opportunities for learning.

Instructors strive to be aware of their biases, judgments and pre-conceptions, and how these influence the student.

The design of the learning experience includes the possibility to learn from natural consequences, mistakes and successes.

The instructor and student may experience success, failure, adventure, risk-taking and uncertainty, because the outcomes of the experience cannot totally be predicted.

2.5 Process Of The Experiential Learning:

Experiential learning involves a number of steps that offer student a hands-on, collaborative and reflective learning experience which helps them to “fully learn new skills and knowledge” (Haynes, 2007). Although learning content is important, learning from the process is at the heart of experiential learning. During each step of the experience, students will engage with the content, the instructor, each other as well as self-reflect and apply what they have learned in another situation.

The following describes the steps that comprise experiential learning as noted by (Haynes, 2007 and UC Davis, 2011)

2.5.1 Experiencing/Exploring “Doing”

Students will perform or do a hands-on minds-on experience with little or no help from the instructor. Examples might include: Making products or models, role-playing, giving a presentation, problem-solving, playing a game. A key facet of experiential learning is what the student learns from the experience rather than the quantity or quality of the experience.

2.5.2 Sharing/Reflecting “What Happened”?

Students will share the results, reactions and observations with their peers. Students will also get other peers to talk about their own experience, share their
reactions and observations and discuss feelings generated by the experience. The sharing equates to reflecting on what they discovered and relating it to past experiences which can be used for future use.

**2.5.3 Processing/Analyzing “What’s Important”?**

Students will discuss, analyze and reflect upon the experience. Describing and analyzing their experiences allow students to relate them to future learning experiences. Students will also discuss how the experience was carried out, how themes, problems and issues emerged as a result of the experience. Students will discuss how specific problems or issues were addressed and to identify recurring themes.

**2.5.4 Generalizing “So What”?**

Students will connect the experience with real world examples, find trends or common truths in the experience, and identify “real life” principles that emerged.

**2.5.5 Application “Now What”?**

Students will apply what they learned in the experience to a similar or different situation. Also, students will discuss how the newly learned process can be applied to other situations. Students will discuss how issues raised can be useful in future situations and how more effective behaviors can develop from what they learned. The instructor should help each student feel a sense of human.

**2.6 Experiential Learning Models:**

The importance of experience and reflection in learning and their connection to experiential learning has been reviewed. The foundations of experiential learning have been explored. This monograph will now consider how to take experiential learning out of the theoretical abstract and into actual practice.

**David Kolb’s Approach to Experiential Learning**

"David Kolb’s 1984 book on experiential learning is one of the more influential works linking theory to actual practice" (Lewis & Williams, 1994).
Kolb describes experiential learning as a four part process, where the learner is asked to engage themselves in a new experience, actively reflect on that experience, conceptualize that experience and integrate it with past experiences. Furthermore, they must make decisions based on their created concepts. "In the process of learning, one moves in varying degrees from actor to observer, and from specific involvement to general analytic detachment" (Kolb, 1984). There is a dichotomy between concrete involvement and abstract detachment (Bruner, 1966). In one of the original documents on the model, Kolb and Fry (1975) describe the process in this manner:

1. here-and-now experience followed by 2. collection of data and observations about that experience. The data are then 3. analyzed and the conclusions of this analysis are feedback to the actors in the experience for their use in the 4. modification of their behavior and choice of new experiences.

According to Kolb the learner must continue cycling through the four parts, thus creating a “learning spiral of ever-increasing complexity” (cited in Lewis & Williams, 1994). A picture of a conical helix comes to mind in trying to describe the process. A learner might begin anywhere in the cycle at any level of knowledge concerning the subject matter. The facilitator’s job is to guide them through each part in an ever increasing level, expanding their learning of a topic. "Kolb considers any one learning style to be an incomplete form of processing information all four stages of the cycle must be negotiated by the learner". For Kolb, then, learning becomes a process where “ideas are not fixed and immutable elements of thought but are formed and re-formed through experience” (Kolb, 1984).

**Boud and Walker’s Stages in Experiential Learning**

Boud and Walker (1992) see experiential learning as a series of stages where there is some kind of preparation done before a learning event, the actual experience itself, and then reflection to “debrief” the learner on what took place. This incorporates two important aspects of Kolb’s model experience and
reflection. It also adds a third: preparation for the event that they feel is important in having learning take place. "Greater use can be made of learning events if the learners prepare beforehand".

When considering preparation for a learning event, the facilitator needs to focus on what experiences the learners bring and what they want to learn. "Learners bring with them 'intent', which may or may not be able to be articulated, and which influences their approach to the event" (Boud & Walker, 1992).

**Dean’s Process Model of Experiential Learning**

Dean (1993) presents a process model of experiential learning in adult education as a series of stages in the process of developing and implementing an experiential learning activity:

1. Planning—Getting Ready to Start
2. Involvement—Getting Started
3. Internalization—Learning by Doing
4. Reflection—Making Meaning
5. Generalization—Making Connections
6. Application—Transfer of Learning
7. Follow-up—Assessment & Planning

As with Boud and Walker, Dean sees experiential learning as a process the facilitator goes through to develop the learning experience. The central concepts of his model relates to the other theories of experiential learning in that there needs to be some kind of experience(involvement and internalization) and a reflection on that experience.

**Laura Joplin’s Five Stage Model**

The Agricultural Education Magazine recently devoted an entire issue to the concept of experiential learning (Leske, 1994). In it, some authors described using Kolb’s model, however, several used a model proposed by Laura Joplin (1981). Joplin follows the “action-reflection” process, however, she adds three other stages that are similar to Boud and Walker’s and Dean’s. Her first stage is
focus, which defines the task to be completed and focuses the learner’s attention on that task. Second is action, where that student must become involved with the subject matter in a physical, mental, or emotional manner. Her third and fourth stages are support and feedback. These are present throughout the learning experience and are provided by the instructor or fellow learners. The fifth and last stage is debriefed, where the learners and facilitator sort and order the information and reflect on its implications. Joplin stresses that “experience alone is insufficient to be called experiential education, and it is the reflection process which turns experience into experiential education”.

**Praxis as an Experiential Learning Model**

Burnard (1989) states that "experiential learning is learning through doing and learning through reflecting on the doing. . . . If we are to learn from what we do, we must notice what we do and reflect on it”. This concept of action and reflection is central in the early writings of Karl Marx in the 1840’s and in the contemporary writings of the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. They used the term praxis to denote action and reflection.

**From a Nineteenth Century philosophy.** The term praxis became popular in the 1960’s, when Karl Marx’s early works were translated into English and widely disseminated (The Oxford English dictionary, 1989). It was actually August von Cieszkowski, in 1838, which first used the term to denote “action and reflection.” He felt that the real power of ideas was in acting upon them, not just thinking about them. "A practical philosophy or rather a philosophy of practical activity, of ’praxis’, exercising a direct influence on social life and developing the future in the realm of concrete activity" (McLellan, 1969). In his early work, Theses of Feuerbach, Marx outlines his philosophy of praxis and how thought must be acted on in the world. In this quotation from Karl Marx and the Philosophy of Praxis, Kitching (1988) sums up Marx’s ideas on the subject:

“It is human activity which, as it were, ’joins' thought to the world. Conversely, it is speculating about 'thinking' and 'thought' in abstraction from
practice, from activity, which creates nearly all philosophical puzzles. It is in this context that we must see the most famous of all the Theses on Feuerbach, the eleventh and final one: Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point however is to change it. Here Marx is taking 'philosophers' to task, not for interpreting the world, but for only interpreting the world.

**To Twentieth Century Education.**

Paulo Freire, in his sentinel work, Pedagogy of the Oppressed(1970a), uses the term praxis extensively to describe a process of dialogue and interaction between the teacher and the student. The facilitator must not tell the learner what to learn. He must explore the content with the learner. The learner must then act on that content. The learner and facilitator must reflect on that action. As Freire defines it: "praxis: the action and reflection of men upon their world in order to transform it" or in the original Portuguese,"é praxis, queimplica a ação e a reflexão dos homes sobre o mundo para transformá lo” (Freire,1970b). Both Freire and Marx used praxis, or acting on theory, to arrive at their laboratory philosophies.

2.7 **Kolb’s Experiential Learning Model:**

While VAK may have popularized learning styles, David Kolb, Professor of Organizational Behavior at Case Western Reserve University, is credited with launching the learning styles movement in the early seventies and is perhaps one of the most influential learning models developed.

According to Kolb (1984), "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it."

2.8 **A Brief History Of Kolb’s Experiential Learning:**

The organizational behavior and management fields for many years have focused on performance as the primary validation touchstone for their theories and concepts. In the twenty-first century however, we have begun to see a shift in focus away from measures of organizational and managerial performance that are often limited and subject to short term manipulation at the expense of long term
sustainability. In the new perspective organizations are seen as learning systems and the management process is viewed as a process of learning. Learning lies at the core of the management process when learning it is defined holistically as the basic process of human adaptation. This broad definition subsumes more specialized managerial processes such as entrepreneurial learning (Corbett 2005, 2007, Poltis 2005), strategy formulation (Ramnarayan & Reddy 1989, Van Der Heijden 1996, Kolb, Lublin, Spoth, & Baker), creativity (Brennan & Dooley 2005), Boyle, Geiger & Pinto 1991, Ogot & Okudan 2006, Potgieter 1999), problem solving and decision making (Donoghue 1994, Jervis 1983, Kolb 1983, Selby et. al. 2004) and leadership (Robinson 2005, Kayes, Kayes & Kolb 2005).

For over thirty-five years research based on experiential learning theory (ELT—Kolb 1984, Kolb and Kolb 2007a & b) has been an advocate for and contributor to this shift in perspective. Experiential learning theory draws on the work of prominent 20th century scholars who gave experience a central role in their theories of human learning and development—notably John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, William James, Carl Jung, Paulo Freire, Carl Rogers and others—to develop a dynamic, holistic model of the process of learning from experience and a multi-linear model of adult development. ELT is a dynamic view of learning based on a learning cycle driven by the resolution of the dual dialectics of action/reflection and experience/abstraction. It is a holistic theory that defines learning as the major process of human adaptation involving the whole person. As such, ELT is applicable not only in the formal education classroom but in all arenas of life. The process of learning from experience is ubiquitous, present in human activity everywhere all the time. The holistic nature of the learning process means that it operates at all levels of human society from the individual, to the group, to organizations and to society as a whole. Research based on ELT has been conducted all around the world supporting the cross-cultural applicability of the model.
2.8.1 Psychology Meaning Of The Experiential Learning Model:

Kolb's experiential learning style theory is typically represented by a four stage learning cycle in which the learner 'touches all the bases':

1. **Concrete Experience** - (a new experience of situation is encountered, or a reinterpretation of existing experience).

2. **Reflective Observation** (of the new experience. Of particular importance are any inconsistencies between experience and understanding).

3. **Abstract Conceptualization** (Reflection gives rise to a new idea, or a modification of an existing abstract concept).

4. **Active Experimentation** (the learner applies them to the world around them to see what results).

**Figure 2.1**

Psychology meaning of the experiential learning model
Effective learning is seen when a person progresses through a cycle of four stages:

1) Having a concrete experience followed by
2) Observation of and reflection on that experience which leads to
3) The formation of abstract concepts (analysis) and generalizations (conclusions) which are then
4) Used to test hypothesis in future situations, resulting in new experiences.

**Figure 2.2**

**Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle of Person Progress**

Kolb (1975) views learning as an integrated process with each stage being mutually supportive of and feeding into the next. It is possible to enter the cycle at any stage and follow it through its logical sequence.

However, effective learning only occurs when a learner is able to execute all four stages of the model. Therefore, no one stage of the cycle is an effective as a learning procedure on its own.

**2.8.2 Characteristic Of Kolb’s Experiential Learning Model:**

Kolb’s proposes that experiential learning has six main characteristic:

- Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes.
- Learning is a continuous process grounded in experience.
- Learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world (learning is by its very nature full of tension).
- Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world.
- Learning involves transactions between the person and the environment.
- Learning is the process of creating knowledge that is the result of the transaction between social knowledge and personal knowledge.

Kolb's learning theory sets out four distinct learning styles, which are based on a four-stage learning cycle. In this respect, Kolb's model differs from others since it offers both a way to understand individual learning styles, which he named the "Learning Styles Inventory" (LSI), and also an explanation of a cycle of "experiential learning" that applies to all learners.

### 2.8.3 Basis Of Kolb's Experiential Learning Model:

Kolb's learning model is based on two continuums that form a quadrant:

**Figure: 2.3**

**Basis of Kolb's Experiential Learning Model**

![Diagram of Kolb's Experiential Learning Model](image)
• Processing Continuum: Our approach to a task, such as preferring to learn by doing or watching.
• Perception Continuum: Our emotional response, such as preferring to learn by thinking or feeling.

For Kolb, "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience." The experiential way of learning involves the application of the information received from the educator to the experiences of the learner. It does not consist of activity generated in the classroom alone. The student does not acquire his or her knowledge exclusively from the teacher. Rather, he or she learns through this process of taking the new information derived in class and testing it against his or her accustomed real-life experiences. By so doing, the learner transforms both the information and the experience into knowledge of some new or familiar subject or phenomenon.

Kolb’s model is comprised of four phases that he locates in a circle. This model has come to be known in the literature as the *Kolb Cycle*.

**Figure: 2.4**

**Kolb’s Experiential Learning Model**
In the first phase, the educator involves the learners in a concrete experience. The experience could be a role play, a live or video demonstration, a case study, or a testimonial. Generally, it will not be a lecture. The learners are then asked to review the experience from many perspectives. They ask themselves questions. What happened? What did you observe? This second phase is referred to as reflective observation. During the third phase of abstract conceptualization, the learners develop theories and look at patterns. Further questions are asked. How do your account for what you observed? What does it mean for you? How is it significant? What conclusions can you draw? What general principles can you derive? The fourth and final phase of this experiential model is active experimentation. The learners suggest ways that they can apply the principles they have learned. How can we apply this learning? In what ways can we use it the next time? What would we do differently?

In closing, experiential learning provides a model that enables learners to draw from their past experiences to acquire new knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes that they can then apply in their organizational settings.

2.9 The Four Stage Learning Cycle by Kolb’s Experiential Learning Model:

Kolb proposed that an individual learner moves through a spiral of immediate experience which leads to observations and reflections on the experience. These reflections are then absorbed and linked with previous knowledge and translated into abstract concepts or theories, which result in new ways and actions to adjust to the experience that can be tested and explored. Kolb described the four stages in the cycle of experiential learning as:

1. Concrete Experience - (CE)
2. Reflective Observation - (RO)
3. Abstract Conceptualization - (AC)
4. Active Experimentation - (AE)
2.9.1 Concrete Experience (CE)

This stage of the learning cycle emphasizes personal involvement with people in everyday situations. In this stage, the learner would tend to rely more on feelings than on a systematic approach to problems and situations. In a learning situation, the learner relies on the ability to be open-minded and adaptable to change.

The individual, the team, or the organization just does the task. During that time, they do not reflect on it but have intention to reflect on it. For example, a student performs an initial interview for the first time.

2.9.2 Reflective Observation (RO)

In this stage of the learning cycle, people understand ideas and situations from different points of view. In a learning situation the learner would rely on patience, objectivity, and careful judgment but would not necessarily take any action. The learner would rely on their own thoughts and feelings in forming opinions.

The reflection includes returning to the beginning point of the task and review what is done and tried. Listening skills, paying attention, distinguishing the differences, and applying ideas help finding results and sharing them with the others. Adjustments, values, and beliefs influence on the definition of particular results. The vocabulary is important for the verbalizing and discussing the perceiving and comprehending of the experience.

In the example, after finishing the student reflects on what they did, makes observations and discusses how they went with their educator.

2.9.3 Abstract Conceptualization (AC)

In this stage, learning involves using theories, logic and ideas, rather than feelings, to understand problems or situations. Typically, the learner relies on systematic planning and develops theories and ideas to solve problems.

The conceptualizing includes interpretation of the marked results and understanding the connections between them. Theory can be useful as a base of
shaping and explaining the results. In that phase the adjustments, values, and beliefs also have influence on the interpretation of the results. During the critical reflection questions are asked from the perspective of the previous experience, while during the phase of conceptualizing an attempt to find answers is done. Generalization and conclusions are made; hypotheses for experience are formed. About the abstract conceptualizing, Kolb says, “In that phase learning involves more logic and ideas than feelings of understanding the problems or the situations. It is typical to follow systematic planning and development of theories and ideas for solving problems.”

In the example, the student then thinks about the interview process and their performance and tries to make links between previous experience of interviewing, the client and what they heard, and any theories or knowledge they can apply.

2.9.4 Active Experimentation (AE)

Learning in this stage takes an active form - experimenting with changing situations. The learner would take a practical approach and be concerned with what really works, as opposed to simply watching a situation.

The planning (active experimenting) gives an opportunity to master the new understanding and its carrying to predicting which is likely to happen later, or what other actions must be taken for improving the way that we treat the task. About the active experimenting, Kolb thinks, “Learning during that phase has an active form – experimenting, influence or change of the situation. You have to have a practical approach and to be interested in what is actually working…” As the name hints, the Experiential Learning theory affirms the significance of experience. But apart from that, it is extremely important for the students to pass through all four phases of the cycle, and to have effective connections between each of these phases. The model is critical to action where students make a small preparation for experience and/or do not reflect effectively on experience, or do not connect it with the corresponding theoretical aspects.
In the example, the student considers ways to improve, and tries out methods and strategies based on the previous stages of the cycle.

2.10 Issues Of Kolb’s Experiential Learning Model:

Here I want to note six key issues that arise out the Kolb model:

2.10.1 It pays insufficient attention to the process of reflection

(Boud 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'.

2.10.2 The claims made for the four different learning styles are extravagant

(Jarvis 1987, Tennant 1997). As Tennant (1997) 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.

2.10.3 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.
2.10.4 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.

2.10.5 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 styles inventory 'has no capacity to measure the degree of integration of learning styles' (Tennant 1997).

2.10.6 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 social psychology perspective. He doesn't really connect 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). Here we might contrast this position with Paulo Freire. His focus is upon informed, committed action.

Given these problems we have to take some care approaching David Kolb's vision of experiential learning. However, as Tennant (1997) 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 counseling, academic advising and so on'.

2.11 Summary:

Even though definitions have a way of making things seen more certain than they are, it may be useful to summarize this chapter on the characteristics of the experiential learning process by offering a working definition of learning. Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. This definition emphasizes several critical aspects of the learning process as viewed from the experiential perspective. First is the emphasis on the process of adaptation and learning as opposed to content or outcomes. Second is that knowledge is a transformation process, being continuously created and recreated, not an independent entity to be acquired or transmitted. Third, learning transforms experience in both its objective and subjective forms. Finally, to understand learning, we must understand the nature of knowledge and vice versa.