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There are a number of humanistic and constructivist approaches to learning. These approaches highlight the idea that learning occurs naturally through experience or that experiences are critical in constructing knowledge. One such approach was promoted by Kolb (1984) where he proposed that learning follows a four-stage cycle. Kolb believed that all stages in the cycle allow for the transformation of experience to knowledge. It is through these stages that the student is immersed in some experience which, when followed by reflection and application, learning can occur. Experiential learning is important in that it makes learning personable and relatable, links theory to practice, and increases engagement.

The four stages of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle are as follows:

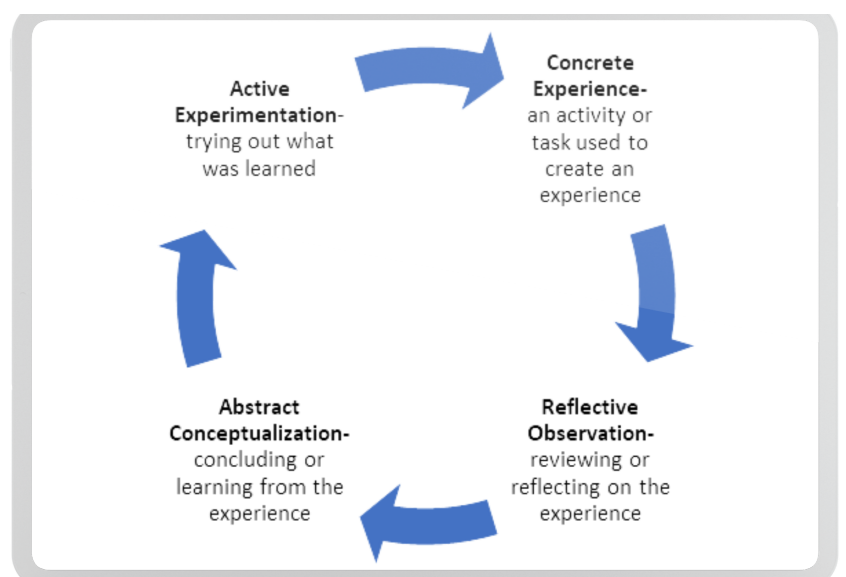
Concrete Experience- Kolb proposed that learning begins with an experience. This experience can be new or one that is revisited but reimagined. In this stage, each learner must engage in either an activity or a task. Involvement is key. He proposes that it is not enough for the learner to read about or watch something. The learner must actively engage in an activity or task for the learning process to begin.

Reflective Observation- After the concrete experience, the learner needs to reflect on the activity or task by writing about it, asking questions, and/or discussing the outcome(s) with others. It is important that the learner recognizes any inconsistency between their perceptions of the experience and the actual intent of the experience.

Abstract Conceptualization- At this point, the learner must think about the learning experience and attempt to draw conclusions on the experience using their prior knowledge, ideas they are familiar with, or through discussion with their classmates about a theory or a

concept. When the learner can begin to organize concepts and form conclusions, they are interpreting the experience and making comparisons to their understandings.

Active Experimentation- In this stage learners use their understanding of the experience



and its meaning by putting their knowledge into practice. This ensures that the information is retained for future learning.

Service-learning is one example of experiential learning. In this example, students can give direct service which could involve the student addressing a need in their community. It could also involve indirect service where community needs are addressed through a research project or community organizing. Finally, service-learning could involve research and advocacy where the students work to bring about a change in their community. To assess learning in these areas, students can be asked to write reflective essays or research papers. They can also give presentations or report the results of their research to interested community members.

There are two old adages:

I hear and I forget, I see and remember, I do and I understand.
~Confucius, 450 BC

Kolb's Experiential Learning

Ann Coburn-Collins

Tell me and I forget, Teach me and I remember, Involve me and I will learn.
~Benjamin Franklin, 1750

Old they may be, but these adages hold true to this day. Experiential learning is a definite way to help our students increase their understanding of a concept, theory, subject, or discipline.

Sources:

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