



**THEORY INTO  
PRACTICE**

## **THEORY: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING**

**AARON STOLLER, PH. D., DIRECTOR OF FYE, AND DREW CAVIN, PH.D., DIRECTOR OF FIELD STUDY**

Experiential learning is a pedagogical approach which begins by immersing students in open-ended activities and concrete real-life situations. Through intentional observation of and reflection on those experiences, students cultivate new awareness and new knowledge.

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) was first articulated by David Kolb (1984/2014), who defines learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 41). Kolb differentiates ELT, on one hand, from most forms of “learning by doing” which engage students in hands-on activities (e.g. internships, service work, and community engagement) disconnected from any sort of systematic or meaningful reflection. On the other hand, Kolb sets ELT apart from traditional classroom-based pedagogies where academic content is often detached from everyday life.

Experiential learning is, instead, intended to transform real-life situations into reliable knowledge, using a student’s experience not as demonstrative but as generative.

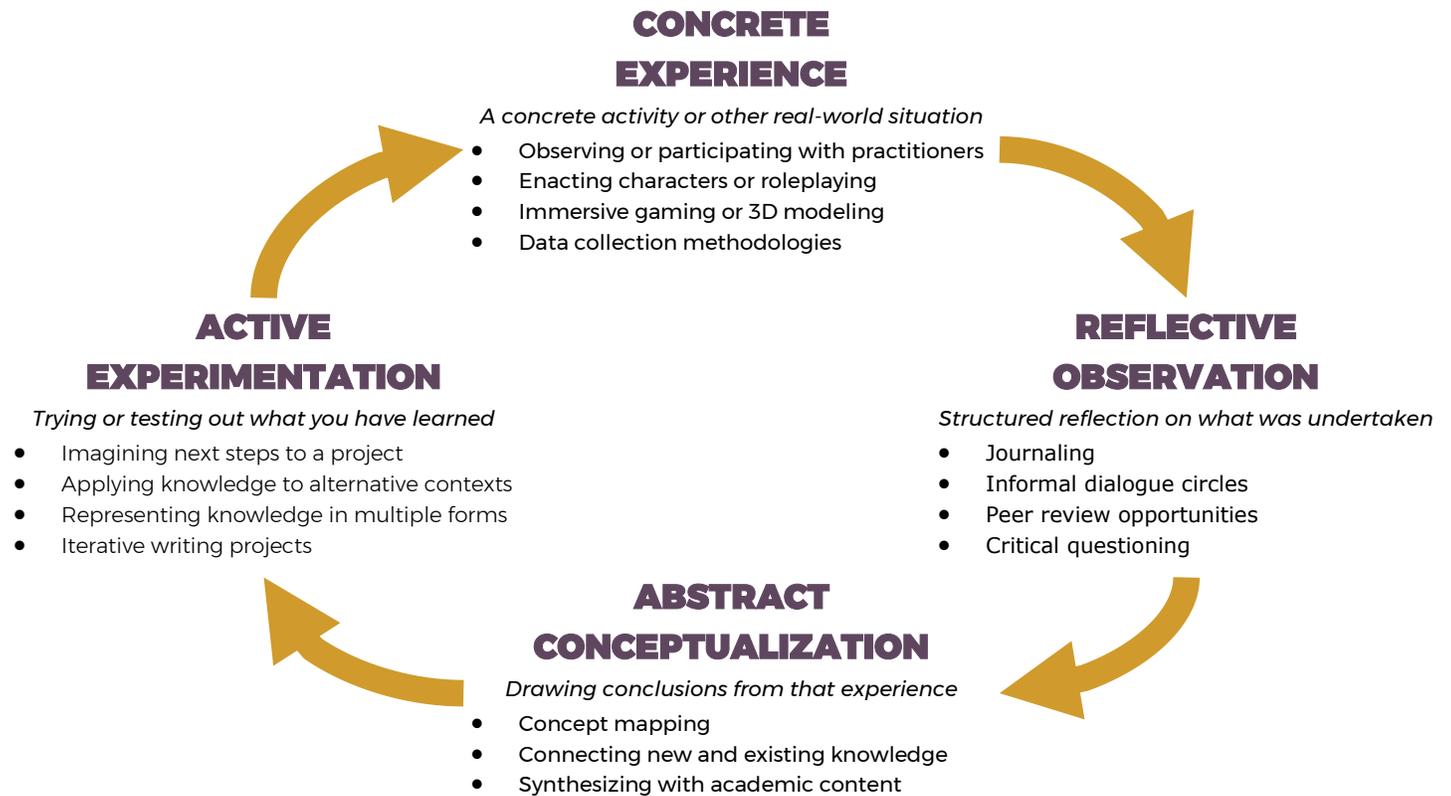
### **CORE BENEFITS**

- Increases student motivation to learn (Guthrie et al., 2006; Holsermann et al., 2010)
- Increases opportunities for analytical reflection (Wright, 2000)
- Helps students transfer their previous learning to new contexts (Furman & Sibthorp, 2013)
- Creates stronger connections between educational and lived experiences (Thomas et al., 2017)
- Deepens understanding of subject matter (Eyler, 2009)

# PRACTICE

## THE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE

Kolb posits a four-fold process for learning (the experiential learning cycle) moving from the concrete to the abstract. Kolb stresses that all four phases of the cycle must work together to create a complete learning process.



## HOW CAN I DO THIS?

- Choose relevant experiences that compliment your course outcomes.
- Be open to risk-taking for both you and your students.
- Plan carefully and early.
- Determine the skills and skill levels required for the assignment.
- Always plan enough time for student reflections of their learning.

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