

Learning styles

The term “learning styles” speaks to the understanding that every student learns differently. Technically, an individual’s learning style refers to the preferential way in which the student absorbs, processes, comprehends and retains information. The students’ style may be different from your style. Being aware of your own style is important!

1. THEORY

The main proponent of this approach to learning, David Kolb, put forward a theory which he intended to be sufficiently general to account for all forms of learning (Kolb, 1984). He argued that there are four distinctive kinds of knowledge and that each is associated with a distinctive kind of learning. The four kinds of learning are:

- concrete experiencing
- reflective observation
- abstract analysis
- active experimentation.

Kolb suggested that the ideal form of learning was one that integrated all four of these, integration being achieved by a cyclical progression.. The result of the journey round the cycle is the transformation of experience into knowledge, and this forms the basis of Kolb's definition of learning: the production of knowledge through the transformation of experience. Thus Kolb views learning as a *process* – one through which any experience (including the experience of being taught) is transformed. If, for example, information is reproduced by the learner in exactly the form taught, learning would not have occurred, according to his view, because nothing would have been changed or transformed. Memorisation might be judged to have occurred, but not learning, which has a kind of ‘value added’ quality in this model because it generates something more than or different from the original stimulus.

The cyclical process can begin anywhere. Starting at the ‘top’, we have concrete experiencing, on which we can reflect and draw out observations. These in turn provide the raw material for the abstract analysis and conceptualization stage, out of which we can derive new ideas or theories, to try out in practice. Active experimentation combines therefore the fruits of both concrete experience and abstract analysis, and when we put our experimental ideas into practice, we generate another episode for concrete experiencing so that the cycle can begin over again.

Kolb argues that all four stages in the experiential learning cycle are essential for the full integration of direct, concrete experience and action with knowledge and theories *about* the world. The integration, as I mentioned earlier, comes by working through each of the four stages identified in the model, from concrete experiencing through reflective observation, abstract analysis and active experimentation. Each of the four stages has a distinctive

activity and function which is essential for the achievement of learning. Kolb's theory requires that each stage be given its full value by the learner, with outcomes that feed forward into the next stage of the model – wherever we begin on the cycle.

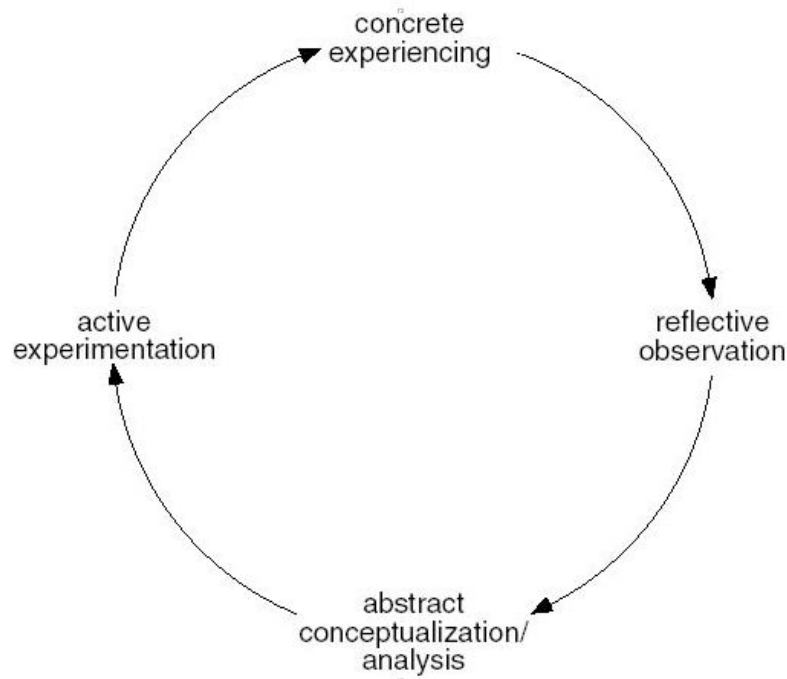


Figure 4: The Kolb model of learning

Kolb's four-stage model has been used as the basis for a typology of learning styles.. Each of the four styles has been identified with a particular type of learner behaviour that is characteristic of that approach to learning. Thus the learner who is happy with the concrete experience stage of learning might be recognisable as someone who in their approach to learning is happy to have a go, to get involved, to take risks – even when the outcome is not clear at the beginning. By contrast, there are weaknesses with this same preference, such as a lack of reflection on the purpose of activity.

Just as learning models have strengths and weaknesses, so each style can be separated out in the form of positive statements which are its strengths and negative statements which are its weaknesses. Do you have strong preferences for how you learn and the type of activity that is required of you? Perhaps you have taken your own reactions for granted and assume that everyone learns the same way. You may also assume that the way you learn is something that cannot be affected by what you do or by your attitudes to learning. But some people believe that they can and do change the way that they learn – in the sense of managing their own reactions and activities where they feel this is necessary for the learning goal in hand.

The required basis for change however is self awareness, and that is one of the aims of the next activity, which is optional.

Depending on your learningstyle, your coaching can be different. Activists will involve action, reflectors will let their students think. Being aware of your own style and ways to adapt your style to the students is important. Because your style may be different from their style!

<p>Reflectors</p> <p>Prefer to watch, think, review</p> <p>Journals and brainstorm</p> <p>Expert lectures</p>	<p>Theorists</p> <p>Think through step by step</p> <p>Lectures case studies</p> <p>Reading</p>
<p>Pragmatist</p> <p>Apply new learning to actual practice</p> <p>Field work and lab work</p> <p>Feedback and coaching</p>	<p>Activists</p> <p>Challenge of the new experience</p> <p>Role play Small groups</p> <p>Involvement with others</p>

2. POSSIBLE WAYS TO BRING THIS THEORY

- Learning styles Test (appendix 1)
- Bowline Knot (appendix 2)
- ...

4. Checklist

APPENDIX 1

Learning styles Test

Test: [Learning styles Kolb](#)

Let the mentor fill out the test. After filling out the test, the participant knows which is his learning style. You can let the participants discuss about the advantages and disadvantages and about how they can teach and coach others, concerning your own learning style and the learning style of the students.

APPENDIX 2

Bowline knot

Give the participants a rope and let them make a bowline knot. They have different options:

- they can make the know without any help
- They can make it with a picture
- They can make it based on a roadmap
- Or they can watch others making the rope and then making it themselves.

→ This can help the trainees their own learning style.

