Experiential Learning

Reflective thought is “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and that further conclusion to which it tends.” (John Dewey, 1933, p.9).

The Kolb Learning Cycle can provide a useful framework for designing adult learning sessions. While every individual learns best from a particular portion of the process, the most effective learning takes place when all four steps are included in your program design. Drawing from the work of John Dewey (1938), David Kolb describes learners as going through a cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and practical application. Kolb emphasized the importance of learners having opportunities to experience all stages of the “experiential learning cycle” as a way to enrich and enhance motivation and “deeper” level learning. From an educator’s perspective, there are many ways to provide challenging experiences for learners, experiences that will challenge their way of seeing themselves or issues in the world around them more deeply. Practica and apprenticeship programs, field research, and volunteer work are all examples of practical experiences. Educators can further help learners reflect on the value of their experiences through discussion, critical incident questionnaires, and journal writing. The following are examples of practical strategies that educators can apply to help their students develop meaningful learning experiences:

Concrete Experience (Primary “hands on” experience)
Case Study
Debate
Simulation/Role Play
Field Trips
Film Viewing
Text Reading
Drama
Discussion Groups
Literature Circles
Interviews
Prior Experience

Reflective Observation
Journal Writing
Note Taking
Critical Incident Questionnaire
Thoughts and conclusions on concrete experience
Metaphors and Analogies

Abstract Conceptualization
Theoretical input or concepts
Theory and model building/development
Formal Research Paper  
Analytical Report Writing  
Article and Manuscript Writing  
Task Analysis Report  
Portfolio Development  
Lecture that builds upon reflective observation

**Practical Application**
Action planning or some other structured experience that helps process and/or activate new learning  
Application of theoretical perspectives in a new context  
Project Development  
Formal Presentation  
Creative reappraisal of problem  
Problem Solving

**Teaching/Learning Strategies:**
Case studies, debates, critical questioning, and analyses of theoretical perspectives may be of interest to learners who have a preference for analysis and reflection. Working together in pairs or collaborative groups that examine a particular frame of reference may be helpful for individuals who express preferences in self-expression and sharing ideas with others. Concrete and experiential strategies such as field trips and simulations can assist students who prefer “hands on” learning. Games, metaphors, imaging, brainstorming, and arts-based inquiry may appeal to learners who are more intuitive. Kolb emphasized that students need to be introduced to diverse experiences and learning approaches.

**Inventory of Instructional Strategies for Adult Learners**
- Apprenticeship  
- Audio-visual material  
- Brainstorming  
- Buzz Groups  
- Cooperative Learning  
- Case Study  
- Colloquy  
- Debate  
- Exhibit  
- Experimentation  
- Field Trip  
- Guest Speaker  
- Information Brief
-Inquiry/Discovery Learning
-Interview
-Individualized instruction
-Journal Writing
-Laboratory Instruction
-Language Lab
-Lecture
-Listening Teams
-Panel Discussion
-Practicum
-Questioning Strategies
-Role Play
-Seminar
-Symposium
-Report/Research
-Workshop, Clinic, and Institute

Adapted from:


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