A book review on the experiential educator: principles and practices of experiential learning

İlke Evin Gencel [1]

Abstract

Experiential learning has been studied since the 1800s. David A. and Alice Kolb have synthesized all major studies about experiential learning and transformed it into a unique theory accepted worldwide. The Experiential Educator: Principles and Practices of Experiential Learning brings together the theory and practice of experiential learning. The book consists of three main parts and sub-chapters. The book's first part focuses on the philosophy of experiential learning, while the second part is about creating learning spaces for experiential learning. The final part exemplifies practical implementations of experiential learning. This study aims to introduce the first edition of this essential book in experiential learning, published in May 2017 and consisting of 581 pages.

Keywords: experiential learning, experiential educator, book review

[1]**Corresponding author,** İzmir Democracy University, Faculty of Education, Curriculum and Instruction Department, Türkiye, ilke.evingencel@idu.edu.tr

Part I: Principles of Experiential Learning Theory

The first part of the book consists of seven chapters. These chapters provide a comprehensive and detailed background to the philosophy and theoretical foundations of experiential learning. The authors also explain misunderstood concepts and processes related to experiential learning.

Chapter 1: The Philosophy of Experiential Education
This chapter provides detailed explanations of the work of William James, John Dewey, Mary Parker Follett, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Carl Jung, Carl Rogers, and Paulo Freire, have significantly influenced the Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory. The authors considers this pioneers as the foundational scholars of experiential learning and explained in detailed their contributions to the experiential learning theory The chapter also introduces the principles of the experiential learning philosophy and establishes a strong theoretical and philosophical foundation for the readers. This chapter highlights the transformative potential of experiential learning by emphasizing the holistic relationships among cognitive, affect, physical and social components of learnnig. It can be said that the inital chapter enhances comprehension of the following parts and chapters of the book.

Chapter 2: The Learning Cycle and Learning Style
The experiential learning cycle is one of the most important component of the Experiential Learning Theory and this chapter explains the learning cycle step by step. Like the first chapter, the authors provide detailed explanations to correct misunderstandings about the learning cycle. The authors especially emphasize that the four stages of the experiential learning cycle (Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization and Active Experimentation) do not have to be sequential. They state that the common misunderstanding about the cycle is that these stages are perceived to be inflexible. This chapter explains that how the flexibility of experiential learning cycle can be utilized in different learning environments and with different characteristics of learner. Another important components of the Experiential Learning Theory is the concept of learning style. In the Experiential Learning Theory, four main learning styles, namely accommodating, assimilating, converging and diverging were initially put forward. Over the years the authors have developed The Kolb Learning Style Inventory 4.0 (KLSI 4.0) and the new 9 learning style typology as a result of their empirical research. This chapter explains the new typology of the learning styles. In addition, this chapter emphasizes the difference of KLSI 4.0 from other psychometric instruments by highlighting the dialectical perspective. The dialectical approach is the expression of the individual's use of his/her experiences and conceptual knowledge together.

Chapter 3: Experiential Learning and the Brain
This chapter focuses on the role of memory in learning from experience, the importance of conscious awareness in the learning process, and the relationship between the different paths that individuals with different learning styles follow in the learning cycle and the functioning of the brain. Additionally, experiential learning, episodic memory and long-term retention of knowledge are explained in detail and the relationship among them is stated. The chapter 3 emphasizes the importance of neuroscience research in education and experiential learning. The authors explain how the biological structure and different parts of the brain function at different stages of the experiential learning cycle. In this chapter, different learning cycles such as The Exploration/Mimicry Learning Cycle and The Instruction/Recall Learning Cycle are presented depending on the biological characteristics of the brain. Multiple learning cycles in the brain are explained through concrete examples. In this chapter, the authors discuss findings from research in neuroscience and cognitive psychology that explain the role of memory in the experiential learning process.

Chapter 4: The Spiral of Learning and Development
In this chapter, the authors explain that the experiential learning cycle is actually a learning spiral. They also state the meaning of constructivism in experiential learning and how it differs from the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky. The authors view the individual development process in a more context-oriented, less age-related, and non-hierarchical manner. They present the scientific studies and findings that justify these perspectives. The experiential learning theory of development model put forward by the authors reflects both the ontological and epistemological aspects of development. The authors state the importance of questioning the assumption that

development is always a one-way, linear as a continuous progression to a better and superior situation. The chapter in general provides a comprehensive frame for understanding the multi-dimensional nature of learning and its role in individual development. The theoretical and practical explanations about spiraling through the learning cycle in this chapter provide valuable information for educators.

Chapter 5: Learning Identity

This chapter explains the factors in the development of learning identity and the aspects that differentiate it from learning styles. The authors emphasize that individuals with a learning identity have the characteristics of lifelong learners and that learning identity, which is shaped over time, is an important factor that enables the awareness of life experiences as learning opportunities. In this chapter, the role of learning identity in individual identity development is explained and learning identity development strategies are explained through concrete and practical examples. In the chapter, the role of flexibility and reflective thinking in the development of a learning identity is presented together with the reasons why fixed identities can be an obstacle to individual development. Explaining how learning identity can be used by educators in the individual development and learning process is important in terms of providing a guide for educators as well as individuals.

Chapter 6: Deliberate Experiential Learning

In this chapter, it is explained contributions of consciously using experiences in the development and learning process. In this context, it is emphasized that deliberate learning from experiences is one of the most important powers of the individual. The authors explain in detail the role of metacoginition as a key factor in deliberate experiential learning. In this chapter, deep experiencing is introduced as one of the most important components of the Experiental Learning Theory. According to the authors, learning occurs not only natural process but also intentionally process. Fort his reason individuals should develop themselves as a deliberate learner from experiences. At this point, the authors present exercise to become deliberate learner. In the chapter it is explained that how Kolb's learning styles, which is explained in the previous chapters of the book, can be implemented during the metacognitive practices. In the chapter, the step-by-step explanation of deep experience and the practice of becoming a deliberate learner is presented as an important practise example for both individuals and educators.

Chapter 7: Team and Organizational Learning

In this chapter experiential learning for teams and organizations is explained in detail. experiential learning is important for individual as well as organizations. Experiential learning as a team provide development for both individuals and organizations. The explanations of the authors about the strategies of experiential learning as a team have provided valuable insights for both organizations and educators who want to develop team-learning in their classrooms. In addition, the importance of team members' learning styles in the learning and development process is explained clearly, together with the reasons behind them. It can be said that the effect of the Kolb Team Learning Experience simulation on team development and focusing on organizational learning are the important topics in this chapter. The authors also share their and other researchers' scientific findings on these topics in this chapter.

Part II: Creating Learning Spaces

The second part of the book also consists of seven chapters. The chapters focus on learning spaces and their importance in experiential learning. They explain in detail the features that experiential learning spaces should have and their implications for practice.

Chapter 8: Learning Spaces

In this chapter, the authors first define the concept of learning space and its meaning for experiential learning. With the research findings, it is put forward that different learning subjects and fields need to create different learning spaces. This chapter describes the strategies for educators who need to create learning spaces for experiential learning even in physical conditions of traditional classrooms. In the enhancement of experiential learning, the importance of creating learning spaces is explained with examples of the learning space's physical, cultural, institutional, social, and psychological dimensions. In this chapter, the authors also share the findings of their studies examining the effects of different learning spaces created in different disciplinary fields on learners' academic success in terms of learning styles.

Chapter 9: Creating a Hospitable Space for Learning

This chapter explains the features of hospitable learning space, emphasizing that creating a learning space is not just about the physical arrangement for learning. The importance of the concept of psychological safety in creating a hospitable learning space in experiential learning, the necessity of approaching the views and opinions of others with respect in a democratic environment, and the significance of creating unconditional positive regard are explained. In this context, respect for both other learners and their different life experiences are considered as important conditions of a hospitable learning space. The practical suggestions presented in this chapter provide educators a guide to creating a hospitable learning space.

Chapter 10: Making Space for Conversational Learning

This chapter is about creating space for conversational learning. The authors emphasize that conversation is the fundamental way of experiential learning, and even that the purpose of conversation is to learn. They explain with theoretical and practical knowledge how individual learning cycles merge in the process of speaking and listening in a conversation. In this chapter, the functions of dialectics such as discourse/recourse in the learning cycle in creating conversational learning space and even the functions of periods of silence in a conversation are explained in detail. The authors also provide important insights for educators by explaining the evolution of creating conversational learning spaces through their research since the 1980s. The process of creating conversation-based learning spaces is explained in detail by relating it to concepts such as learning cycle, learning styles, individuality, relationality and status.

Chapter 11: Creating Learner-Centered Learning Spaces

This chapter focuses on creating learner-centered learning spaces. The authors state that subject and teacher-centered education makes students passive and uninterested in learning, and that creating a learner-centered space within the scope of experiential learning is considered vital in solving this kind of problems. The chapter examines learner-centered spaces from a social and emotional perspective, emphasizing that learners often expect the teacher to take responsibility of learning process because of their previous educational experiences. Strategies are put forward to help learners take responsibility for their own learning. In this chapter, the authors provide theoretical and practical information by referring to the theories of scholars who emphasize importance to learner-centered education. In this chapter, it is emphasized that accepting the principles of experiential learning as activities implemented with students rather than activities imposed on them is an important step in becoming an experiential educator, thus offering educators valuable insights.

Chapter 12: Creating Space for Reflective Thinking

This chapter examines the importance of creating space for reflective thinking through the experiential learning approach. In the learning process, it is recommended that educators focus on more comprehensive questions that can have more than one answer and possible explanation, rather than questions with strict two-choice answers. The authors elaborate on the insights and perspectives of the experiential educator with the titles Helping Students Move from Dualism to Multiplicity, Multiplicity to Relativism and Relativism to Commitment. The chapter helps to design what educators can do in their classroom for this purpose by providing concrete examples of the principles of creating a learning space for reflective and critical thinking.

Chapter 13: The Ludic Learning Space

This chapter focuses on the features of ludic learning space based on play and creativity in transforming learning experiences into long-term and meaningful learning. The authors provide detailed explanations from the perspective of many foundational scholars of experiential learning, including Piaget, Dewey and Vygotsky, by referring to their approaches to play as a part of the holistic learning process. The authors introduce the concept of ludic learning space as a concept of a playful learning space where learners can experience deep learning in a free and safe space. The chapter clarifies some of the misconceptions about ludic learning spaces, such as the perception creative playful practices distract from the seriousness of learning. The authors describe the basic principles of a ludic learning space that enables deep learning for learners. This chapter also stresses the impact of ludic learning spaces both on individuals as well as on societal transformation.

Chapter 14: Creating Spaces to Develop and Sustain Deep Learning

This chapter is about creating learning spaces for developing and sustaining deep learning. The authors emphasize

that in order to achieve deep learning, learners need spaces where they can think about complex ideas, develop assumptions, validate their assumptions, and make connections between what they have learned through interdisciplinary approaches and the real world. The chapter elaborates on the necessary conditions for deep learning - such as the creation of learning spaces where students can express their ideas without a fear of being judged and engage in critical thinking activities. Practical strategies for enhancing deep learning such as concept mapping, reflective journals, case studies and discussion are presented in detail.

Part III: The Practice of Experiential Education

The first two parts of the book explain principles of experiential learning and characteristics of experiential learning spaces in detail. Finally, the third part focuses on the implementation of those ideas into real situations, explains how the concepts of experiential learning can be effectively applied and presents the roles and responsibilities of educators in this process with concrete examples. This chapter can be considered as an implementation guide in a sense.

Chapter 15: Curriculum Change through the Application of Experiential Learning Principles and Learning Space Concepts

This chapter focuses on how experiential learning principles and concepts related to the learning space can guide both curriculum development and revision processes. The authors criticize traditional curricula and explain their weaknesses in meeting the varying needs of learners. They explain together with the reasons why experiential learning is an important way to transform effective, meaningful and learner-centered curricula. They examine the critical roles of the experiential learning cycle and learning spaces in curriculum development processes. The chapter also explains how a holistic approach can be applied with experiential learning in this transformation process of curriculum. In addition, concrete solution suggestions for the difficulties that may be encountered in this process are presented. It is emphasized that the transformation of curricula in the context of experiential learning is a continuous process, not a one-time procedure.

Chapter 16: Educator Roles and Educating around the Learning Cycle

In this chapter, different educator roles are explained in detail under the titles Facilitator, Subject Expert, Standard-Setter/Evaluator, and Coaching. The true meaning of being an experiential educator is discussed. The real meaning of being an experiential educator is discussed and clarified with various concrete examples. The authors relate educator roles to the experiential learning cycle and the new 9 learning styles, introduce The Kolb Educator Role Profile (KERP) and explain the benefits of this self-assessment tool, such as enabling educators to become aware of their own educator roles and deliberately make changes in their roles. How successful educators use the different educator roles is explained thorough case studies. It is emphasized that becoming an experiential educator is more than just being a facilitator or matching learning style with teaching style. The challenges faced by educators in their different roles are analyzed in depth. The characteristics of education around the learning cycle are explained in detail.

Chapter 17: Educator Role Best Practices

This last chapter of the book presents examples of good practice regarding the role of educators in experiential learning processes. The chapter includes recommendations, case studies and concrete strategies for each educator role as a guide to practice. The authors analogize educator roles to a painter's preference for one or two colors over others, even though every color is on the palette. They emphasized that awareness of preferred educator roles enhances the ability to expand our repertoire of pedagogical methods and to understand how our own values and understandings influence our teaching. the authors enriched these metaphorical explanations with examples.

Conclusion

David and Alice Kolb's The Experiential Educator: Principles and Practices of Experiential Learning is a revolutionary contribution to the field of education. The book presents the philosophy, principles, fundamental concepts and all other important components of the Experiential Learning Theory from a deep insight, in a comprehensive and holistic manner. This insightful theoretical framework is combined with real practice examples, cases, and practical strategies for individuals on their way to becoming experiential educators, making this book a unique work that integrates theory and practice. Another unique feature of this book is that David

A. and Alice Kolb describe their journey of becoming experiential educators in a sincere, sincere, fluent, understandable, and yet professional language. This book is a valuable study that presents Kolb's experiential learning theory, which is very comprehensive, multidimensional, and based on a deep philosophy, in a holistic way, not only in terms of theory but also in terms of practice. The book clarifies what experiential learning is through case studies, scientific research findings, direct quotations from participants' views, the authors' memories, and also reveals what experiential learning is not by explaining the misunderstood points about the theory. In conclusion, it would not be wrong to say that the book is a manifesto for transformation through experiential learning in education.

Statement of Researcher

Researcher's contribution statement: All aspects of this book review, including the selection, critical analysis, and synthesis of content, were conducted solely by the researcher.
Conflict of interest statement: The author declares no conflicts of interest in this review's preparation, analysis, or writing.
Acknowledgement: The author would like to express her deepest appreciation to David A. and Alice Kolb for their invaluable contributions to experiential learning. Their groundbreaking work continues to inspire educators and researchers by providing a deep foundation for understanding and applying the principles of experiential learning.

Author Biographies

İlke Evin Gencel is a professor and Head of the Curriculum and Instruction Department at İzmir Democracy University, Turkiye. She earned her Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from Dokuz Eylul University and completed her postdoctoral research as a visiting scholar at the College of Education, Florida State University, USA. She also serves as a Member of the Board at the Experiential Training Center, where she contributes to educational projects focusing on youth and adult learning. Prof. Evin Gencel has published over 100 research papers on experiential learning, contemporary teaching methods, teacher education, curriculum development, and instructional design. She has successfully coordinated three Erasmus+ projects and contributed as a researcher, expert, and consultant to numerous international initiatives. With 25 years of teaching experience, she is committed to driving innovation and excellence in education.