


# Chapter 3

## Experiential Learning in Adult Education

**İlknur Bayram**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8109-8051>

*Turkish National Police Academy, Turkey*

### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter explores the foundational contributions of Dewey, Schön, and Kolb to the field of experiential learning, with a focus on their implications for adult education. Dewey's emphasis on experience as the cornerstone of education, Schön's concepts of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, and Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle collectively shape our understanding of how adults learn best. The chapter examines how these theories highlight the importance of integrating real-world experiences into the learning process, encouraging critical reflection, and applying knowledge in practical settings. By engaging in experiential learning, adults take ownership of their educational journey, leading to deeper understanding, enhanced critical thinking, and greater adaptability in diverse professional environments. The discussion also addresses how these approaches foster lifelong learning, motivating adults to continuously develop their skills and knowledge in an ever-evolving world.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Learning cannot occur without experience. In the context of experiential learning, experience is regarded as a sophisticated concept that is defined and interpreted in various ways by different scholars. John Dewey defines experience as the interaction of a person with his or her environment. Learning occurs every time an individual is actively engaged with his or her surroundings which transforms both the individual and the surroundings (Dewey, 1938). Dewey criticizes traditional education

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-5812-2.ch003

because of its authoritarian and rigid nature, emphasizing that it rests mainly on rote memorization. He also critiques progressive education as he thinks it lacks coherence and structure. He is in favor of learning through experience (Sikandar, 2015). Making a distinction between mere experience and educative experience, Dewey asserts that experience alone does not guarantee learning, it needs to satisfy certain criteria to qualify to be educational and meaningful (Hildebrand, 2016). An experience can only be considered as truly educational if it involves continuity and interaction. The concept of continuity of experience put forward by Dewey means every experience affects future experiences, thus creating a continuum of learning. According to Dewey, education is effective only when experiences build on one another in meaningful ways. Interaction, on the other hand, comprises the dynamic relationship between the individual and their environment; between the learner and what is learned (Dewey, 1916).

Donald Schön defines experience as a dynamic interplay of action and reflection, emphasizing that professionals learn from their actions by reflecting both during and after them. In Schön's reflective practice model, doing and thinking complement each other (Visser, 2010). He introduces the concepts of *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action*. According to Schön, experience is a key component of reflective practice, particularly in professional education. In his concept of the reflective practitioner, Schön emphasizes that professionals learn and develop expertise through the process of *reflection-in-action*, where they actively think about and assess their experiences while they are happening. This reflective process allows practitioners to make adjustments and improve their actions in real-time, especially in complex and uncertain situations where standard procedures may not apply. Schön contrasts this with *reflection-on-action*, which occurs after the experience and involves analyzing what happened to inform future practice. He argues that by engaging in both types of reflection, professionals can continuously learn from their experiences, adapt to new challenges, and enhance their skills (Schön, 1983; Schön, 1987).

David Allen Kolb defines experience as the foundation of learning in his Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984). He views learning as a process where knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. He emphasizes that learning is a continuous process grounded in experience. According to Kolb, experience involves a cyclical process that includes four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. This cyclical process allows learners to develop deeper understanding and adaptability by continuously integrating new experiences with prior knowledge. Kolb's model emphasizes that effective learning is achieved when learners engage fully in all stages of this cycle, making experience a crucial element in the acquisition and application of knowledge (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Kolb contends that experience entails both active engagement and reflection, both of which are critical components

24 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: [www.igi-global.com/chapter/experiential-learning-in-adult-education/361635](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/experiential-learning-in-adult-education/361635)

## Related Content

---

### **Institutional Ethnography: A Holistic Approach to Understanding Systems**

Ursula T. Wright and Tonette S. Rocco (2016). *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology* (pp. 27-41).

[www.irma-international.org/article/institutional-ethnography/167779](http://www.irma-international.org/article/institutional-ethnography/167779)

### **Profiling and Supporting Adult Learners**

Chi Zhang and Guangzhi Zheng (2014). *Adult and Continuing Education: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 1575-1598).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/profiling-and-supporting-adult-learners/105329](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/profiling-and-supporting-adult-learners/105329)

### **Linking Behavioral Styles of Leaders to Organizational Success: Using the DISC Model to Grow Behavioral Awareness**

Kimberly A. Gordon, Jill N. Auten, Derek Gordon and Autumn Rook (2019). *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology* (pp. 40-59).

[www.irma-international.org/article/linking-behavioral-styles-of-leaders-to-organizational-success/222748](http://www.irma-international.org/article/linking-behavioral-styles-of-leaders-to-organizational-success/222748)

### **Rethinking the Measurement of Training and Development in the Professions: A Conceptual Model**

Doug Lynch, Chris Thomas, Wendy Green, Michael Gottfried and Matthew Varga (2010). *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology* (pp. 31-48).

[www.irma-international.org/article/rethinking-measurement-training-development-professions/39022](http://www.irma-international.org/article/rethinking-measurement-training-development-professions/39022)

### **Social Networking, Adult Learning Success and Moodle**

Margaret Martinez and Sheila Jagannathan (2010). *Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes* (pp. 68-80).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/social-networking-adult-learning-success/36859](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/social-networking-adult-learning-success/36859)