


# Chapter 6

## Investigating the Relevancy of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle for Second Language Acquisition

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter reviews the relevancy of Kolb's experiential learning cycle to the field of second language acquisition, particularly with respect to linguistic and cultural competence. The chapter begins with an overview of the fundamental principles of Kolb's experiential learning cycle and its place in the educational realm and then moves to an examination of potential applications of the cycle to the acquisition of second language grammar via the PACE model (Adair-Hauck & Donato, 2002a, 2002b) and to the development of students' intercultural competence via Allan's intercultural learning spiral (Allan, 2003). The chapter ends with an exploration of ways in which readers may conceivably implement this information in their own respective contexts.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Ortega (2009) defines second language acquisition (SLA) as “the scholarly field of inquiry that investigates the human capacity to learn languages other than the first, during late childhood, adolescence or adulthood, and once the first language or languages have been acquired” (pp. 1-2). Saville-Troike (2012) explains that SLA “refers both to the study of individuals and groups who are learning a language subsequent to learning their first one as young children, and to the process of learning that language” (p. 2). These scholars point out that second language acquisition involves not only the development of students’ ability to understand and converse in other languages but also the circumstances under which such growth occurs and the optimal conditions for facilitating such learning. This process commonly includes the concurrent advancement of students’ communicative and cultural competencies. Savignon (2002) understands communicative competence as “the ability to use language in a social context [and] to observe sociolinguistic norms of appropriateness” (p. 2), which necessarily consists of “the ability of classroom language learners to interact with other speakers, [and] to make meaning” (p. 3). Thus, communicative competence entails the successful transmission of one’s thoughts to other interlocutors while also competently interpreting messages imparted by others. Canale & Swain (1980) assert that communicative competence includes grammatical competence (knowledge of the linguistic features and structures of the language), sociolinguistic competence (awareness of the conventions and norms of communication in a given speech community, and strategic competence (the ability to compensate for failure to effectively transmit one’s communicative intent); Canale (1983) later added discourse competence to Canale & Swain’s (1980) formulation of communicative competence, which is comprised of one’s dexterity in connecting utterances together both grammatically and logically. In turn, intercultural competence refers to “the awareness of experiencing otherness and the ability to analyze the experience and act upon the insights into self and other which the analysis brings” (Alred et al., 2002, p. 4). In essence, intercultural competence encompasses a person’s aptitude in identifying similarities and differences between other cultures and one’s own, considering essential features and characteristics that are (not necessarily) shared among these cultures, and finally utilizing this information to help them conceptualize the world in new ways.

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