

THIRD EDITION

Experiential Learning

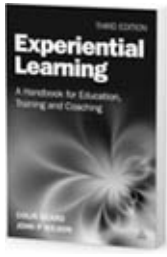
A Handbook for Education,
Training and Coaching

COLIN BEARD
JOHN P WILSON



Experiential

Learning



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A handbook for education, training and coaching

Colin Beard
John P Wilson



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PART ONE

**Experiential
learning:
foundations
and
fundamentals**

“Experience is the child of Thought, and Thought is the child of Action – we cannot learn men from books.

BENJAMIN DISRAELI, 1826

Introduction

If you followed the advice of Benjamin Disraeli’s quotation above, you would not proceed any further than the first page of this book before returning it to the shelf! However, don’t go away, bear with us as we explain how this book will offer a new way of thinking about and organizing the development and delivery of experiential learning.

Disraeli was using his skills as a political orator to polarize the debate about theory and practice and draw attention to the need to think and learn through experience. The argument that ‘we cannot learn men through books’ is an unsustainable one but Disraeli’s underlying message has a kernel of truth. Traditional learning, with the teacher or trainer spouting facts and figures and with pupils or participants regurgitating the information without deeper involvement, is a very ineffective form of learning. A much more effective and long-lasting form of learning is to involve the learner by creating a meaningful learning experience.

This handbook will enable you to see new opportunities to unleash some of the more potent opportunities for learning through experience. In order to free the spirit of learning, whether it be in management education, corporate training, youth development work, therapy, higher education or life coaching, it is necessary to explore in much greater detail the interconnected nature of the learning ‘experience’. We explore the meaning of experiential learning in Chapter 2, but to provide greater clarity from the beginning we present a definition that embraces the notion of a whole person approach to learning, and we embrace thinking derived from different disciplines, including biology, neurophysiology, psychology, and social and environmental sciences. Experiential learning was defined in our second-edition book as a sense-making process of active engagement between the inner world of the person and the outer world of the environment. Here we introduce a balanced, connective approach to learning as:

a sense making process involving significant experiences that, to varying degrees, act as the source of learning. These experiences actively immerse and reflectively engage the inner world of the learner, as a whole person (including physical-bodily, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually) with their intricate ‘outer world’ of the learning environment (including belonging and doing – in places, spaces, within social, cultural, political context etc) to create memorable, rich and effective experiences for and of learning.

(Beard, 2010: 1)

This is of course a very broad and rudimentary definition. Edward Cell in his book *Learning from Experience*, referred to a definition offered by Keeton and Tate way back in 1971. Cell was highlighting the differences between academic learning and experiential learning, and

the definition quoted referred to experiential learning as:

learning in which the learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied. It is contrasted with learning in which the learner only reads about, hears about, talks about, or writes about these realities but never comes into contact with them as part of the learning process.

(Keeton and Tate, 1978, in Cell, 1984: vii)

Interestingly, the Keeton and Tate text was titled *Learning by Experience – what, why and how*. The immersion in, and contact with, the experience is thus perceived as very important. The ‘experience’ takes centre stage: it is the foundation of, and the stimulus for, learning. This is the core argument in much theoretical work on experiential learning. That is why several core dimensions of the experience of learning form the focus of this book.

Although there are no easy answers to the creation of learning experiences, whether they be by deliberate programme design or by emergent opportunity, there are significant areas of knowledge about many of the main ingredients that can be used to create new and innovative learning experiences. In this first chapter we illustrate this with a model, presented initially and for practical understanding in the form of a combination lock, which comprises a series of tumblers each designed to illustrate the almost infinite range of ingredients that can be altered in order to enhance learning. Many participants on our programmes are given six polystyrene cups that fit together and rotate to form a copy of the combination lock model. Using this visual metaphor of a combination lock with six tumblers, the potential number of learning permutations is more than 15 million and it can be further expanded to an almost infinite number. Although we are on our guard to avoid simplistic mechanistic thinking, we do believe it is robust material and we discuss the theoretical basis of our thinking, as well as offering many practical examples to illustrate the value of learning from experience. Learning specialists are required to understand the very complex processes involved in experiential learning, and that is where this model can help unpick some of the complexity. We have also used other visual interpretations of the model to aid initial understanding and memory retention: a tennis court in Malaysia, where the net represented the senses, large pebbles on a beach in Greece, and a large yellow circle that was found painted on concrete flooring on Pulau Ubin off the coast of Singapore where Outward Bound is based. The yellow circle was used as the sensory interface between the inner and outer worlds and we added coloured plastic hoops to facilitate discussion of other key dimensions involved in experiential learning.

Experience, in its many guises, pervades all forms of learning; however, its value is frequently not recognized or is even disregarded. Active engagement is one of the basic tenets of experiential learning: experiential learning undoubtedly involves the ‘whole person’, through thoughts, feelings and physical activity. The recognition of this ‘whole environment’, both internally and externally, is important. Experiential learning can take on many appearances in life, such as recreational or leisure activities, exhilarating journeys or adventure experimentation or play. It can also take the form of painful events. Indeed Mälkki (2011) demonstrates how transformation often results from powerful negative emotional experiences that take us from our *comfort zone* into *edge emotions*. Heron (2000: 316), in writing about the facilitation of learning using ‘whole person’ approaches suggests we recognize that the perfect life web is never complete, but often torn and damaged. People, he said, were engaging in a form of action enquiry throughout their everyday life: ‘This consciousness-in-action involves intentionally, both participatory and individuating functions: feeling and emotion, intuition and

imagery, reflection and discrimination, intention and action.'

This handbook explores both the theory and practice of experiential learning. It offers an exciting range of illustrative case material from around the world in an attempt to 'ground' the contribution to contemporary theory. It provides numerous signposts leading to other sources to draw upon, and we, like other professionals, have ventured into, borrowed and learnt from many other disciplines in order to facilitate learning and change. We include ideas and integrating concepts from fields such as psychotherapy, psychology, education and training, people development, adventure and leisure. The book suggests numerous ways to work with human emotional intelligence (EQ) and sensory intelligence (SI), to improve deeper thinking and learning. We offer methods that help people to see and understand things as if for the first time even though they may have undergone the experience before. We also offer experiential techniques that revisit past experiences and allow learners to view them in a new light: the methods we call retrospective learning. Moving from the past to the present, we consider methods to improve immediate learning, which we call concurrent learning. Finally, we investigate the possibilities of learning through imagination and projecting ideas into the future we call this prospective learning.

The book offers techniques that help learners make sense of their experience, as well as methods to develop and practise new behaviours. The techniques include mood setting, drama, creative writing, art, meditation, environmental modification and routine rituals. Much more detailed accounts covering over 30 practical experiences are found in the sister book *The Experiential Learning Toolkit* (Beard, 2010). We seek to help you as a coach, developer, educator or trainer, to focus on new ideas and we explore ways to improve professional practice and ethical responsibility through self-monitoring and feedback techniques. Many of the theories and practical methods presented in this book apply equally to providers and learners; indeed as practitioners, we too are learners, and good practice emanates from our ability to learn from our own experiences.

In building the model called the learning combination lock, we first explore simple dichotomies and the notion of balance in learning activities. In rejecting the classical dualism we call for balance: of energy–tension, challenge–support, task–process, male–female, indoor–outdoor, natural–artificial environments and real–simulated activities. These themes illustrate some of the key factors that present countless opportunities in the design of experiential learning.

We develop many simple models that take the form of waves or circles, and these are important in our thinking throughout the book. Waves of energy underpin the daily experience and these waves of activity influence the basis of experiential programmes. We nurture and prepare people, energize and engage people, help to support, provide for or create the experience and then encourage relaxation. There are surface waves and deeper ones, short ones and long ones.

A novel can be likened to an ocean. The little waves we see lapping the shore are in fact carried on the waves that are nine ordinary waves long. These waves are themselves carried by waves that carry nine of them and these larger waves are similar carried by waves that carry nine of them. Some waves in the ocean are miles long.

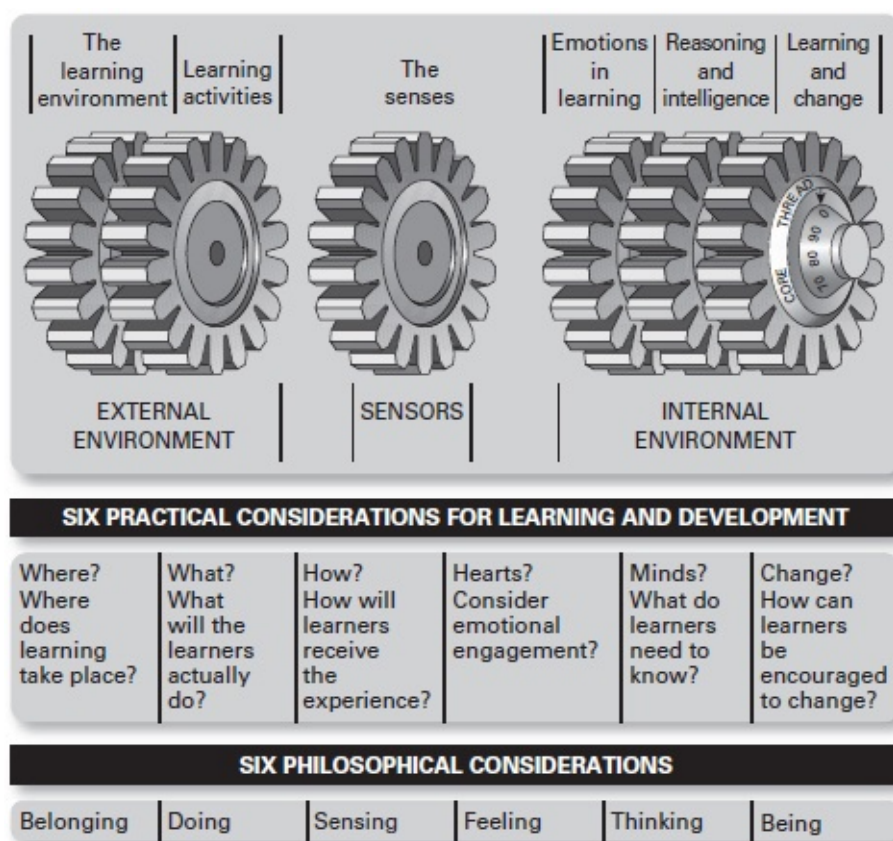
(Buzan, 2000: 20)

So let us now look at the learning combination lock as a new conceptual framework (see Figure 1.1).

For the first time ever, to our knowledge, all the core ingredients of the learning equation have

been brought together in the learning combination lock. This model was initially theoretical grounded in a concept of cognitive processing, including contemporary theories of embodied cognition (linked with bodily learning) and embedded cognition (linked to the environment). Both are discussed in more detail later in the book. In the past, only some of the elements have been discussed in the literature, and then often in isolation, which therefore gives only a partial picture of human learning. The chapters that follow this one will address in sequence the tumblers (as key dimensions of learning) that make up the learning combination lock; however, we will briefly discuss each of these main categories here in order to provide an overview that will enable you to dip in and out of the book in order to find strategies and answers that apply to the circumstances in which you find yourself.

FIGURE 1.1 A simple diagnostic tool – the learning combination lock



The learning combination lock in its elementary sense is based on the notion that the person interacts with the external environment through the senses. It is presented as a visual metaphor of six tumblers that represent the complexity of the many possible experiential choices. Beginning on the left of the learning combination lock, the first tumbler involves the question *where, and with whom?* The environment consists of the people, place and space in which learning takes place, providing the location, external stimuli and ambience for the experience. The next tumbler represents the *what* of the experience; *what is it that people are going to do?* Many possible learning activities present themselves in practice; for example, a journey or challenge. The next group of tumblers are concerned with the *how*. How is the learning actually received? This tumbler represents the senses through which we receive the various forms of stimuli. The fourth tumbler involves engaging the emotions (*heart*) where we perceive, interpret

and emotionally respond to the stimuli from the external environment; in other words v internalize the external learning experience. The fifth tumbler focuses on the scope and form intelligence (*mind*). The final tumbler concerns change and transformation. Each of these s tumblers should inform practice; choices, and selection of other tumbler options, so as to avoid random, one-armed bandit approach to selecting the possible components for experiential activities for learning.

As you read through the book, you may well identify new elements to add to the contents individual tumblers, and perhaps even add completely new categories of tumblers. We strongly encourage you to create your own personalized learning combination lock to answer and respond to your own obstacles and challenges.

The tumblers: representing the core dimensions of learning

Tumbler 1

The learning environment: *where and with whom?*

The learning environment of places and people can strongly influence the experience. Space and place and the spatial ecology involved in the experience of learning are relatively unexplored territory in most other texts on experiential learning. Learning is literally and metaphorical breaking out of the traditional venues. The redesign of learning spaces, and the understanding of the milieu of spaces best suited for different aspects of a learning experience, is contributing to the emergence of a new pedagogy of space. The learning experience is related to and dependent on environmental features. For example, involving the participants in an orienteering or treasure-hunt exercise over windswept moorland in winter will produce a very different atmosphere from one that involves people sitting around a log fire, on a warm beach watching the sun setting. Similarly, learning about boiler-making through a long bullet-point screen presentation in a hotel boardroom layout will be a very different experience from reading about organizational development sitting by a log fire with coffee and croissants by your side. Outdoors, the primal elements of earth, air, fire and water may also be incorporated within the learning activity to help learners explore within themselves, discover new things and create personal enlightenment. Elements, such as darkness and silence, tend to be less commonly used within education, training and development exercises but can prove to be very powerful channels to encourage learning. People construct learning together and this is an important consideration for this first tumbler. Many exciting dimensions of this tumbler in the model are explored in Chapter 4.

Tumbler 2

Learning activities: *what* experiences will people have, what are they going to actually do?

What might people do in order to learn? Doing does not necessarily mean physically active! In the design of deliberate indoor and outdoor learning activities there appears to always be a number of basic ingredients in which the participants are involved. These normally have some

aspect of *physical, emotional* and *intellectual* involvement that may provide a challenge that engages the whole person: eg designing a website, tall ship sailing, the building of a raft, or the operation of a virtual organization. Sometimes the activity involves a *journey*, which may be geographical, imaginary, chronological or even the life cycle of a company. Most, if not all activities involve *obstacles* and *problems* that must be overcome by the participants. These may be *real* or *imaginary*, and require those involved to operate within an agreed set of *rules*. New obstacles may be introduced, rules altered and *targets* changed depending upon the *learning aims and objectives*. But these apply more to planned learning experiences, not the emergent or opportunistic ones. These basic ingredients and other more emergent learning experiences are discussed and explored in detail in Chapter 5. The degree to which a learning activity is real or perceived as real, and the extent to which this reality is manipulated by educators or facilitators will be a key consideration for the design and delivery of planned experiential learning. The degree of reality is an important theoretical and practical consideration in learner engagement and it is also explored in depth in Chapter 5. Perceptions of reality will apply to many dimensions of the experience, including the learning process, the activities provided and the location in which they take place. So-called 'real' projects or activities might include environmental or community work.

Tumbler 3

The senses: *how* will the experience be received initially through the senses?

Sensory Intelligence (SI) is particularly important in experiential learning. The senses, including bodily senses, are pivotal in the communicating relationship between our inner and outer world experiences. The senses directly communicate with our brains: the senses connect rapidly with what is said to be our primitive 'feeling brain', and more slowly to our 'thinking brain'. The more senses we use in an activity the more memorable the learning experience will become because it increases the neural connections in our brains and therefore will be more accessible. Habituation is a problem for learning: often the skilled application of *sensory variation* in the learning experience increases greatly the levels of engagement and learning. The optimization of sensual learning and the nature of sensory intelligence (SI) and sensory awareness are discussed in Chapter 6.

Tumbler 4

The emotions: *hearts* – how will the emotional self be engaged?

All experiences have an emotional fast response – it cannot be avoided as we shall highlight in this book. In any learning experience emotions can act as the gatekeeper: the emotions are fast wired to the brain as part of our 'fast, System 1' mode of thinking (see Kahneman, 2011). Positive and negative emotions are pervasive in the roller-coaster events of life, yet so often aspects of society seek to disinfect our lives from the emotional realities. We cannot totally avoid bringing emotional baggage into our everyday experiences, and a range of emotions continually surface as any learning experience progresses. Much theoretical and practical literature now exists that focuses on working with human emotional experiences. Goleman (1996), in his book *Emotional*

Intelligence, argues that, although intelligence or IQ is important, it is emotional intelligence (EQ) that is more likely to determine a person's achievements in life. Chapter 7 will investigate the influence of emotions on the learning experience, and explore techniques to work with and surface the *feeling* dimension of the self.

Tumbler 5

Intelligence: *mind* – what do people need to know?

In the section above we mentioned the concept of emotional intelligence, which, to a considerable extent, developed from the work of Howard Gardner. Gardner's (1983) book *Frames of Mind* proposed that there were several forms of intelligence including: linguistic/mathematical/scientific; visual/spatial; musical; bodily/physical/kinaesthetic; interpersonal; and intra-personal. He maintained that there were other forms of intelligence. Significantly, he argued that we should spend less time ranking children and more time helping them to identify and cultivate their natural competencies and life gifts. There are, he argued, hundreds of ways to succeed, and many different abilities that will help people get there (Gardner, 1986). Another form of intelligence is that of spiritual intelligence (SQ). Zohar and Marshall (2001: 9) suggest that Gardner's forms of intelligence are basically composed of IQ, EQ and SQ, and that SQ is 'an internal, innate ability of the human brain and psyche, drawing its deepest resources from the heart of the universe... Spiritual intelligence is the soul's intelligence. It is the intelligence with which we heal ourselves and with which we make ourselves whole. This tumbler, looking at notions of knowledge, knowing, intelligence and higher forms of learning, including wisdom, will be explored in Chapter 8.

Tumbler 6

Learning and change – developing *change* in the self, and our being state?

Some of us learn better in the morning, others in the dark hours of the night, and if we are aware of our preferences we tend to use this insight to plan how to organize our learning. In effect, this is personal learning theory and it can be very influential on our behaviour. More general theories of learning have developed over the millennia, and a vast array now exist that would require several volumes in order to give justice to their importance in influencing learning strategies. The three main types are behaviourist, cognitivist and humanist, and these are included in a table in Chapter 9, which identifies and briefly describes the main aspects of key learning theories. One of the main theories that we discuss is Kolb's learning cycle, which led to Honey and Mumford's (1992) learning styles inventory, which focused attention on the manner in which people learn; ie activist, pragmatist, theorist and reflector. There are also numerous other theories about the manner in which people learn. Three of these – retrospective, concurrent and prospective learning – are developed and discussed in Chapter 2. In addition, action learning, developed by Revans, and reflective practice (Argyris and Schön) are brought together in Chapter 9 to illustrate the practical value of taking time out from busy schedules to think and reflect about work patterns and behaviour and thus lead to improvements in performance.

An overview of the chapters

Few books other than novels are designed to be read from cover to cover, and this book is based on the pick-and-mix principle. You will have your own particular requirements and should therefore, dip in and out to select the areas that have most value to yourself. The book is in three parts: the first part introduces and defines experiential learning and the role of the coach, facilitator and educator. The second part of the book has a chapter for each of the six tumblers of the model; ie chapters devoted to *belonging, doing, sensing, feeling, knowing, and being*. The final part of the book considers experiential learning and the future.

Below we provide a brief description of each of the chapters, to help guide you through the book and to support your personal learning and topic investigations.

Chapter 2: Exploring experiential learning

Experiential learning, while superficially a relatively simple concept, becomes more complex as we probe the subject more deeply. Through this investigation the various dimensions of experience are revealed, and one of the most fundamental is that experience can be considered as a synonym for learning. We look at how to create positive learning environments and also how even negative experiences can have a powerful impact on learning. We explore the core definitions of experiential learning and the distinction between formal learning and experiential learning. A number of the basic models of learning are provided to illustrate how experiential learning has evolved, and we also consider experiential learning from the perspectives of the past, present and future. Finally, to provide balance, we critique the notion of experiential learning and Kolb's learning cycle.

Chapter 3: Coaching and facilitation, good practice and ethics

At the start of the chapter we explore what is meant by good practice for people involved in designing and providing experiences for learning and we take a close look at the process of facilitation, training and coaching and some of the responsibilities within the professional domain. Real codes of practice are presented for scrutiny, and we examine the vast range of ethical dilemmas that face experiential providers. In so doing we create a hierarchy of responsibility involving individual, organizational, professional and governmental roles. We offer case studies addressing incompetence, bad behaviour and lack of awareness, and pose ethical questions such as, 'What would you do in this situation?' We explore the ethics of emotional engineering as well as the provision of emotional scenarios. Last, we look at principled ethics and virtue ethics, and offer a step-by-step approach to the resolution of ethical dilemmas. We also guide you to further reading that presents even more case material on ethical dilemmas for discussion.

The next section of the book has chapters covering each of the six dimensions of the Combination Lock Model.

Chapter 4: Learning environments: spaces and places

The belonging dimension

Experiential learning can take place indoors or outdoors, and in natural or artificially created environments. Learning is also about interacting with other people, even reaching out into communities, and this chapter explores people, and the more-than-human world of places and spaces for learning. We examine the empathetic and combative use of space and location for experiential learning and show how the design and use of artificial and natural learning environments can maximize learning. Sheds, tall ships, school classrooms, artificial caves, sky slopes, climbing walls, concrete white-water rafting courses and many other places are offered as illustrative case examples. A greater understanding of the rich and varied spatial ecology is emerging: many different spaces are being utilized for the many different functions involved in the experience of learning.

Chapter 5: Experiential learning activities

The doing dimension

Doing what? Doing less or more? This chapter guides you through a range of design ideas for particular forms of planned experiential learning. We recognize that much learning occurs in an unplanned way, and that outcomes are often unanticipated. The chapter explores what it is that people 'do' in order to learn. By systematically analysing many experiential learning activities we have created a basic design typology or checklist. Each of the 17 elements of the typology is covered, and a very extensive range of practical examples and case studies are provided. The chapter examines stories and journeys, planned and unplanned learning, real versus simulated learning, the use of objects to help or to act as obstacles, sequencing and pacing, and the degree of challenge and support. The main theme of this chapter is that there are many new and emerging trends that provide endless possibilities for experiential providers to enhance the delivery of any experience for educational, training or developmental purposes. In this chapter we also consider the way in which the degree of 'reality' can be altered to benefit learning. Learner perceptions of reality can be applied to many aspects of experiential learning, including the learning process itself, the perceived reality of the activities and the perceived reality of the location in which the experience takes place. We show examples where reality can be manipulated as a key consideration in the design and delivery of experiential learning, including the alteration of elements of realness in a negotiating training programme, as well as the alteration of reality in play, drama, sculpture, art and fantasy.

Chapter 6: Sensory experience and sensory intelligence

The sensing dimension

Educators, facilitators and coaches acknowledge that the senses are the means through which information or stimuli reach our bodies and brains – they are the conduits which connect the outer world with the inner world experience and the means by which we communicate in its raw sense. This chapter acknowledges that the more senses that are used during experiential learning the stronger the possibility that learning will be deeper. For this reason, the various senses are considered one by one and strategies for enhancing and enriching them are addressed. The chapter also recognizes that the senses can be overwhelmed by data and we provide advice on the benefits of solitude or silence, or by reducing sensory input through, for example, the use

blindfolds.

But it is not as simple as that: the senses can be viewed as basic data, or profoundly important for learning. In compassionate communication (Rosenberg, 2003) and in other complex communication dynamics, learning to develop pure observation skills without emotion judging means developing a strong sensory awareness focus. Excessive feeling and thinking are to some extent suspended. In this chapter we also offer many practical examples where the senses can be used to enhance learning, including activities that awaken the senses, as well as ideas for sensory enhancement and reduction, sensory stepping, solitude, the use of masks, and the applications of sensory work to higher mind states, for working with people with learning difficulties, and for therapeutic work. Sensory data significantly influence the learning experience and there is a need for more research into sensory intelligence for learning.

Chapter 7: Experience and emotions

The feeling dimension

Emotional experiences and emotional intelligence underpin learning, yet many educators and trainers have only recently given more attention to emotional capability. Emotional intelligence is at the core of all success according to Goleman. Emotions are played out in the theatre of the body, and experiential learning will always have an emotional dynamic as part of the experience. This chapter begins with an examination of how emotions and moods underpin experiential learning. The concept of emotional intelligence is examined and set in context with other types of intelligence. The chapter examines the nature of emotional waves, including the troughs, with balance as a central theme: different waves, different sizes and different frequencies all create the essential roller coasters that form the emotional self. Emotions also form the roots of our identity, and we examine the role of emotional blocks to learning such as fear and risk taking. The positive and negative aspects of emotional engineering are also considered. In this chapter the learning combination lock shows how the senses form the basic conduit for an external experience to be translated into an internal stimulation. The stimulation of the senses creates a parallel affective response, one that is a powerful determinant of subsequent learning. Helping people to be conscious of this emotional experience can allow people to manage and intensify their own learning. The chapter offers ways to read and work with key emotional signals and to understand the emotional nature of unfulfilled need within conflict. We suggest methods to access the roots of emotion and ways to surface feelings and challenge emotions, and we further explore how humour, metaphors, trilogies and storytelling can be used to access and influence the emotional connection to learning. Helping learners to sense, surface and express both positive and negative feelings rather than to deny or censor them requires great skill and care in group work. It enables the colour and richness of the feelings of learners to be expressed and considered in a controlled way so as to maximize learners' understanding of the learning processes.

Chapter 8: Experience, knowing and intelligence

The knowing dimension

Which is best: thinking slowly or thinking fast, thinking superficially or thinking with depth

thinking too little or thinking too much? How important is the human body in the process of thinking? We address many of these core issues in this chapter. We explore the historical period when computational processing by the brain was the dominant view of human learning, and we consider new developments. Howard Gardner's book *Frames of Mind* drew attention to the validity and importance of multiple intelligences (MI), eg musical, linguistic. This chapter considers the range of intelligences, including the difficult areas of spiritual intelligence, naturalistic intelligence, and creative intelligence. Each of the three intelligences – spiritual, naturalistic and creative – is theoretically discussed and descriptions of skills are listed. As with the rest of the book, there are frequent illustrations of practical examples that link theory and practice, thus applying the essence of experiential learning.

Chapter 9: Experience, learning and change

The being dimension

To select the most appropriate elements from each of the tumblers in the learning combination lock requires that we have an understanding of the basic theories of learning. The final tumbler provides a brief description of the main theories, all of which are linked through the notion of experience. The fundamental message of this book is the importance of linking action with thought or reflection. This is a key element in the work of Kolb (1984) and is equally seen in Revans' (1982) action learning. This chapter demonstrates how action learning can be used within organizations to improve performance for individuals and groups. It also investigates the strategies employed in reflective practice (Schön, 1983), which are increasingly being used to develop the performance of people involved in professional practice. Practical case studies are used to illustrate the value of encouraging effective learning through practice and theory.

The final section of the book contains a single closing chapter.

Chapter 10: Imagining and experiencing the future

It is not only through considering past and present experiences that we can learn. It is also possible to imagine multiple futures and rehearse alternative scenarios in our minds. This gives us the possibility to minimize the potential for failure and increase the chance of success. Thinking about future possibilities tends to develop the neural connections in the brain and further increase the likelihood of success. Furthermore, we look at how the conscious part of our brains can interfere with the subconscious to undermine our performance, and use the game of tennis as an example.

To find that point, that reason for our doing and our being, it helps to build on three senses – a sense of continuity, a sense of connection and a sense of direction. Without these senses we can feel disoriented, adrift and rudderless... We shall need all the help we can find to recognise our place and role in it. These senses are the best antidote I know to the feelings of impotence which rapid change induces in us all.

(Handy, 1994: 23)

Conclusion

This handbook, in linking theory and practice, offers practical tools that address the main factors to consider when developing and delivering learning experiences, whether it be for yourself, for

employees, youth groups, schoolchildren, or indeed for anyone who wishes to learn in a way that engages the self as a whole person. Experiences for learning can of course occur anywhere outdoors, within classrooms, training rooms, hotels or residential centres. Also, much learning will occur in ways that were not planned.

As we develop many core principles throughout the book for each of the dimensions of experiential learning (tumblers), it becomes clear that the number of permutations for designing or creating learning experiences is almost limitless. While we present you with some of the main concepts, we also strongly encourage you to add to the learning combination lock model, or to develop your own personal learning models as experience develops through practice. We wish you every success with this process and we hope this book is a small contribution towards helping you to find new connections, and a new direction for experiential learning.

“The only source of knowledge is experience.” ALBERT EINSTEIN

Introduction

Learning from experience is one of the most fundamental and natural means of learning available to everyone. It need not be expensive, nor does it require vast amounts of technological hardware and software to support the learning process. Instead, in the majority of cases, all that requires is the opportunity to reflect and think, either alone or in the company of other people. This natural form of learning has become increasingly popular whether it operates at the individual, group, organizational or societal levels and for this reason it deserves close examination.

All too often theories of learning, education, training and development are produced in isolation from one another and thus there is no overall coherence. The great strength of experiential learning is that it provides an underpinning philosophy that acts as a thread joining many of the learning theories together in a more unified whole. Yet, this philosophy, which appears relatively straightforward, is in actual fact rather complex and forces us to consider the nature of who we are and what we mean by experience.

In this chapter we will investigate experience in more detail and we encourage you to relate what you read to your own personal experiences so that your learning becomes deeper and more applicable. The more we understand what experiential learning is the more it can be harnessed to enhance learning opportunities and so a considerable focus will be on exploring what is meant by experiential learning and providing a definition. It will also examine when learning from experience does not always happen and some of its limitations.

Experiential learning’s expanding horizons

The impact of David Kolb’s (1984) book *Experiential Learning: Experience as the source of learning and development* has been quite extraordinary and far-reaching. An *Experiential Learning Theory* bibliography assembled by Kolb *et al* (2001) contained 1,004 entries across a range of disciplines: management (207); education (430); information science (104); psychology (101); medicine (72); nursing (63); accounting (22); and law (5). The bibliography was subsequently updated (Kolb and Kolb, 2008a, 2008b) and the original figure had expanded to 2,453 entries (Kolb and Kolb, 2009).

It is evident that the application of experiential learning is growing and is being applied in a breadth of subjects and locations including education and other occupational sectors. The widespread use illustrates the value and benefits that are perceived to accrue from its use and in some professional areas, such as medicine, it is the foundation of the learning philosophy. Dunn and Chaput de Saintonge (1997: 25) state:

Medical education in the UK differs from that in many other European countries in its emphasis on clinical experience as a means of learning... Experiential learning is therefore at the centre of the education of the pre-registration house officer.

Experiential learning is also commonly utilized in work-related learning, which, according to Smith and Betts (2000: 591), can be divided into three main forms which are interrelated:

- Learning *about* work which is *informational*;
- Learning *at* work which is *locational*;
- Learning *through* work that is *experiential*.

The experience society

And, it is not just at the individual and occupational levels that experience has become important. The concept of the experience society was largely introduced by Schultz (1992) in *D. Erlebnissesellschaft*, and Pine and Gilmore's (2011) *The Experience Economy*.

Pine and Gilmore (2011) contend that societies have progressed through a number of stages, agricultural, industrial, service, knowledge, and are now predominantly experience economies. They also argue that although the other economic factors are still present the experience economy is the main active force.

Although they briefly mention the importance of experience in educational settings, the arguments presented by Pine and Gilmore are predominantly economic ones. They emphasize the financial benefits and state:

Relying on the manufacturing of goods and the delivery of services remains the mindset of too many executives (and politicians), prohibiting the shift to more vibrant enterprise offering experiences (and thus more robust national economies). Let us be clear: goods and services are no longer enough to foster economic growth, create new jobs, and maintain economic prosperity. To realise revenue growth and increased employment, the staging of experiences must be pursued as a distinct form of economic output. Indeed, in a world saturated with largely undifferentiated goods and services the greatest opportunity for value creation resides in staging experiences.

(Pine and Gilmore, 2011: i)

The importance of experience

A few years ago I was driving across the high-level Pennine hills on the M62, the UK's main west-east highway, when there was a sudden torrential downpour. The rain was so heavy that it was very difficult to see through the windscreen and so I slowed down by gently applying the brakes. As I put my foot on the brake pedal I noticed that I slid sideways a little and then realized that I had been aquaplaning. In effect, my tyres were not in proper contact with the road but had a layer of water underneath them, thus reducing the tyre's grip with the road's surface and increasing the danger due to an increased risk of skidding uncontrollably. Gently, I pulled over to the slow lane together with many other careful and cautious drivers.

Yet, as I cautiously drove along the motorway in the dreadful conditions I noticed that there were still motorists who were racing along in the fast lane seemingly oblivious to the dangers they were in. Later, on arriving at my destination, I described their suicidal tendencies to a colleague and commented that I couldn't understand this behaviour that brought danger to other road users and not just themselves. The colleague responded, 'You knew what the true road conditions were like, the drivers who were racing along in the fast lane probably had no experience of the dangers they were playing with.'

Although having experience can be valuable, it also can be a two-edged sword. People who

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