Chapter Seven Experience and Learning

Aaron, a psychotherapist with twenty years of experience, attends a workshop concerning new treatments for depression. Aaron has treated many clients with this disorder and wants to remain abreast of new treatment modalities. The workshop instructor, Dr. K., asks participants to introduce themselves, explain their reasons for being at the workshop, and tell what they want to learn. Dr. K. indicates that he wants to know participants' experiences treating people with depression and provides activities and opportunities for workshop attendees to interact and learn from each other. Dr. K. tailors the workshop to the needs of the participants. On the workshop evaluation, Aaron writes, "The interaction with peers was the most beneficial part of the workshop. Dr. K.'s willingness to value our experiences made this a successful workshop." Aaron's colleague Gloria attends a different workshop on the same subject. Participants listen to lectures and briefly interact with the presenter in a question-and-answer session at the end of the workshop. Gloria's experiences are never solicited. Her workshop evaluation reads, "I could have read this information in a book. The workshop was a waste of time." The difference between the two workshops was Dr. K.'s recognition that learners have a vast array of experiences that can be used for learning.

We learn from experience in a variety of ways. As in the vignette, Aaron learned as the result of a direct embodied experience that engaged him mentally, physically, and emotionally in the moment. Other dimensions of experience include learning from a simulated experience or reliving a past experience. In addition, people may make sense of their experience through collaboration with others in a community (sometimes referred to as a community of practice)

or through introspective experiences such as meditation or dreaming (**Fenwick, 2003**).

In addition to there being different dimensions to experiential learning, there are different theoretical conceptualizations of this type of learning. **Fenwick (2003)** proposes five perspectives that "raise important questions about the nature of experience" (p. 38): (1) reflecting on concrete experience (constructivist theory of learning); (2) participating in a community of practice (situative theory of learning); (3) getting in touch with unconscious desires and fears (psychoanalytic theory of learning); (4) resisting dominant social norms of experience (critical cultural theories); and (5) exploring ecological relationships between cognition and environment (complexity theories applied to learning). The constructivist approach focuses on "reflection on experience" (**Fenwick, 2003**, p. 22). People have concrete experiences; they reflect on them and construct new knowledge as a result of these reflections. In this view, the focus is on the learners' meaning-making processes as the result of an experience.

Unlike the constructivist paradigm, which emphasizes reflection on experience, the situative theory posits that knowing is intertwined with doing. **Fenwick (2003)** states, "Learning is rooted in the situation in which the person participates, not in the head of that person as intellectual concepts produced by reflection" (p. 25). Participation in a community of practice is the goal of this perspective. Fenwick continues, "The outcome of experiential learning as participation is that the *community* refines its practices, develops new ones, or discards and changes practices that are harmful or dysfunctional" (p. 27; italics in original).

The psychoanalytic perspective sees our unconscious as interfering with our conscious experiences. As a result, we must work through psychic conflicts to learn (**Fenwick, 2003**). This approach recognizes the complex role of desire in our learning. We may have conflicting desires in a learning situation that affect our learning experience (**Fenwick, 2001**). The fourth lens through which experiential learning is viewed, the critical cultural perspective, "seeks to transform existing social orders, by critically questioning and resisting dominant norms of experience" (**Fenwick, 2003**, p. 38). Last, the complexity theory says learning is produced through interaction "among consciousness, identity, action and

interaction, objects and structural dynamics of complex systems" (p. 37). In this view, the focus is not on the experience itself but on the "*relationships* binding them [the dynamics] together in complex systems" (**Fenwick, 2003**, p. 37; italics in original).

Numerous adult educators have underscored the fundamental role that experience plays in learning in adulthood. For example, Lindeman (1961, p. 6) states that "the resource of highest value in adult education is the learner's experience." Experience then becomes "the adult learner's living textbook ... already there waiting to be appropriated" (p. 7). Similarly, one of the primary assumptions underlying Knowles's (1989, p. 58) work on andragogy is that "[a]dults come into an educational activity with both a greater volume and a different quality of experience from youths." As adults live longer they accumulate both a greater volume and range of experiences. Knowles also observes that adults tend to define themselves by their experiences, describing themselves as parents, spouses, workers, volunteers, community activists, and so on. **Kolb (1984)** states, "Learning is a continuous process grounded in experience. Knowledge is continuously derived and tested out in the experiences of the learner" (p. 27). Kolb notes that these experiences can be personal (for example, the experience of happiness) or objective/environmental (for example, years of experience at a place of employment).

Although adult educators have accepted the connection between experience and learning, we are still learning about this connection and how to use it most effectively in both formal and nonformal learning situations. A number of questions puzzle us: What leads to learning from experience? Is the context in which the experience happens important? Are there ways we can design learning episodes to capture this experiential component best? In this chapter we explore responses to these and other important questions related to experience and learning. First, we briefly discuss John Dewey's view of experience and learning. Next, we delineate several models of experiential learning. Third, we explore educators' purposes, roles, and learning designs for experiential learning and delve into four methods associated with experiential learning: reflective practice, situated cognition, cognitive apprenticeships, and anchored instruction. Last, we detail criticisms and pedagogical debates in the experiential learning literature.

Learning from Life Experiences

John **Dewey (1938)**, in his classic volume *Experience and Education,* made some of the most thoughtful observations about the connections between life experiences and learning. More specifically, Dewey postulated that "all genuine education comes about through experience" (p. 13). However, this "does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative" (p. 13). In fact, some experiences "mis-educate," in that they actually "distort growth ... narrow the field of further experiences ... [and place people] in a groove or rut" (p. 13). Judging whether experiences actually produce learning can be difficult because "every experience is a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into" (p. 31). For example, being diagnosed as HIV-positive may make some people so bitter and angry that any positive or growth-enhancing learning from that life change is almost impossible. In contrast, others become highly active inquirers and participants in maintaining their health as well as become involved in caring for those with full-blown AIDS.

For learning to happen through experience, Dewey (1938, p. 27) argued that the experience must exhibit the two major principles of continuity and interaction: "The principle of the continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after." In other words, experiences that provide learning are never just isolated events in time. Rather, learners must connect what they have learned from current experiences to those in the past as well as see possible future implications. For example, we can assume that people who are enjoying their retirement have been able to connect their past experiences to those of the present. Glennie, a retired salesperson, who may have always traveled vicariously through the Sunday paper's travel section, has bought a small travel trailer and now spends six months of the year exploring new places.

The second principle, that of interaction, posits that "an experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment" (**Dewey, 1938**, p. 41). Going back to the example of Glennie, she is learning about new places firsthand because she now has the time and means to visit them. Through her travels,

she has developed an interest in Native American culture and so seeks out new tribal groups to explore. As illustrated through Glennie's interest in Native American culture, the two principles of continuity and interaction are always interconnected and work together to provide the basis for experiential learning. What Glennie has learned in visiting one reservation "becomes an instrument of understanding" for attending the next tribal celebration with a different group of Native Americans. In translating Dewey's ideas into educational practice, what is key is how important the situation becomes in promoting learning. Developing a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere, providing the right materials, and linking these materials to learners' past and future experiences are critical in assisting adults to learn from their experiences.

While **Dewey (1938)** explored how people learned from life experiences, **Kolb and Kolb (2005)** went one step further. They examined the works of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Carl Jung, and Carl Rogers, among others, and they compiled six general propositions of experiential learning theory. First, "learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes" (p. 194). Second, "learning is relearning" (p. 194). Students' ideas must be drawn out, discussed, and refined. Next, learning requires a resolution of "dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world"; that is, learners must move between "opposing modes of reflection and action and feeling and thinking" (p. 194). Fourth, learning is holistic. Fifth, learning involves interactions between the learner and the environment. Last, learning is constructivist in nature. These propositions are evident in some of the models of experiential learning that are discussed in the next section.

Models of Experiential Learning

Clearly, people learn from experience. However, scholars' perceptions of *how* people learn differ depending upon their theoretical orientation. **Kolb's (1984)** and **Jarvis's (1987)** models arise from the constructivist paradigm, while **Boud and Walker (1991)** and Usher, Bryant, and Johnson's (1997) models are situative in nature. Although the psychoanalytic, critical, and complexity approaches to experiential learning proposed by **Fenwick (2003)** do not have models per se, their theoretical underpinnings show us how people learn.

Kolb (1984), building primarily on the work of Dewey, Piaget, and Lewin, conceptualized that learning from experience requires four different kinds of abilities: (1) an openness and willingness to involve oneself in new experiences (concrete experience); (2) observational and reflective skills so these new experiences can be viewed from a variety of perspectives (reflective observation); (3) analytical abilities so integrative ideas and concepts can be created from their observations (abstract conceptualization); and (4) decision-making and problem-solving skills so these new ideas and concepts can be used in actual practice (active experimentation). Kolb pictured these capabilities as interrelated phases within a cyclical process, starting with the concrete experience and then moving through reflective observation and abstract conceptualization to active experimentation. Whatever action is taken in the final phase becomes another set of concrete experiences, which in turn can begin the experiential learning cycle again. (See **Miettinen, 2000**, for a critique of Kolb's conceptualization of Dewey's work.) For Kolb, the ultimate goal of this experiential learning process is to obtain "a fully integrated personality" (**Malinen, 2000**, p. 89).

A critique of Kolb's model is that the learner's context is not taken into consideration (**Fenwick, 2003**). Experience and reflection seem to exist in a vacuum. Kolb does not account for issues of power in his model. Jarvis's (1987, 2001) model addresses some of **Kolb's (1984)** shortcomings. Jarvis's model shows that the person brings his or her biography into the situation. Our construction of our experiences is affected by our "psychological history" (**Jarvis, 2001**, p. 52). There are two main types of learning from experiences. We may engage in *nonreflective learning,* which includes remembering an experience and repeating it or just doing what we are told to do. In contrast, we may engage in *reflective learning* when we "plan, monitor, and reflect upon our experiences" (p. 52). Jarvis includes both experimental learning (the result of a person experimenting on the environment) and reflective practice (thinking about and monitoring one's practice as it is happening) with what he conceives as the highest forms of learning. Jarvis notes that, ironically, often the more experiences we have, the less likely we are to learn from them. Instead, we tend to choose what is familiar and deny ourselves new learning (**Jarvis, 2001**; see also **Chapter Four** for Jarvis's model, 2006. For a critique

of Jarvis's model, see **Le Cornu, 2005**. Le Cornu critiques three dimensions of Jarvis's model including "its time-centered base, its weak process of internalization, and the notion of non-learning" (p. 166). She suggests several modifications of the model.)

Boud and Walker (1991) take a situated approach to experiential learning. These scholars augmented Kolb's model in two ways. First, they recognized that "specific contexts shape an individual's experience in different ways" (**Fenwick, 2001**, p. 11). Second, they were "interested in how differences among individuals—particularly past histories, learning strategies, and emotion influence the sort of learning developed through reflection on experience" (p. 11). Boud, Keogh, and Walker's (1985, 1996) original model consisted of three stages: (1) returning to and replaying the experience, (2) attending to the feelings that the experience provoked, and (3) reevaluating the experience. The authors state that people need to work through any negative feelings that have arisen and eventually set those aside while retaining and enhancing the positive feelings. If the negative feelings are not addressed, what commonly happens is that learning becomes blocked. In the reevaluation stage, our aim is to use this experience as a way of getting us ready for new experiences, and thus new learning. Four processes may contribute to this reevaluation stage: "association, that is, relating of new data to that which is already known; integration, which is seeking relationships among the data; validation to determine the authenticity of the ideas and feelings which have resulted; and appropriation, that is, making knowledge one's own" (**Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1996**, pp. 45–46).

In addition to Boud, Keogh, and **Walker (1996)**, other authors also recognize the importance of emotion in experiential learning (**Beard & Wilson, 2002**; Dirkx, **2001a**, **2001b**). **Beard and Wilson (2002)** note, "The affective domain can be seen to provide the underlying foundation for all learning" (p. 119). In order for people to interpret experiences positively and to learn effectively they need to have confidence in their abilities, good self-esteem, support from others, and trust in others. In contrast, distorted learning can occur if a person is told he or she is not talented, or distressed learning can occur when we are forced to learn something (**Beard & Wilson, 2002**).

Beard and Wilson (2002) discuss several methods for working with emotions in the classroom. They suggest that fear can block

learning and can manifest itself through perfectionism, anger, and aggression. By reflecting and mapping our fears via journaling or writing down "inner rules" and reflecting on them, we can address our fears (p. 119). The authors suggest writing down the rule, then writing down what this rule *really* means, and then revising the rule. For example, perhaps a person's inner rule is: "I must never cry in public." This rule may really mean that the person would be embarrassed if he or she cried in public. The revised rule may read: "I would rather not cry in public, but if I do, it wouldn't be the worst thing in the world. I could handle it." This new rule takes some of the fear away from crying in public. Techniques for creating positive emotion in the classroom include using various aromas to help the learning process. For example, they suggest that the scent of lemon increases mental clarity and they have specific instructions for dealing with anger, promoting calm, disputing the internal critic in all of us, and being assertive.

Usher, Bryant, and Johnston (1997) approach the situated or contextual nature of experience in a very different way from most other scholars who discuss experience as foundational to learning. Although they acknowledge that **Jarvis (1987)** and **Boud and Walker (1991)**, among others, use a contextual or sociological frame for learning from experience, they still view the work of these authors as centered on an individualized self who uses experiences as the material to be acted upon by the mind through observations and reflection. Grounded in the assumption that "the self is a culturally and historically variable category," Usher, Bryant, and Johnston (1997, p. 102) view experience instead as a text to be used in learning—as "something to be 'read' or interpreted, possibly with great effort, and certainly with no final, definitive meaning" (p. 104). These authors assert that "the meaning of experience is never permanently fixed; thus, the text of experience is always open to reinterpretation" (p. 105). Usher, Bryant, and Johnston have proposed a "map" of experiential learning within the framework of postmodern thought. With this model, "learning does not simplistically derive from experience; rather, experience and learning are mutually positioned in an interactive dynamic" (p. 107). In posing this model, these authors view the use of experience as part of the learning process as "inherently neither emancipatory nor oppressive, neither domesticating nor transformative.

Rather ... it is perhaps most usefully seen as having a potential for emancipation and oppression, domestication and transformation, where at any one time and according to context both tendencies can be present and in conflict with one another" (p. 105).

Usher, Bryant, and Johnston's model, shown in **Figure 7.1**, is structured around two intersecting continua—autonomy-adaptation (empowerment of individuals to act independently to being able to adapt one's actions in relation to the context) and expression-application (being able to apply what one knows in real-world contexts)—and four quadrants, referred to as lifestyle, vocational, confessional, and critical. Learning from experience happens both between and within the quadrants, which represent different types of learning venues.

Lifestyle practices center on the achievement of autonomy through individuality and self-expression, particularly in taste and style (for example, ways of speaking, clothes, leisure pursuits, vacations). Experience is used as a means of defining a lifestyle that is actively sought by people but also influenced by socially and culturally defined norms.

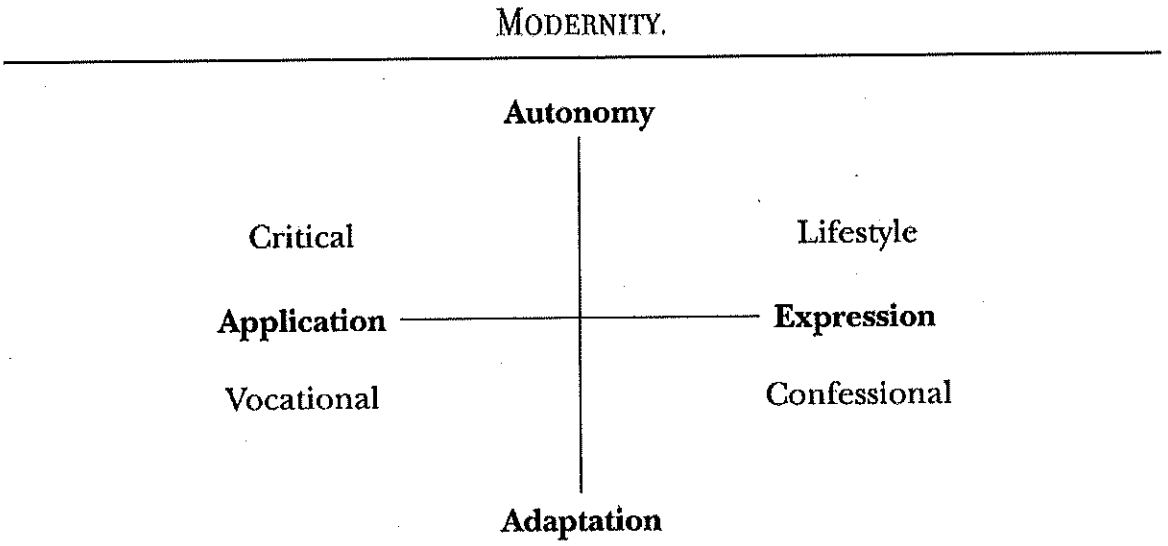

Figure 7.1. Map of Experiential Learning in the Social Practices of Modernity.

Source: **Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997**, p. 106.

Vocational practices are conveyed through the market. Learners need to be highly motivated in the direction of a personal change linked to the needs of the socioeconomic environment. Vocationalism then is designed to produce flexible competencies and a predisposition to change. As a result of learning adaptive skills through experiential means, learners become more empowered to respond to their changing vocational environments.

In *confessional practices* our private, self-regulating capacities become public. In other words, realizing oneself, finding out the truth about oneself, and accepting responsibility for oneself become both personally desirable and economically functional. The emphasis in this process is on self-improvement, self-development, and regulation. Experience is used as enabling access to knowledge and the innermost truths about self, which in turn creates productive and empowered people in a number of roles (for example, as active citizen, ardent consumer, enthusiastic employee).

Finally, in Usher, Bryant, and Johnston's (1997) fourth quadrant, *critical practices,* there is a recognition that experience is never a basic given. The focus is on changing particular contexts rather than adapting to them, and therefore working with learners becomes a political practice. Experiential learning becomes a strategy designed to find and exercise one's voice in the service of self and social empowerment and transformation and is not regarded as something that leads to knowledge, but rather as knowledge itself.

Although no particular model exists to represent the psychoanalytic perspective that focuses on the issue of desire and the unconscious in experiential learning, Jacques Lacan's work exemplifies this approach. Lacan's idea that a person's "identity is split between conscious and unconscious desires" may help explain why people are conflicted in some experiential learning situations (**Fenwick, 2001**, p. 30).

Experiential learning from the critical cultural perspective looks at "power as a core issue in experience" (**Fenwick, 2001**, p. 39). Emancipatory learning exemplifies this perspective on experiential learning. People critically examine how power works in society, and they rise from their oppression and take action that makes a difference in their lives and others' lives. This perspective concentrates on the community, not the individual. The community recognizes that it needs to act, takes collective action, and understands that

learning arises from conflict. For example, a group of HIV-positive individuals realize that many HIV-positive individuals could die without access to affordable medication. They unite to lobby the state for free or low-cost medications for HIV/AIDS. They learn how to lobby their legislature and as a result the state passes a bill that helps supply low-cost HIV/AIDS medications to state residents.

Clearly the role of experience in learning is highly complex. Perhaps equally complex are the roles of the adult educator in the experiential learning process. In the next section we explore educators' roles and purposes in the classroom.

Educators' Roles and Purposes

As we have seen, experiential learning models focus on different aspects of the process, depending on their theoretical orientation. Likewise, educators' purposes, roles, and learning designs for experiential learning differ depending on the lens through which they view experiential learning.

Those who see experiential learning through a constructivist lens want to foster critical reflection on experience and challenge learners' assumptions while validating personally constructed knowledge (**Fenwick, 2003**). Educators serve as facilitators of reflection and encourage learners to discuss and reflect on concrete experiences in a trusting, open environment. For example, they challenge students' assumptions by having them reflect on specific work situations. A second role the teacher plays is that of catalyst. Instructors involve students in role-plays or problem-based learning exercises where learners must solve a dilemma. This activity reveals learners' assumptions and creates ample opportunities for reflection. Third, the adult educator may become the student's coach or mentor. Coaching is generally associated with "specific skill learning" while mentors serve as life guides (**Fenwick, 2003**, p. 117). Last, the teacher becomes the assessor of the learners' prior experiential learning. Typical assessment tools that emphasize reflection are portfolios, learners' analyses of their life or work experience, and interviews in which learners explain their "learning outcomes of their past experience" (p. 118).

The educator's role from the situative framework is to get learners involved in a community of practice (**Fenwick, 2003**). The

educator arranges real situations in which the learners participate. Fenwick states, "The educator's role ... is in providing just-in-time assistance to enable confident action in situations where confident competence is lacking" (p. 121). Fenwick adds that the instructor may also help those who become stuck or immobilized in situations to move ahead. The situative orientation can be found in service-learning activities. These experiences "are often community-based volunteer work with different non-profit organizations ... and are typically organized for a short-term period of a few weeks" (p. 149). Cognitive apprenticeships (discussed later in the chapter) exemplify the type of experiential learning promoted by this theoretical orientation.

Facilitators who view experiential learning through the psychoanalytic lens want to facilitate analysis of learners' psychic conflicts that may impede learning (**Fenwick, 2003**). Educators can do this by encouraging students to pay attention to their dreams, behavior, and odd images that may arise in their minds. Activities that may facilitate these goals include finding materials such as images, film clips, or texts that elicit emotion. These emotions may lead us to uncover aspects of our unconscious that block our learning (Dirkx, **2001a, 2001b**). Students are encouraged to respond as educators listen and compassionately help them examine resistance and bring to light unconscious feelings associated with the material. Another technique used to help learners analyze their desires and anxieties in their workplace is to ask employees a series of questions about their most pleasant, frustrating, or anxious moments at work. In addition, **Dirkx (2001a)** suggests having learners "name an emotion or feeling they experienced during an assignment or classroom meeting" (p. 16). Next, they should describe the emotion in their journal and also write anything they associate with the emotion. They may also want to draw or paint any images that come to mind.

For those educators looking at experiential learning through the critical cultural lens, the educator's purpose includes helping learners see the influence of power relationships on their lives. Teachers support and encourage resistance against oppression and help learners see beyond the immediate struggle to solutions (**Fenwick, 2003**). Educators engage in what **Freire (1970)** called *problem-posing.* The issues of concern come from the people, and

educators help "identify general causes and outcomes of these issues" (**Fenwick, 2003**, p. 162). Instructors encourage people to critically analyze their situations and work toward a solution. For example, workers in a factory may be concerned about the working conditions and wages. The teachers ask questions to allow the workers to see they are oppressed and help workers find an empowering solution to their problems. The learners then may, for example, engage in social action through forming a union or fighting as a group for better working conditions.

Individuals who view experiential learning through the complexity theory lens do not instigate change through organization but "seek to open spaces for the system to experiment with change itself" (**Fenwick, 2003**, p. 132). The emphasis is on seeking change within complex systems. One of the teacher's roles in this environment is to be an interpreter in order to help students understand the changes in the complex systems in which they find themselves. In addition, instructors "attune the learner and the learning community to the disturbances: drawing attention to the new possibilities created, while helping to divert patterns that may start to create unsafe spaces or power inequities" (p. 134). The teacher helps learners explore changes by having them dialogue about issues in order to develop insights. Unlike the educators from the critical cultural perspective, these teachers are not expected to help the community "link its experiences to larger forces perpetuating exploitation and inequity" (p. 169).

In sum, educators' roles and purposes differ according to their theoretical orientation. Constructivists foster critical reflection on students' assumptions and assess learners' prior experiential learning. Teachers from the situative framework engage students in a community of practice through service activities and cognitive apprenticeships. Those from the psychoanalytic framework want to help learners bring to light unconscious conflicts that may impede learning; they can assist learners by providing activities that elicit emotion and listening to learners. Instructors who take a critical cultural approach help learners see the influence of power in their lives; they encourage resistance against oppression and help learners find solutions. Last, those utilizing the complexity theory help students understand change within complex systems and work toward solutions.

Methods Associated with Reflective and Situative Paradigms

In the previous section, we explored how educators' purposes, roles, and learning designs for experiential learning differ depending on their theoretical orientation. Since much of the experiential learning literature focuses on procedures used by practitioners from the constructivist and situative paradigms, we choose to investigate four methods in detail. Namely, we will discuss reflective practice, situated cognition, cognitive apprenticeships, and anchored instruction.

Reflective Practice

Reflective practice allows one to make judgments in complex and murky situations—judgments based on experience and prior knowledge. Although reflective practice is most often associated with professional practice, this process can be applied to other types of learning situations, both formal and informal. Practice knowledge, the cornerstone of reflective practice, consists of much more than abstract theoretical or technical knowledge (**Cervero, 1988**; **Schön, 1983**). The knowledge we gain through experience and the way we practice our craft are just as important. The initiation of reflective practice involves using data in some form, which almost always includes our past and current experiences. Our tacit knowledge about practice—that is, knowledge that we use every day, almost without thinking about it—is an important part of these data.

Researchers define reflective practice in a number of ways. Perhaps one of the most inclusive, useful definitions comes from scholars interested in using reflective practice to improve schools. They write: "Reflective practice is a deliberate pause to assume an open perspective, to allow for higher-level thinking processes. Practitioners use these processes for examining beliefs, goals, and practices, to gain new or deeper understandings that lead to actions that improve learning for students. Actions may involve changes in behavior, skills, attitudes, or perspectives within an individual, partner, small group, or school" (**York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, & Montie, 2001**, p. 6.).

The authors focus on several elements of reflective practice. First, reflective practice requires a deliberate slowing down to

consider multiple perspectives. Second, maintaining an open perspective is also necessary. The purpose of reflective practice in a group is not in needing to be right or in winning but in openness to a variety of perspectives, for it is only in openness that new understandings can occur (**York-Barr et al., 2001**). Third, reflective practice requires "active and conscious *processing of thoughts,*" which may include analysis, synthesis, and metacognition (thinking about thinking) in order to achieve a "broader context for understanding" (p. 7; italics in original). Fourth, beliefs, goals, and practices must be examined. Beliefs are formed from experiences and influence behavior, while goals include "desired aims, outcomes, or intentions," which may be general or specific (p. 7). Practices include one's "dispositions, behaviors, and skills in specific areas of performance, such as designing instruction and assessment strategies, interacting with students, developing relationships with families" (pp. 7–8). The outcome of reflection is to gain deeper insights that lead to action.

Although reflective practice theoretically should result in the most thoughtful and useful solutions to practice problems, this may not be the case depending on the beliefs educators have about this practice. **Wellington and Austin (1996)** have argued that depending on their beliefs and values, practitioners have very different orientations toward reflective practice. These differing orientations influence how reflective practice is used, and therefore the possible outcomes of this practice. For example, do those involved believe that education should be a liberating or "domesticating" form of practice? And what is more important to them: system or human concerns? Wellington and Austin have depicted a way of thinking about reflective practice that acknowledges how it could be filtered through the belief and value systems of practitioners, which in their view results in five orientations toward reflective practice: the immediate, the technical, the deliberative, the dialectic, and the transpersonal.

Practitioners who use the immediate orientation, focusing basically on survival, rarely use any form of reflective practice. Those who view practice as more of a domesticating activity —that is, who see societal needs as taking precedence over individual needs—lean toward the technical and deliberative orientations. The technical mode "uses reflection as an instrument to direct practice"

(**Wellington & Austin, 1996**, p. 308), usually within predetermined guidelines and standards. The deliberative orientation "places emphasis on the discovery, assignment and assessment of personal meaning within an educational setting" (p. 310). Those operating from this orientation are typically humanistic, stress communication, and believe that the attitudes and values of learners are important. Although people whose orientation is deliberative sometimes are uncomfortable with the organization in which they work, they nevertheless tend to work within that system. And finally, those who view educational practice as liberating primarily have the dialectic and transpersonal orientations. Practitioners whose orientation toward reflective practice is dialectical "reject the limitations of authorized organizational structures and parameters and are uncomfortable working within them. ... They tend to ... focus on political and social issues ... [and] advocate political awareness and activism" (p. 310). In contrast, the transpersonal orientation "centers on universal personal liberation. ... They question educational ends, content and means from a personal, inner perspective" (p. 311). This orientation, applied to groups, is the basis for what is called *organized reflection.* This is a type of reflection that occurs "within and as a collaborative entity," where groups critically question the status quo (**Welsh & Dehler, 2004**, p. 20). It examines power relationships in groups and emancipation is its aim.

Wellington and Austin (1996) cast these orientations not as competing views of what reflective practice should encompass but as different ways of going about reflective practice. They believe that practitioners need to recognize their own predominant modes, as well as respect the preferred orientations of others. "When practitioners become aware of their own preferences and prejudices across models, they can begin to reflect upon a wider range of questions and develop a wider range of responses" (p. 314). No matter what orientation people have, two basic processes have been identified as central to reflective practice: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action.

Reflection-on-Action

Reflection-on-action involves thinking through a situation after it has happened. This mode of reflection is presented by most authors as primarily an analytical exercise, which results in new perspectives

on experiences, changes in behavior, and commitments to action. In reflection-on-action, we consciously return to the experiences we have had, reevaluate these experiences, decide what we could do differently, and then try out whatever we decided to do differently. Different authors have offered various models of carrying out this reflective cycle. **Kolb's (1984)** model, or adaptations of his model, is the one most often used in practice. The cyclical nature of the model allows for a process of continued change and growth. Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985, 1996) have added to Kolb's work on reflection-on-action by stressing that we must attend to the feelings created by our experiences in order for the reflective process to be truly effective. In addition, they have added more in-depth descriptions of four cognitive processes (association, integration, validation, and appropriation) that can contribute to the reflective process.

Osterman and Kottkamp (2004), borrowing from the work of **Argyris and Schön (1978)**, set reflective practice within the framework of espoused theories (beliefs) and theories-in-use (actions). Within this framework, they view the reflective practice cycle as helping practitioners become aware of, and act on, the discrepancies between their beliefs (their espoused theories) and what they actually do. In contrasting espoused theories with action, people may ask themselves, "Was our action consistent with our intent? Did we act as we wanted to act, in a way consistent with our values?" (Osterman & Kottcamp, 2004, p. 34). For example, a teacher may espouse the theory that she is responsible for helping students who are disruptive in class. She knows that their anger is a cry for help. However, instead of directly addressing the disruptive students, she glares at them. Osterman and Kottcamp (2004, p. 35) state, "[The teacher] consciously knows that student misbehavior is frequently a cry for help (espoused theory) but her gut reaction is an angry one. The response may reflect a deeper assumption (theory-in-use)"—for example, that angry students are intentionally disrespectful students.

Critical examination of discrepancies between espoused theories and theories-in-use often begin with a feeling that something could be improved upon in one's practice (Osterman & Kottcamp, 2004). In the process of improving their practice, people think about their espoused beliefs, examine what they actually do and the results of their actions, and contrast their espoused beliefs with their practice to unearth their theories-in-use.

Descriptions are plentiful on how to put reflection-on-action into practice (for example, **Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004**; **York-Barr et al., 2001**). Some of the most popular methods used in education and other fields are portfolio development, journal writing, mapping (a form of journal writing that can be more fluid and visual than a journal), and critical reflection. Key to all of these methods is the framing of critical observations and questions as part of the reflection-on-action process. For example, York-Barr et al. (2001, p. 47), delineate a four-step process that can guide reflection. First, individuals must pick an event and ask themselves what happened. Second, they need to analyze and interpret the event by asking themselves questions such as, "Why did things happen this way? Why did I act the way I did? How did the context affect the experience? Did past experiences affect the way I reacted?" Third, people have to make sense of the event by asking themselves, "What have I learned from this event? How can I improve? How might this change my future thinking, behaving, interactions?" Last, people must think about implications for action by querying, "What am I going to remember to think about the next time this situation comes up? How could I set up conditions to increase the likelihood of productive interactions and learning?"

Reflection-in-Action

In contrast, reflection-in-action reshapes "what we are doing while we are doing it" (**Schön, 1987**, p. 26). "Thinking on your feet" and "keeping your wits about you" are commonly used phases that describe reflection-in-action. Schön (1983, 1987, 1991, 1996) is perhaps the best-known author who has challenged professionals to incorporate this form of reflective process as an integral part of professional development. In Schön's view, reflection-in-action is triggered by surprise. What we have been thinking and doing all along as professionals no longer works. "We think critically about the thinking that got us into this fix or this opportunity; and we may, in the process, restructure strategies of action, understanding of phenomena, or ways of framing problems. ... Reflection gives rise to on-the-spot experiment" (**Schön, 1987**, p. 28).

For example, in running an institute for professionals, the institute staff sense that the sessions on a particular day have not gone well. Over coffee, they ask for feedback from participants, and the

general observation is that they are finding the material too esoteric and are tired of being "talked at." The next presenter, who is listening to these conversations, has also planned to lecture. Although Ron knows he is an excellent lecturer, he decides that unless he changes the way he presents the material, he will totally lose the audience. Knowing that many of the people in the audience have experience related to his content area, he asks for volunteers to join him in a panel discussion on the topic, explaining that he is changing his format to respond to their needs as learners. While Ron works with the panel members on their roles, he asks the rest of the participants to generate questions they would like to ask panel members. Although he has never used this format in quite this way before, he believes it might work and is willing to take a chance to recapture the interest of the participants. In this way, Ron is using his expertise as an instructor to change on the spot what he is doing as a presenter as he goes along. Schön goes on to observe that competent and experienced professionals use reflection-in-action as a regular part of their practice, although they may not verbalize they are doing this. This form of reflective practice allows professionals to go beyond the routine application of rules, facts, and procedures and gives them the freedom to practice their craft more as professional artistry where they create new ways of thinking and acting about problems of practice.

There have been both validation of and criticisms to Schön's model of reflection-in-action. **Ferry and Ross-Gordon (1998)**, for example, in exploring the links between experience and practice, support Schön's theory that "reflection-in-action goes beyond 'stable rules' by devising new methods of reasoning" (p. 107) and fostering new ways of framing and responding to problems. Educators who were reflective in their practice used both reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action to build their expertise. They did not find, however, that the amount of experience a person possessed necessarily had anything to do with that person using reflective practice.

In contrast, Usher, Bryant, and Johnston (1997) assert that although Schön adequately describes the reflection-in-action process, in his own work he did not use "his own practice as a producer of text ... [and they view that as] a problem of the absence of reflexivity in his own work" (p. 143). By this, Usher, Bryant, and

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Johnston meant that Schön did not question how the context of his work, being academic in nature, could get in the way of the message. Overall, Usher, Bryant, and Johnston believe that despite Schön's clear message that reflection-in-action should be implemented in a critical manner, the way in which he conveyed that message makes it easy for practitioners to co-opt the process into a technical and rationalistic dialogue.

Situated Cognition

Although reflective practice and situated cognition both involve learning from real-world experiences, how these experiences are interpreted is often vastly different. In most models of reflective practice, learning from experience is still viewed as something that goes on in someone's head. Individuals, whether by themselves or in groups, think through problems presented to them and then act on those problems by changing their practice on the spot or as they encounter similar situations at a later date. Experience provides the catalyst for learning in reflective practice, but most often it is seen as separate from the learning process itself.

In situated cognition, one cannot separate the learning process from the situation in which the learning is presented. Knowledge is not received and later transferred to another situation "but part of the very process of *participation* in the immediate situation" (**Fenwick, 2003**, p. 25; italics in the original). The proponents of the situated view of learning argue that learning for everyday living (which includes our practice as professionals) happens only when people interact with the community (including its history and cultural values and assumptions), "the tools at hand" (such as technology, language, and images), and the activity at hand (**Fenwick, 2003**, p. 25). In other words, the physical and social experiences and situations in which learners find themselves and the tools they use in that experience are integral to the entire learning process.

Machles (2004), through his study of the situated learning of occupational safety by biotechnical employees, provides us with an example of how situated cognition translates into practice. In his study, participants interacted with each other in the workplace to learn occupational safety on the job. Steve, a study participant,

stated, "I think most everything I have learned, especially about safety ... has been learned from other people. ... It was learned from my co-workers and stuff. There was never a class" (p. 145). The tools for learning can be physical tools or concepts learned at the workplace. **Machles (2004)** observed that workers' tools included physical equipment, such as the eye wash and shower used to treat chemical accidents, as well as concepts such as "don't hesitate, respond quickly" (p. 154). A study respondent, James, spoke about how he used both the physical tools of the eye wash and shower and the concept of "respond quickly" to save a colleague's sight after a chemical accident. James stated, "Another guy got something in his eye. ... I got him in the safety shower. I kept him there 20 minutes. ... It's kind of an automatic reflex. Grab and go" (p. 113).

In viewing learning from a situated perspective, two other ideas are key. The first is that the emphasis in the learning process changes from being concerned about memory and how we process information internally to perception and the settings in which those perceptions are made (**Hansman, 2001**). In essence, according to **Clancey (1997)**, "[E]very human thought and action is adapted to the environment, that is, situated, because what people perceive, and how they conceive of their activity, and what they physically do develop together" (pp. 1–2). According to proponents of the situative perspective, this situated nature of cognition makes the transfer process from using learning gained from one situation to the next more problematic, which has led some theorists to question whether knowledge, especially practical knowledge, can really transfer across situations (**Anderson, Reder, & Simon, 1996**). However, constructivists maintain that the transfer of learning from one situation to another is possible (**Fenwick, 2003**). Scholars who study organizational learning indicate that knowledge transfer of tacit knowledge (knowledge evident in our actions but that may not be explicitly articulated), occurs through socialization with others (**Fenwick, 2003**). They also recognize that explicit knowledge can be transferred.

Second, making the assumption that learning and knowing are primarily cultural phenomena moves the study of cognition (and therefore, learning from experience) into the social and political realm and raises the issue of knowledge and power as a legitimate

part of the study of cognition (**Fenwick, 2003**; **Kirshner & Whitson, 1997**). Although this issue of power and knowledge is fundamental to the theory of situated cognition, it has often been downplayed or overlooked in favor of how to apply the concept practically (**Fenwick, 2003**). In acknowledging cognition and learning from experience as a cultural phenomenon, the perspectives of critical, feminist, and postmodern thinkers become crucial. Among the major results of thinking about cognition from a cultural frame are the critiques that have been fostered about traditional educational theory and practice (**Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989**; **Lave, 1988**). Foremost among these critiques is a challenge to the fundamental notion that learning is something that occurs within the individual. Rather, learning encompasses the interaction of learners and the social environments in which they function.

In using experience in the framework of situated cognition, the emphasis is on "providing enabling experiences in authentic versus decontextualized contexts" (**Choi & Hannafin, 1995**, p. 53). As **Greeno (1997)** has thoughtfully observed, "When we recognize that all learning involves socially organized activity, the question is not whether to give instruction in a 'complex, social environment' but what kinds of complex, social activities to arrange, for which aspects of participation, and in what sequence to use them" (p. 10). From this perspective education and training by just abstraction is of little use. Rather, "to meet the test of 'authenticity,' situations must at least have some of the important attributes of real-life problem solving, including ill-structured complex goals, an opportunity for the detection of relevant versus irrelevant information, active/ generative engagement in finding and defining problems as well as in solving them, involvement in the student's beliefs and values, and an opportunity to engage in collaborative interpersonal activities" (**Young, 1993**, p. 45). Cognitive apprenticeships and anchored instruction are two ways in which the concept of authentic experiences has been put into practice by educators.

Cognitive Apprenticeships

Cognitive apprenticeships have received much attention in the literature. "Cognitive apprenticeship methods try to enculturate [learners] into authentic practices through activity and social interaction

in a way similar to that evident—and evidently successful—in craft apprenticeship" (**Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989**, p. 37). The cognitive nature of the apprenticeship places emphasis on teaching learners different ways of thinking about whatever they are learning, as well as any skills associated with the apprenticeship. **Fenwick (2003)** adds, "Cognitive apprenticeship moves away from the purely situative view of learning, treating learners as independent reflective constructors of knowledge" (p. 152).

Based on a study of different forms of cognitive apprenticeship used in several professions, such as engineering, medicine, and educational administration, Brandt, Farmer, and Buckmaster (1993) have created a five-phase model (see **Table 7.1**). The first phase, modeling, is where the model demonstrates the activity as he or she verbally describes the activity. Phase 2, approximating, consists of the learner doing the activity with the teacher providing support (scaffolding) and coaching the learner. In Phase 3, the coaching and scaffolding are gradually removed and the learner works in less defined situations individually and in groups. The student is self-directed in Phase 4 and assistance from the instructor is only provided when requested. In Phase 5, generalizing, the generalizability of the skill is discussed and students are encouraged to try the skill in new situations.

Several studies indicate that the cognitive apprenticeship model produces better results in the classroom than traditional instruction (**Hockly, 2000**; Mayer, Moutone, & Prothero, 2002; **Snyder, 2000**; **Walker, 2003**). Meyer, Mautone, and Prothero required college students to solve geology problems using a computer game. Those who were given instructional support and scaffolding outperformed those who received basic instruction. Cope, Cuthbertson, and Stoddart (2000) surveyed nurses who had completed their practice placements in nursing. Results demonstrated the benefits of scaffolding and mentoring for nurses in a practicum setting.

Anchored Instruction

The purpose of anchored instruction is to create situations in which learners, through sustained experiences, can grapple with the problems and opportunities that experts encounter (**Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt, 1990**, 2000). To do this, the instructional

process is anchored in what the Cognition and Technology Group calls *macrocontexts,* which are complex problems explored over extended periods of time and through multiple lenses (**Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt, 2000**). These macrocontexts, which in essence become the tools of learning, can take many forms. For example, instructors might provide videodisks containing the problems to be explored or they might ask learners to prepare problem-based case studies. The goal of anchored instruction is to have learners "experience what it is like to grow from novices who have only rudimentary knowledge ... to relatively sophisticated experts who have explored an environment from multiple points of view" (**Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt, 1990**, p. 9).

Table 7.1. Cognitive Apprenticeship Phases.

	Role of Model	*Role of Learner*	*Key Concepts*
Phase 1: Modeling	Model real-life activity that learner wants to perform satisfactorily. Model states aloud the essence of the activity. He or she can include tricks of the trade.	Observe performance of total activity, not merely the individual steps. Develop a mental model of what the real thing looks like.	Articulation, domain-specific heuristics
Phase 2: Approximating	Provide coaching to the learner. Provide support when needed.	Approximate doing the real thing and articulate its essence. Reflect on the model's performance. Use self-monitoring and self-correction.	Scaffolding, coaching
Phase 3: Fading	Decrease coaching and scaffolding.	Continue to approximate the real thing. Operate in increasingly complex, risky, or ill-defined situations. Work individually or in groups.	Fading
Phase 4: Self-directed learning	Provide assistance only when requested.	Practice doing the real thing alone. Do so within specified limits acceptable to profession and society.	Self-directed learning
Phase 5: Generalizing	Discuss the generalizability of what has been learned.	Discuss the generalizability of what has been learned.	Generalizability

An Appraisal of Experiential Learning

Differing philosophical viewpoints provide several critiques of experiential learning. First, scholars debate whether people consist of one unified self or if they are a collection of multiple selves (**Fenwick, 2003**). The constructivist approach maintains that "[t]he learner is assumed to be a stable fixed identity, with transparent access to experience through rational reflection" (p. 77). However, the psychoanalytic perspective on experiential learning counters that the self is split between "conscious and unconscious desires" (**Fenwick, 2003**, p. 77). The conflict between these desires can affect our learning and reflection processes.

Those professing the psychoanalytic viewpoint also take issue with the prominence of cognitive reflection in experiential learning. They maintain that the focus on cognitive reflection in the experiential learning literature is limited (**Fenwick, 2003**). In the constructivist view of learning, the impact of desire and resistance is not taken into account in the learning process.

A third critique of experiential learning involves the separation of the learner from the context of the experience. The learner's context includes "the social relations and political cultural dimensions of the community, ... the nature of the task, ... the vocabulary and cultural beliefs through which the individual makes meaning of the whole situation, and the historical, temporal, and spatial location of the situation" (**Fenwick, 2003**, p. 79). **Kolb's (1984)** model, in particular, is criticized for its inattention to context, and although **Boud and Walker (1991)** mention context, it is presented as a "static

space" (p. 79) that the learner experiences. However, notes Fenwick (2003, p. 80), "Social relations of power exercised through language or cultural practices are not theorized as part of knowledge construction" in Boud and Walker's (1991) model.

Last, say critics, experiential learning needs to be bounded (**Fenwick, 2003**). Experiential learning can occur in a variety of contexts. How does experiential learning differ from experiences in classrooms such as class discussions and reflection? If all of life's activities are considered experiential learning, what does this mean for the educator?

In addition to critiques of experiential learning, there are debates about the content, design, and role of the educator in experiential learning. For example, critics maintain that educators' management of learners' experiential learning interferes with the basic tenet that experiential learning should liberate and not oppress learners. Scholars argue that management of experiential learning in the workplace may worsen social problems. In the workplace, "workers' experiential learning becomes human capital with great potential economic benefits for the organization" with no attention given to the workers' dignity and freedom (**Fenwick, 2003**, p. 90).

A second, related criticism is that the assessment of learning by organizations "becomes a tool to control lives" (**Fenwick, 2003**, p. 91). In North America, institutions of higher learning assess learners' experiences to "help adults gain credits in postsecondary education" (p. 91). However, the interests and biases of the institution color what *counts* as experience worthy of credit. Fenwick states, "People's knowing is colonized by being squeezed into ... categories and identities" (p. 92).

Some critics counter that although interference in adult learners' experiential learning can be oppressive, it is necessary so that bad practices do not continue. **Fenwick (2003)** states, "Unsupervised people may make do, finding ways to participate that actually reinforce negative practices that a community is trying to eliminate" (p. 93). Educators can intervene and help create positive practices and reaffirm the adult learner.

Summary

The experiences of adults have always been viewed as a critical component of learning in adulthood. Various theoretical perspectives

Summary

The experiences of adults have always been viewed as a critical component of learning in adulthood. Various theoretical perspectives emphasize different aspects of experiential learning. The constructivist perspective highlights reflecting on the concrete experience and making meaning of it. The situative approach focuses on getting learners involved in a community of practice because in this view learning is intertwined with doing. The psychoanalytic lens emphasizes the learner's need to get in touch with his or her unconscious desires and fears. The critical approach focuses on the need to resist dominant social norms. Last, the complexity theory of experiential learning emphasizes the relationships among experiences. Although exploring the role of experience in learning has a long history, we continue to discover more about the connections between learning and experience and how to assist adults in formal and nonformal settings to capture the richness of learning from experience. Discussed in this chapter were the theories of Dewey (1938), Kolb (1984), Jarvis (1987), Boud and Walker (1991), and Usher, Bryant, and Johnston (1997), which offer varying conceptual views of the process of learning from experience. Central to all of these writers is the notion that learning from experience involves adults' connecting what they have learned from current experiences to those in the past as well to possible future situations. We investigated common methods employed in experiential learning, including reflective practice, situated cognition, cognitive apprenticeships, and anchored instruction. Reflective practice, one of the main ways in which educators have structured learning from experience, focuses on helping learners make judgments based on experience related to primarily complex and murky problems. Situated cognition acknowledges the importance of the social and cultural context of learning. In other words, the physical and social experiences and situations in which learners find themselves and the tools they use are integral to the learning process. The importance of the authenticity of the experience in which adults learn is stressed in the situated framework. Two ways educators have put this concept of authentic experiences into formal practice are cognitive apprenticeships and anchored instruction. Last, there are several criticisms of experiential learning. For example, some critics assert that the focus on cognitive reflection in the experiential learning literature is a limited perspective and that the learner is separated from the context of the experience in experiential learning (Fenwick, 2003). Finally, current debates in the experiential learning literature center on the role of the educator in the process. Critics assert that the educator's control over the experiential learning situation may be viewed as oppressive.