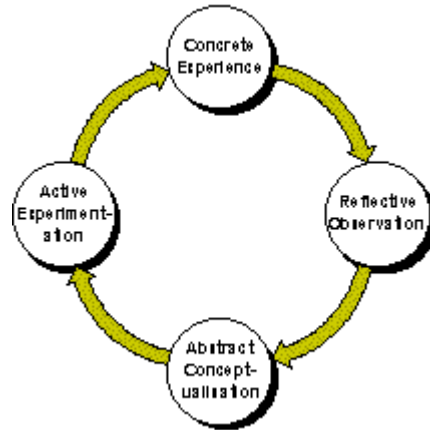


Kolbs & Mumford Learning Cycle

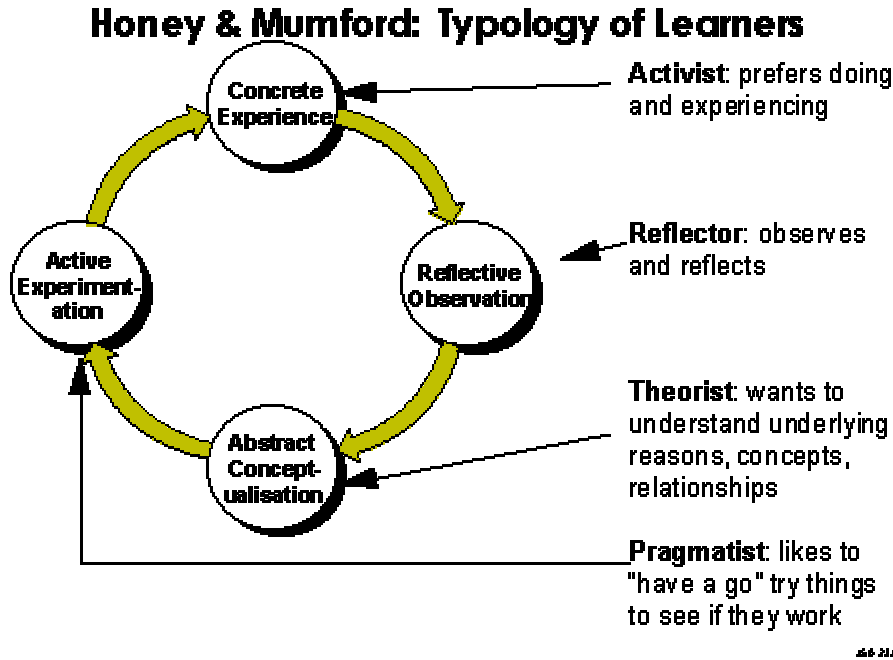
Kolb (1984) provides one of the most useful descriptive models of the adult learning process available, inspired by the work of Kurt Lewin.



This suggests that there are four stages which follow from each other: **Concrete Experience** is followed by **Reflection** on that experience on a personal basis. This may then be followed by the derivation of general rules describing the experience, or the application of known theories to it (**Abstract Conceptualisation**), and hence to the construction of ways of modifying the next occurrence of the experience (**Active Experimentation**), leading in turn to the next **Concrete Experience**. All this may happen in a flash, or over days, weeks or months, depending on the topic, and there may be a "wheels within wheels" process at the same time.

The most direct application of the model is to use it to ensure that (pace the reservations above) teaching and tutoring activities give full value to each stage of the process. This may mean that for the tutor or mentor, a major task is to "chase" the learner round the cycle, asking questions, which encourage Reflection, Conceptualisation, and ways of testing the ideas. (The Concrete Experience itself may occur outside the tutorial/mentoring session).

Experiential Learning Styles



Honey and Mumford (1982) have built a typology of Learning Styles around this sequence, identifying individual preferences for each stage (Activist, Reflector, Theorist, Pragmatist respectively), Kolb also has a test instrument (the Learning Style Inventory) but has carried it further by relating the process also to forms of knowledge.

Learning styles mean that:

- At a minor level there is a need for adjustment between learner and teacher: sometimes their preferences are complementary, sometimes antagonistic, and of course sometimes collusive if they both tend to go for the same stages in the cycle.
- At a major level, neglect of some stages can prove to be a major obstacle to learning.

A group of doctors immediately grasped the significance of this distinction: their patients, they said, know their illness by direct acquaintance, whereas they know about it.

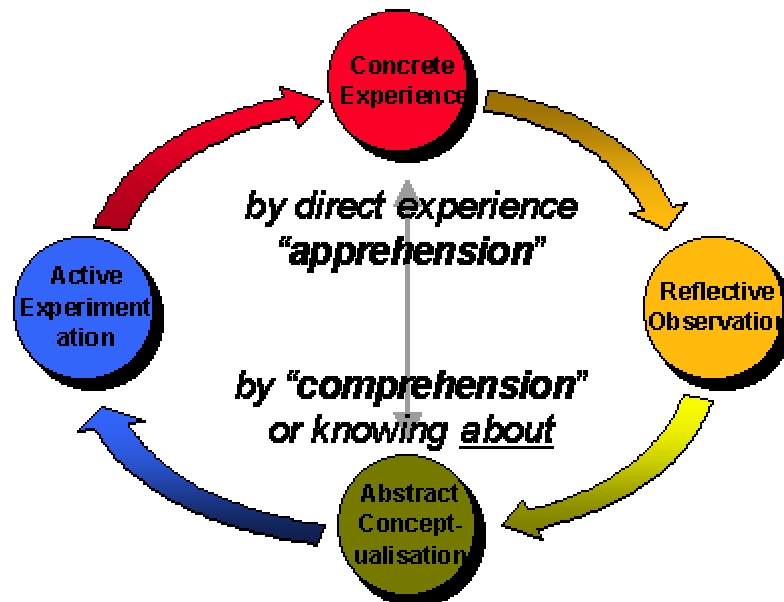
For many people, knowledge by acquaintance is the only valid form of knowledge, and they distrust "book-learning". One of the most frequent questions to social workers from parents is, "Do you have any children?". Answer "no", and your credibility is shot.

Elaborations of the Experiential Learning Cycle

Not all forms of skill and knowledge emphasise all the stages of the Cycle to the same extent, and Kolb has carried the argument further by relating topics and subject areas to the cycle in the following ways:

- **Concrete Experience** corresponds to "knowledge by acquaintance", direct practical experience (or "Apprehension" in Kolb's terms), as opposed to "knowledge about" something, which is theoretical, but perhaps more comprehensive, (hence "Comprehension") and represented by **Abstract Conceptualisation**. This distinction was first made by Aristotle, and has been discussed by epistemologists ever since.

Two ways of knowing:



- **Reflective Observation** concentrates on what the experience means to the experiencer, (it is transformed by "Intension") or its **connotations**, while **Active Experimentation** transforms the theory of Abstract Conceptualisation by testing it in practice (by "Extension") and relates to its **denotations**.