



***Methods of Analysis***  
**Experiential Analysis**

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Concepts are so clear; it takes so little time to develop their implications; experiences are so confused, and it requires so much time and energy to lay hold of them. (Dewey, 1917, p. 62)

*Experientia docet*— experience teaches— our ancestors advise. Yet how and what does experience teach? Indeed, the primary problem will always be *experientia literata* or how to make experience learned and shared. Experiential analysis is a composition and decomposition of presence in a stream of consciousness or interaction within an environment. This notion refers to pragmatic definitions of experience— as a “stream of consciousness” or “living flow,” according to James (1884), or an interaction or transaction, according to Dewey. For instance, Dewey (1934) defined experience as “the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication” (p. 22). Here, humans and nonhumans, young and old, alike have or learn from experiences. Experience is a way of talking about or making sense of what happened and experiential analysis offers techniques for formalizing this.

As de Lauretis (1984, p. 159) notes, “‘experience’ is a word widely recurrent in the feminist discourse, as in many others ranging from philosophy to common conversational speech” (p. 159). Drawing from pragmatists, she defines experience as “personal, subjective, engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning, and affect) to the events of the world” (p. 159). However, Scott (1991) cautions: “The process that de Lauretis describes operates crucially through differentiation; its effect is to constitute subjects as fixed and autonomous, and who are considered reliable sources of a knowledge that comes from access to the real by means of their experience” (p. 782). It is “important to note,” she continues, “that this subject is both the object of inquiry— the person one studies in the present or the past— and the investigator him- or herself” (p. 782). Similarly, Reinhart (1979/1984) clarifies:

The instrument in experiential analysis is the experiencing *self* in its observing, interacting, acting, and sensing.... Experiential analysis does not require the differentiation of researcher from the people being studied. In that sense, it is a humble methodology. (p. 354)

Just as conceptual analysis focuses on concepts, and perceptual analysis on percepts, experiential analysis focuses on experiences. Phenomenologists contemplate “what is given in experience,” whether our experiences are preconceptual, and whether we can analyze them as such. To be sure, maintaining a dualism between preconceptual givens and conceptual schemes in describing how experience generates knowledge creates problems, as Wittgenstein concludes. Critics of pragmatism assert that an experience consists of particulars and the challenge is to build wholes while remaining true to the parts. For pragmatists, an experience is a continuum, “unanalysed whole,” or “qualitative whole” and the challenge, upon reflection, is selecting and rejecting features or parts for analysis while maintaining the whole of the experience. Experiential analysis rests on a resolution that “we apprehend more than we comprehend” (Michael, 1997, p. 122). In other words, we know that there *is more* than what we know.

1. Two questions are herein begged: What is Experience or Experiential? *and* What is analysis?
  - a. James (1905, p. 30): Prepositions, copulas, and conjunctions, 'is,' 'isn't,' 'then,' 'before,' 'in,' 'on,' 'beside,' 'between,' 'next,' 'like,' 'unlike,' 'as,' 'but,' flower out of the stream of pure experience, the stream of concretes or the sensational stream, as naturally as nouns and adjectives do, and they melt into it again as fluidly when we apply them to a new portion of the stream.
  - b. Russell (1914, p. 2): The word "experience" like most of the words expressing fundamental ideas in philosophy, has been imported into the technical vocabulary from the language of daily life, and it retains some of the grime of its outdoor existence in spite of some scrubbing and brushing by impatient philosophers. Originally, the "philosophy of experience" was opposed to the *a priori* philosophy, and "experience" was confined to what we learn through the senses. Gradually, however, its scope widened until it included everything of which we are in any way conscious, and became the watchword of an emaciated idealism imported from Germany. The word had, on the one hand, the reassuring associations of the "appeal to experience," which seemed to preclude the wilder vagaries of transcendental metaphysicians; while on the other hand it held, as it were in solution, the doctrine that nothing can happen except as the "experience" of some mind.
  - c. Dewey (1917, p. 62): Concepts are so clear; it takes so little time to develop their implications; experiences are so confused, and it requires so much time and energy to lay hold of them.
  - d. Dewey (1917, p. 37): experience means primarily not knowledge, but ways of doing and suffering.
  - e. Dewey, "Conduct and Experience" (1931, pp. 251-252): The structure of whatever is had by way of immediate qualitative presences is found in the recurrent modes of interaction taking place between what we term organism, on one side, and environment, on the other. The interaction is the primary fact, and it constitutes a *transaction*. Only by analysis and selective abstraction can we differentiate the actual occurrence into two factors, one called organism and the other, environment.
  - f. Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934, p. 22): experience *is* the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication.
  - g. Steinkamp & Bell (1979, p. 2): in *Webster's (Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*, second college edition), experience is an actual "living through an event or events." The "living through" of an experience involves the total personality. We suggest that an experience cannot be understood by fragmentation or isolation; it has identity, continuity, and a broad base involving all human senses and activities. For example, upon reflection one can cite stimuli that evoked the possibility of an experience. One can trace activities within the scope of an experience that sequentially brought about participation in the experience and, finally, dissemination of that experience whether it was positive or negative. It is our contention that individuals, when they think of events from their own past, think of the totality of an experience, of the sequence of related activities within the experience and of their involvement in those activities.

Individuals think of experience as an integrated whole involving mind, physical being, and the sum of their previous experience.

- h. de Lauretis (1984, p. 159): "Experience" is a word widely recurrent in the feminist discourse, as in many others ranging from philosophy to common conversational speech. My concern here is only with the former. Though very much in need of clarification and elaboration, the notion of experience seems to me to be crucially important to feminist theory in that it bears directly on the major issues that have emerged from the women's movement—subjectivity, sexuality, the body, and feminist political practice.... I should say from the outset that, by experience, I do not mean the mere registering of sensory data, or a purely mental (psychological) relation to objects and events, or the acquisition of skills and competences by accumulation or repeated exposure. I use the term not in the individualistic, idiosyncratic sense of something belonging to one and exclusively her own even though others might have "similar" experiences; but rather in the general sense of a process by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed. Through that process one places oneself or is placed in social reality, and so perceives and comprehends as subjective (referring to, even originating in, oneself) those relations—material, economic, and interpersonal—which are in fact social and, in a larger perspective, historical. The process is continuous, its achievement unending or daily renewed. For each person, therefore, subjectivity is an ongoing construction, not a fixed point of departure or arrival from which one then interacts with the world. On the contrary, it is the effect of that interaction—which I call experience; and thus it is produced not by external ideas, values, or material causes, but by one's personal, subjective, engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning, and affect) to the events of the world.
  - i. Scott (1991, pp. 782, 797): The process that de Lauretis describes operates crucially through differentiation; its effect is to constitute subjects as fixed and autonomous, and who are considered reliable sources of a knowledge that comes from access to the real by means of their experience. When talking about historians and other students of the human sciences it is important to note that this subject is both the object of inquiry—the person one studies in the present or the past—and the investigator him- or herself. Experience is not a word we can do without, although, given its usage to essentialize identity and reify the subject, it is tempting to abandon it altogether. But experience is so much a part of everyday language, so imbricated in our narratives that it seems futile to argue for its expulsion. It serves as a way of talking about what happened, of establishing difference and similarity, of claiming knowledge that is "unassailable."
  - j. Hassenzahl (2010, p. 8): An experience is an episode, a chunk of time that one went through—with sights and sounds, feelings and thoughts, motives and actions; they are closely knitted together, stored in memory, labeled, relived and communicated to others. An experience is a story, emerging from the dialogue of a person with her or his world through action.
  - k. Burley (2014, p. 33): contact with otherness. The implication is that awareness is the result of how one is changed (how experience is created) by contact with otherness
2. What is Experiential Analysis?

- a. Reinhart (1979/1984, pp. 353-354): Experiential analysis assumes that what one person experiences is related to or reflects psychosocial arrangements and forces, so that to explicate the former is to illuminate the latter. Everyone has access to his own experience, although people are differentially aware of, interested in, or able to describe their experiences.... The instrument in experiential analysis is the experiencing *self* in its observing, interacting, acting, and sensing.... Experiential analysis does not require the differentiation of researcher from the people being studied. In that sense, it is a humble methodology. The researcher is not elite or aloof but becomes the subject of his own investigations.
    - i. (p. 362): Experiential analysis produces not information about something, as is the case in objective studies, but rather intimate knowledge that something is the case, knowledge of, or knowledge for some purpose. It derives its certainty from the irrefutability of the researcher's having lived through whatever is being studied. Experiential analysis is a pursuit of directness and immediacy; it is not only "instrumentless research" but also the adoption of a stance of complete surrender to the experience.
  - b. Hubbell (1994, p. 61): Instead, she proposes to extend the boundaries of participant observation by advocating a form of research called experiential analysis. Experiential analysis is a form of research that encourages the researcher to use a variety of alternative techniques— some of them quite openly subjective—as a means of learning about a particular sociopolitical phenomenon. According to Reinhartz, researchers who engage in experiential analysis should be guided by the following principles: the research should mirror the researcher's personal concerns; the research product should be a mix of rational analysis and intuitive insights; the research product should be well written and be geared towards actively engaging the potential reader; it should be a combination of objective and subjective findings; and it should reflect explicitly the personal values of the researcher.
3. **Procedures of experiential analysis** (artificial, cultural, natural & spiritual beings & things, and hybrids).
- a. One may follow a process of phenomenology in experiential analysis (see Perceptual Analysis): van Manen's (1989) brief summary of phenomenology and phenomenological methodology. Drawing from an extensive elaboration in *Researching Lived Experience*, van Manen summarizes the phenomenological method:
    - i. Turning to the nature of lived experience
      - 1. Formulating the phenomenological question
      - 2. Explicating assumptions and understandings
      - 3. Orienting to the question
    - ii. Investigating experience as we live it
      - 1. Turning to personal experience as a starting point
      - 2. Tracing etymological sources
      - 3. Searching idiomatic phrases
      - 4. Obtaining experiential descriptions from others
        - a. Protocol writing (Lived experience descriptions)
        - b. Interviewing (personal life story)
        - c. Observing (experiential anecdote)
        - d. Experiential descriptions in literature

- e. Biography as a resource for experiential material
      - f. Diaries and Journals as resources
      - g. Art and fiction as a resource
    - iii. Hermeneutic phenomenological reflection
      - 1. Lifeworld existentials as guides to reflection
      - 2. Thematic analysis
        - a. Uncovering thematic aspects
        - b. Isolating thematic statements
        - c. Composing linguistic transformations
        - d. Gleaning thematic descriptions from art and literature
        - e. Interpretation through conversation
        - f. Determining incidental and essential themes
    - iv. Hermeneutic phenomenological writing
      - 1. Attending to the speaking of language
      - 2. Silence— the limits of power and language
      - 3. Anecdotes
      - 4. Themes
      - 5. To write is to show or reveal something
  - b. Or consider the following procedure or sequence:
    - i. What are the questions or problems?
    - ii. Specify an experience for analysis. The more recent the better for clarity, although this may not always be feasible or the case.
    - iii. Describe or amplify the experience with necessary empirical details. Ask: What is it about this experience that is truly begging or deserving attention or awareness? Ask: Is this experience whole and can I or we realize its wholeness? Ask: Is this experience a sum of parts and what are the parts and partialities that are somehow additive? What makes this experience or its parts truly memorable or forgettable? Funny? Boring? Impressive? Familiar? Strange? Etc.
      - 1. Am I writing stream of consciousness or reflective or both?
    - iv. Explicate or clarify meaning
      - 1. What is the unit of analysis?
        - a. The experience of...
        - b. A feeling toward...
        - c. An insight into...
      - 2. What or who is this experience illuminating, if anything or anyone?
    - v. Schematic and Thematic Analysis
      - 1. What are the schemas or themes that make this experience common or unique?
      - 2. How do the relevant literature sources or theories conceptualize these schemas or themes?
    - vi. Draw the analysis to closure
4. Experiential Learning
  - a. James (1980): Dewey, who was probably the greatest educational thinker ever produced in this country, wrote of learning as an experiential continuum, a continuity of growth experiences. But here is where the disagreement begins, because he characterized learning not as the experience itself, but as thinking

about experience. So a form of education like Outward Bound that provides intense experiences also needs to provide tools for thinking about those experiences, for tying what has happened on a course into the experiential continuum of those who have passed through it.

<http://wilderdom.com/facilitation/Mountains.html>

- b. Dewey argued that education *is* experience. Experience occurs continuously through interaction with artificial and natural environments. But, it is inquiry, expression, and analysis, or sometimes coercion, which inspire *an* experience, and interconnect experiences over time (Dewey, 1934, pp. 35-65).
- c. Criteria for an educationally rich experience are not easily articulated. Dewey (1916) ambiguously proposed in *Democracy and Education* that an experience is educative when it “adds to the meaning of experience... [and] increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (pp. 89-90). He attempted to clarify the dilemma of reconciling experience with education in two later books (i.e., Dewey, 1934, 1938). Dewey (1916) asserted that not everything had to be, nor could be, learned through experience; at the same time, the reconstruction of experience was to be social as well as a personal endeavour. Dewey criticized educators for shortsighted and ungrounded interpretations of experience, and it was on this issue that much of the so-called experience-based or activity work was challenged. Reacting to trivialized interpretations of experience, Svendsen (1963) wrote candidly: "doing is not, *ipso facto*, learning" (p. 99).
- d. How do we learn? How do we learn from experience? For Dewey, there were three phases or stages to experiential learning: Purposive Planning, Reflective Inquiry, and Transformative Action. An experience is educational if students purposively plan their experience, inquire into some problem and reflect on the inquiry (something has to be resolved), and in the final stage, the students are transformed by their actions.

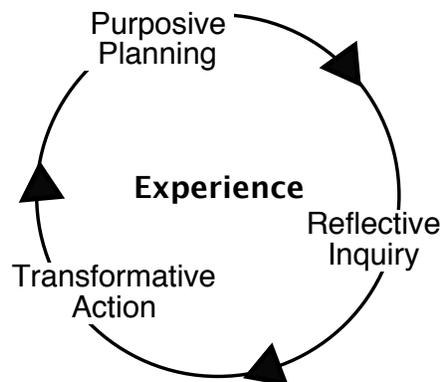


Figure 1. Dewey's Experiential Learning Cycle.

- e. Kolb (1984) built on Dewey's work and distilled four stages of experiential learning from his observations of educational activities. Kolb said that the cycle of experiential learning begins with Reflective Observation, proceeds through Abstract Conceptualization and Active Experimentation and concludes with Concrete Experience. In other words, there is more to an experience, if it is to be educative, than merely doing. Kolb suggested that most experience was triggered by active experimentation through inquiries and projects. Once the cycle is

started, it is the teachers' task to guide the experiences and provide time and materials for reflective observation and abstract conceptualization.

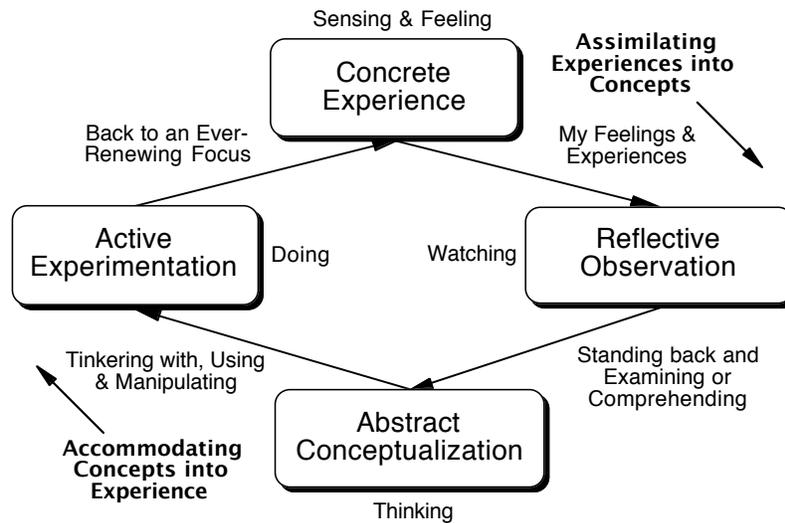


Figure 2. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle.

- f. Most, if not all, of the activities and projects we use in education ought to complete a cycle of learning styles. We ought to provide time for reflective observation (demonstrations, examples), time for abstract conceptualization (discussions, questions concerning why and what), and time for active experimentation and concrete experience (activities, projects). Some people prefer to perceive the world through concrete experience. These people perceive by sensing and feeling, and prefer to use intuition to solve the problems of a given task. Other people prefer abstract conceptualization. They like to think things through, analyze and intellectualize. They function well in structured situations. Some people prefer to process new information by active experimentation. They like to roll up their sleeve and immerse themselves in the task. They look for practical ways of applying what they learn. They embrace risk-taking and are results oriented. Still others process through reflective observation. They like to watch and ponder the situation. They likely see tasks from several points of view. They value patience and judgment.
- g. Steiner & Bell, *Experiential Taxonomy* (1979, pp. 10-11)
  - i. EXPOSURE: Consciousness of an experience. This involves two levels of exposure and a readiness for further experience [Sensory Response and Readiness].
  - ii. PARTICIPATION: The decision to become physically a part of an experience. There are two levels of interaction within this category [Representation and Modification].
  - iii. IDENTIFICATION: The coming together of the learner and the idea (objective) in an emotional and intellectual context for the achievement of the objective.

- iv. INTERNALIZATION: The participant moves from identification to internalization when the experience begins to affect the life-style of the participant. There are two levels in this category [Expansive and Intrinsic].
- v. DISSEMINATION: The experience moves beyond internalization to the dissemination of the experience. It goes beyond the positive sharing that began at Level 3.t) and involves two levels of activity. [Informational and Homiletic].