

APPLYING DAVID A. KOLB'S EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING MODEL IN ORGANISING EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract: The research investigates the modeling competency of economics and business administration students by analysing the academic program at Economics and Business Administration Department, University of Economics and Management Business - Thai Nguyen University. The author accordingly highlights the roles of modeling competency in the formation and development of economics students' competencies.

Keywords: Educational activities, experiential learning model, preschool children.

1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of preschool education is to form and develop children physically, emotionally, intellectually, esthetically, create the first elements of personality and prepares them for primary school enrollment; as well as develop children's psychological functions, competencies and fundamental qualities, age-appropriate life skills, stimulate and develop the maximum potential, set the foundation for further study at the next educational level and for lifelong learning [1; pp. 3]. For this purpose, experience-based education is studied and applied in caring and educating children, creating opportunities for children to explore, experience to develop personal experiences about the surrounding world.

Experiential education, or learning by experience, was studied and applied by many educators throughout the world, such as J. Dewey (1983), Kurt Lewin (1947), J. Piaget (1950), David A. Kolb (1939). David A. Kolb's learning model is applied effectively in modern education. His theoretical viewpoint is that knowledge is constructed through the transformation of experience, which is the foundation to develop experiential learning model and, apply it in the learning process.

2. CONTENT

2.1. David A. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory

David A. Kolb (born 1939) is an American educator. He is the founder and president of the Experiential Learning System. His research has greatly influenced the innovation of educational methods, particularly the method of applying experiential education in schools. David A. Kolb's greatest contribution is to provide a model of experience-based learning.

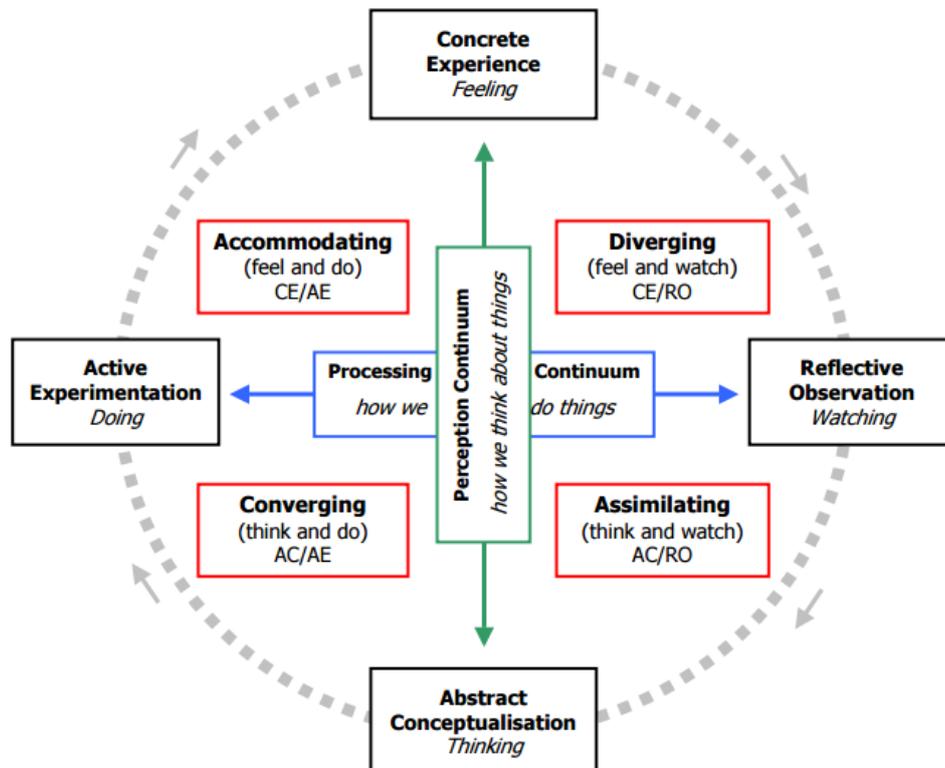
David A. Kolb's learning model has inherited the cognitive development model of J. Piaget. J. Piaget believes that children develop through action. When a person interacts with his/her environment, his/her

existing knowledge will evolve. In his theory, the basis of learning is self-discovery, and "To understand is to discover or reproduce by rediscovering." The cognitive development of children goes through different stages in which the child perceive the idea, which can then be eliminated as false. Therefore, J. Piaget appreciated the role of action, knowledge is constructed step by step through children's active participation in the surrounding environment. According to J. Piaget, cognitive development also follows a four-step process: from concrete phenomena - to reflection - to abstract thinking - and ultimately to active intellectual action. In this cycle, the role of experience in the cognitive development of children is clearly reflected. Children's cognitive development is the result of an experience cycle. The experience of this stage is the successor of the experience of the previous stage.

Similar to J. Piaget's cognitive development model, David A. Kolb's experience-based learning model consists of four steps and four interrelated learning styles: 1) specific experience; 2) reflection observation; 3) abstract concepts; 4) active testing. This model was illustrated in the below figure.

Step 1. Concrete experience. At this stage, the learner performs manipulation and actions on specific objects such as object observation, explanatory listening, reading materials, listening to lectures, discussing the topic of the lesson, etc. Through practical activities learners will develop their short term experience, which becomes the "key input" of the learning process. These experiences will become sustainable and the basis for subsequent experiences. According to the learning experience model of David A. Kolb, this is just the beginning.

Step 2. Reflection Observation. In this stage, the learner needs to analyze, compare and evaluate existing experiences. It means that the learner analyzes the



David A. Kolb's experience-based learning model [2]

experiences which he or she has experienced, considering the suitability of the experience with the practice. This assessment helps learners to extend their own experience. In the process of contemplation, and further memorization of those thoughts in a natural way, the learner will draw lessons, experience, as well as new directions for the next step.

Step 3. Abstract Concept. This step is an important step for the experience to be transformed into “knowledge” - the concept system, and stored permanently in the brain. After the practical activity, the learner analyzes, identifies, and conceptualized the experiences they have received. From experience, learners obtain new concepts and “theory”. Without this step, experience cannot be permanent.

Step 4. Active Experiment. This step is important in the formation of real knowledge. New knowledge is put into practice for testing. According to David A. Kolb, this is the final step for the learner to confirm or deny the concepts from the previous step.

The core of David A. Kolb's experiential learning theory is the return of thinking in consciousness, which means the learner works with his or her experience, refer to his or her own experiences, analyze, generalize and formalize them into concepts. Then, these concepts are

applied and tested in practice etc.; hence, new experiences appear. In this way, old experience works as the basis of new experience, new experience is tested in practice, gradually become the old experience. Looking at the model of David A. Kolb, we find that the learner's experience is shaped by the conflict between concrete experience and abstract concept, or the contradiction from the unknown and the known. In order to solve this conflict, learners need to have specific techniques and methods, learners can use their specific experience, or abstract concepts to solve problems, or combine both concrete experiences and abstract concept to perform the task. It can be said that David A. Kolb's experimental learning process is derived from the acquisition of experience from the senses, by analyzing, generalizing, and finally applying the experience into a new cycle.

David A. Kolb believes that learners need have capacity to observe, to reflect personal experiences from many angles, to investigate situations from many perspectives, and to be aware of applying new knowledge to practical activities and solving problems.

2.2. Requirements for early childhood teachers in organizing early experimental activities for preschool children

It is said that learning through experience is a natural

education method, children develop by themselves through the process of operation. However, David A. Kolb and the researchers on experiential learning claimed that the role of teachers is of great significance to the effectiveness of the practical activities to the learner. Experiential teaching requires instructors to follow a supportive, non-instructive style to help learners gain knowledge from real experiences and at the same time to adapt to the learner's style.

Development takes place in predictable steps and learning takes place in certain sequences, including individual differences in speed as well as in learning patterns. Children perceive reality, directly from the specific senses and perception with objects, things, phenomena. Children's thinking is also associated with feelings and subjective will. Cognitive skills are the basis of the cognitive structure and these skills will be strengthened and developed if the child is regularly practiced, experienced in activities. Children's learning activities are not compulsory. The learning elements are only primitive and unclear forms.

In addition to the requirements for childcare skills, preschool teachers need to consider the characteristics of the child to ensure the requirements for organizing educational activities for children as follows:

- *Creating motivation for children.* At kindergarten age, it is impossible and not a positive thing to force children to act in the adult context. When children are excited, they will be more active and productive. An intriguing story, an eye-catching picture, an engaging corner with lots of toys will inspire children to be active and active. In the "learning" of children too, if adults create interest in children with learning, children will have the motivation to learn and study in a positive way. The child's activity motors consist of internal and external ones. Internal motivations include curiosity, exploration, love to imitate and the desire to show off their ability as an adult. The latter includes operating environment, timing and the teacher's encouragement and motivation. Preschool teachers have a variety of techniques to motivate their internal motivations, such as surprise elements and teacher's encouragement. A surprise element stimulates curiosity and inspires children to participate in activities, especially learning activities. Teachers can use items such as boxes, bags or curtains to create a surprise element for children, then children explore each object and find the characteristics of the object through the senses. The task of learning when a child completes a game is also an element of surprise for the child. It will be easy to create a "concrete experience" as the child engages with a relaxed mind and

wants to discover new things.

- *Paying attention to the Zone of Proximal Development the child.* Vygotsky believes that education should be based on children's background experience and anticipate the development of children for effective education. He asserted that humans are born with social features which will develop early in the child when children participate in activities. Undoubtedly, every single behaviour of a child is dissolved in and rooted from society. Moreover, he presented the theory of "zone of proximal development". Every individual has different background experiences due to experience, education and genetic quality. It regulates the potential of the individual, which decide the ability to act, think, make decisions and solve problems if there is sufficient support.

- *Emphasizing the meaning of experiential activities, including play activities with children.* To educate children effectively, preschool teachers should pay attention to children's core activities. The main activity of kindergarten children is playing. Through playing, especially role-play activities, children experience with role, play action, activities with different playing situations, from which the experience of the child is gradually formed. Preschool children always have the need to explore the surrounding world, exploring new things in life. It is the perception that has become the motivation for engaging in activities. Therefore, the constant involvement of children in experiential activities will help children to develop comprehensive personality. This concept of early childhood education acknowledge children's role of the active subject of the activity (the concept of activity here includes both object and communication activities). Various activities are organized with children as center (for children - for the development of the child, by children - children initiate by themselves, from children - based on children's background experience and their individual characteristics) to ensure the stable development of children [3].

- *Maintaining children's engagement for subsequent experiences.* Children engagement throughout the course of the activity have a great impact on the performance or formulation of their new concept. Therefore, maintaining the engagement for the next experience is essential. In daily activities of children, the pick-up-and-return time is a good time to inspire new experiences and follow-up activities. At the point of picking up children, with teachers' gentle words, teachers can create a sense of safety and fun, which will give children the excitement of the daily activities. At the time of the child's return, if

teachers talk with children about the joy and achievements of the day, this will give her the expectation to come to class the next day to play, to experience with their friends. Thus, there are many factors affect the effectiveness of organizing experiential activities such as maintaining the motivation of the child, mobilizing and using the experience of children, core activities of the child, creating and maintaining excitement for your children.

By analysis of the typical activities of kindergarten children and the model of learning through the experience of David A. Kolb, the researchers propose some recommendations for applying the theory into organizing educational activities for children in kindergartens.

2.3. Some guidelines to apply David A. Kolb's experiential learning theory into organizing educational activities for preschool children

As mentioned, at preschool level, there is overall development of the child and the cognitive ability of the child is not the same as older children. Therefore, it's necessary to take the following point into consideration when using the experiential learning model to organize educational activities in kindergartens:

- *First, organizing educational activities with the emphasis on content relevant to children's real life and experience.* The national preschool educational program clearly states the content requirements to be: "*consistent between educational contents and real life, relevant to the child's life and experiences, preparing them for gradually integrating into life*" [1; pp. 3]. The selection of content for the children's experience is not beyond the requirements. For each region, each ethnic group has its own cultural characteristics, mountainous areas are different from the delta areas, rural areas are different from urban ones, so the selection of content is necessarily relevant to real life. When the content of the experience is linked to the child's real life, it gives the child a sense of fun, discovery, and the opportunity to apply the experience to the child's daily life. By regularly experiencing daily life-related activities, children have the opportunity to mobilise their background experience to solve the problems and develop the skill to apply knowledge into real life.

- *Secondly, strengthening the experiment activities outside the classroom, outside the preschool to create opportunities for children to do and explore.* +) Through outdoor activities, preschool children will develop intellectual, physical and emotional relationships and ultimately develop their personality. It is indispensable for children to participate in outdoor activities so that

they are able to enjoy fresh air, observe the world around them, discover new things from the nature, and be free to work and enrich their living experience. Activities on schoolyards, playgrounds, picnics, etc. are outdoor activities that greatly influence their development. For example: visiting gardens, school grounds, experiencing a working day of the farmer in the garden of the kindergarten etc. These activities not only bring children the comfort of physical activity and movement, but also help children to be active and explore the surrounding phenomena. +) Activities outside the preschool such as visiting elementary school, historical relics, landscapes, places close to where children live etc. provide the surprise and have great educational significance for children. +) For off-site preschool activities, teachers should plan and prepare well in cooperation with young parents during preparation and organization to ensure the safety and efficiency of the activity. +) After the experience outside classrooms and preschools, children will achieve new experiences. In order that children's experience becomes sustainable, teachers should create many situations and opportunities for children to apply his or her experience, mobilise their background knowledge in problem solving and performing educational tasks.

- *Thirdly, integrating educational content in children's experience* is essential and appropriate to the developmental characteristics of children. When organizing the children's activities in the preschool garden, teachers can help children experience the activities of taking care of vegetables and trees, and also can integrate educational contents such as teaching names, features, medical values of different kinds of vegetables to human's health or teaching them to protect the environment, count the kinds of vegetables in the garden, etc. Thus, through an experiential activity, teachers can integrate many educational contents. Based on children's cognitive characteristics and the actual conditions of the child experience, teacher plans and selects the contents to effectively integrate.

- *Finally, paying attentions on education assessment and evaluation based on children's experience.* The *Early Childhood Education Program*, states that *assessing children's development* is a process of systematically collecting information about children and analyzing, contrasting with the objectives of educational activities [1]. Evaluating the child in the process of experiencing focuses on children's ability to solve

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primary education reform. In particular, attention should be paid to the promotion of learning positivity, enhancing the discovery, problem solving, cooperation, experience, creativity, enhancing practice, applying knowledge into life, training the assessment skills for students, which are all the basic directions for teaching mathematics.

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problems, applying their background knowledge into specific situations rather knowledge that children acquired in the end. Each child with different personal experiences will deal with the situation and perform the task differently. It is therefore necessary to evaluate the educational performance based on the child's experience.

3. CONCLUSION

For preschool children, integration of educational content through experiences is described as effective in the implementation of preschool education programs. According to David A. Kolb, organizing educational activities includes: providing opportunities for children to work, stimulating and maintaining excitement for children, mobilising the child's background experience, paying particular attention to their "proximal development zone"; focusing on the experience in organizing educational activities. Therefore, in the process of educating the child, preschool teachers need to exploit more experiential activities for the children to work, explore and enrich their personal experience.

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