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EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE AS THE BASIS FOR SESSION DESIGN IN NEW METHODOLOGY CURRICULUM

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The Ukrainian education system is undergoing a transformation in order to meet European and international standards. The Ministry of Education and Science is preparing reforms in the secondary and higher education that are to significantly change the Ukrainian education system. As Lilia Hrynevych states, “These changes are necessary for the successful development of human recourse in the country in its struggle for European integration” [1, 91].

“New Generation School Teacher” project jointly initiated by the British Council Ukraine and the Ministry of Education and Science Ukraine and launched in March 2013 was introduced in response to recent changes and developments in education and society. The overall aim of the project is to introduce change to the initial teacher education system in Ukraine, to strengthen the teaching profession and shape 21st-century teachers. The project team has designed National Curriculum for foreign language teacher education (Methodology). Ten universities are now participating in the first wave of the Curriculum piloting according to Ministry of Education and Science Order # 871 issued on 12 August, 2015.

The course programme of the EFL Methodology reflects a complete innovation:

- The course lasts for three years, right up until a teacher’s final certification. The number of class hours has also been raised from an insufficient 4% - 54 to

108 hours of classroom instruction – to 660 class hours of teacher training and devoted exclusively to methodology.

- In the new curriculum, training is delivered exclusively in English, and in this way the communication skills in the foreign language are developed.
- The EFL Methodology course is no longer taught as a theoretical course, but is focused on developing teaching skills integrating school experience into it.
- School experience is introduced in the third semester and runs through the eighth semester. Moreover, it takes a very different form. It begins with controlled observation (third and fourth semester): students observe the work of experienced teachers in the classroom once every two weeks. Then they examine this experience, comparing it with their course materials on teaching foreign language. Fifth through seventh semester students will work as teacher assistants, microteaching once a week. Eighth semester students will conduct classes independently at school.
- Further programme innovations include a greater emphasis on interactive learning, and a reduction of traditional lectures and seminars. Thus, there is a shift from a teacher-centred to a student-centred learning and teaching [3].

The innovative character of the Methodology Curriculum requires new approaches to session design. Since Kolb's Experiential Learning theory is one of the most popular and most frequently cited educational theories, it has been chosen as the basis for session design in new Methodology course. According to Kolb (1984), "Learning is a process, in which knowledge is created through transformation of experience" [2, 38]. Thus "experiential learning" applies to any kind of learning through experience. Kolb's theory presents a way of constructing and alternation in the course of study, and provides concrete understanding of a whole course of study which can be taught in order to have better learning by the students. Each ends of the continuums (modes) provide a step in the learning process (see Figure 1).

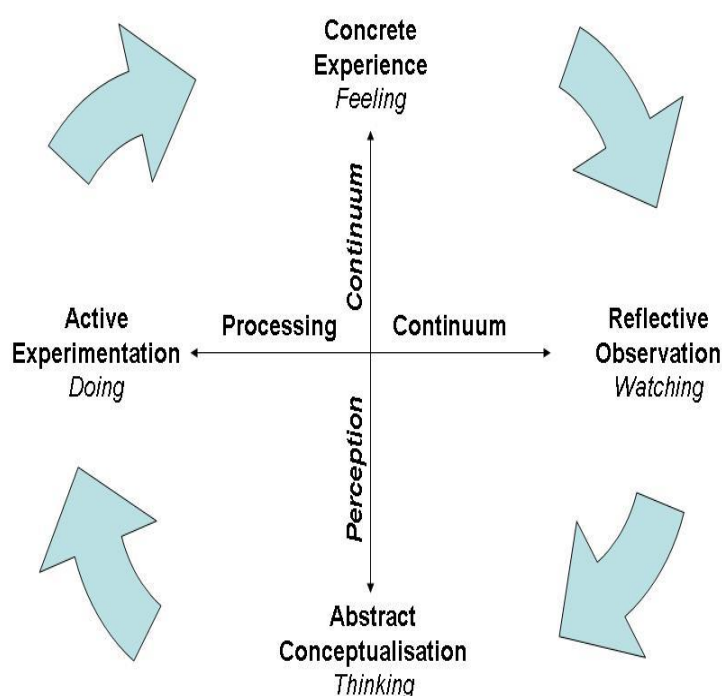


Figure 1. Kolb's experiential learning cycle

As we see Kolb suggests a 4-phase learning cycle connected with doing, sensing, observing, reflecting, thinking and planning. This learning cycle structures learning sequence and provides the development of life skills (communication, teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, information literacy, creativity, etc.) which is the aim of the Curriculum.

Based on real session (Unit 2.3. Teaching Vocabulary in Context, Session 2. Techniques for Presenting Vocabulary), the following descriptions demonstrate more clearly the practical application of Kolb's experiential learning cycle to EFL Methodology teaching.

Stage 1. Students reflect on the way they were taught vocabulary at school/University and fill in the tables individually. Then they share their experience of learning vocabulary with their partners specifying techniques used by their teacher which they find most useful and explaining what makes their vocabulary learning experience memorable. Here students reflect on their own experience and share it.

Stage 2. Students watch a video and identify the techniques which the teachers use to convey the meaning of vocabulary items. Then they discuss the results in plenary.

Stage 3. In groups, students read the articles on teaching vocabulary and find three more techniques for teaching vocabulary, which were not mentioned in the video. Then they share the information with the group.

Stage 4. In the same groups, students discuss what techniques are particularly appropriate for the presentation of certain types of words (e.g. abstract/concrete nouns, parts of speech, phrasal verbs) and what techniques are likely to be more, or less appropriate for particular learners (e.g. young/ adult, beginner/advanced). Then they categorize the techniques according to types of words and learners' age.

So, on stages 2 – 4 students get new experience, reflect on it and share it.

Stage 5. Working in pairs, students are supplied with the list of words and the list of techniques for presenting vocabulary. They are to choose the appropriate technique for presenting a particular lexical item. Then they check the answer with the key and discuss the controversial points if any. On this stage students experience new skills.

Stage 6. Students work in four groups. Each group is given three vocabulary items to present in class, using an appropriate technique to convey the meaning and specifying age and level of learners. The rest of the group is to identify the techniques presented and give feedback. Here students try out new skills.

Stage 7. Students participate in round-up. They are asked to point out three things about vocabulary teaching that they have learnt during this session; to name vocabulary activities which they particularly liked; to name vocabulary techniques they would like to experiment with. On this stage students reflect on their new experience.

Throughout the session students are actively involved in different activities or experience (Concrete Experience), they reflect on each of the activity or experience (Reflective Observation), gain knowledge or skills from the experience (Abstract Conceptualisation), try out and test new skills and abilities (Active Experimentation).

So experiential learning cycle views learning as an integrated process with each stage being mutually supportive of and feeding into the next. Such approach to session design makes the sequence of activities logic and provides learners with the opportunity to experience the real world. Simultaneously, it develops 21-st century skills which are viewed as fundamentals in the methodology of teaching a foreign language, since it takes a 21st century teacher to instruct a 21st century learner. Content modules will provide undergraduates in teacher training programs with both curricular and life skills which they can then pass on to their pupils at school.

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