Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) - David Kolb (1984)

This theory defines learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (Kolb 1984: 41).

The learning process is portrayed as an idealized learning cycle or spiral where the learner “touches all the bases” - experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting. Immediate or concrete experiences are the basis for observations and reflections. These reflections are assimilated and distilled into abstract concepts from which new implications for action can be drawn. These implications can be actively tested and serve as guides in creating new experiences. ELT proposes that this idealized learning cycle will vary by individual’s learning style and learning context.

Kolb and Fry (1975) argue that the learning cycle can begin at any one of the four points – and that it should really be approached as a continuous spiral. However, it is suggested that the learning process often begins with a person carrying out a particular action and then seeing the effect of the action in this situation. Following this, the second step is to understand these effects in the particular instance so that if the same action was taken in the same circumstances it would be possible to anticipate what would follow from the action. In this pattern the third step would be understanding the general principle under which the particular instance falls.

When the general principle is understood, the last step, according to David Kolb is its application through action in a new circumstance within the range of generalization. In some representations of experiential learning these steps, (or ones like them), are sometimes represented as a circular movement. In reality, if learning has taken place the process could be seen as a spiral. The action is taking place in a different set of circumstances and the learner is now able to anticipate the possible effects of the action.

(http://infed.org/mobi/david-a-kolb-on-experiential-learning/)