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# Teaching your students to learn and unlearn

## Pre-webinar reading

by Manal Sabbah

Learning is a complex concept. Different people understand it in different ways. Hence, there are many theories that exist to conceptualise it. The discussion in the webinar will be based on *experiential learning* theories and their application in the English Language classroom, in particular Dewey's theory. In these theories, learning is understood as a situated continuous process that takes place through experiences that happen in the real world and result in emergent outcomes. The purpose of this handout is to help the attendees develop a general understanding of the theoretical context of experiential learning theories, before the webinar.

### Experiential Learning Theories

Under the umbrella of Experiential Learning Theories, are those of Kolb's, Schon's and others. These theories are mainly derived from Dewey's Theory of Transaction (2004/1916; 2008/1938).

#### 1. Dewey's Theory of Transaction:

John Dewey, an American pragmatist and educational reformer, emphasized the practical usefulness of philosophy in people's lives. Dewey's theory of learning revolves around the centrality of experiences within the sociocultural context. He rejected the dualistic view of body/mind and individual/environment, instead proposing that learning happens through transactions between learners and their environments. Thinking and action are inseparable, forming an "organic circle." He argued that all learning occurs through experiences, with educative experiences being those that promote growth and continuity. He considered experiences that do not result in growth and continuity as "mis-educative". Dewey emphasized the importance of interaction and continuity in learning, viewing the learner and the environment as a single entity. Knowledge, to Dewey, is a subset of experience and is derived through reflection and inquiry.

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Dewey's approach stresses the emergent and embodied nature of learning, emphasizing the ongoing cycle of experiences, reflection, and change, and viewing individuals as meaning-making beings shaped by their experiences in their worlds. In order for people to learn, they need to utilise tools. Dewey views language as “the tool of tools”. This is because language allows people to express themselves to themselves and to other people. This is one of the reasons why Dewey’s theory can be helpful in teaching language in the classroom. Dewey's theory has influenced young and adult learning theories, particularly in shaping the understanding of reflective practices among teachers.

## References and Further Reading

- Dewey, J. (2004). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York, NY: Dover. (Original work published in 1916).
- Dewey, J. (2008). *Logic: The theory of inquiry*. USA: Read Books. (Original work published in 1938).

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You can register for Manal Sabbah’s webinar here: <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/news-and-events/webinars/webinars-teachers/active-learning-methodologies-mini-event>