

Lesson 2: Create Lessons for Different Learning Styles

Conceptualize a project plan based on the four stages of the learning cycle.

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Everyone learns differently. Some people learn through observation; others learn through doing. To support the many different styles of learning, education theorists and philosophers have developed the experiential-learning cycle.

As the name suggests, experimental learning helps students learn through an experience that involves a direct encounter with the phenomena being studied, rather than just thinking about the encounter. The learning cycle drives home a lesson by having students do an act repeatedly, which helps turn concepts into skills and memory.

The learning cycle is composed of four stages: **experience**, **process**, **generalize**, and **apply**. Each stage drives the next in a continuous loop.

1. Students **experience** what they are going to learn about through a concrete activity.
 2. They **process** the experience by looking back and evaluating it through reflections and observations.
 3. They **generalize** what was important about the project by developing theories and concepts.
 4. Finally, they **apply** the information they've learned by testing it in another activity.
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The Learning Cycle in Action

To reflect younger learning paths, Citizen Schools has revamped the traditional stages of the learning cycle into the following: modeling, scaffolding, coaching, and fading. Lesson plans for apprenticeships are developed around these stages, so keep them in mind when thinking about your lessons. Below is a basic overview of each stage. Later lessons will elaborate on them further during the development phase.

MODELING

Modeling kicks off the project. Mentors begin by demonstrating how to complete a task that's within their area of expertise. These demonstrations usually involve skills that the mentors use in their day-to-day lives.

For example, a journalism professional might demonstrate how to collect information by interviewing a possible source. Or, a Web designer might demonstrate how to use algebra by calculating the dimensions for a graphic in pixels.

Support for coverage of learning beyond the classroom is provided in part by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

The Learning Cycle in Action (continued)

SCAFFOLDING

Scaffolding is designed to help students complete a task on their own. The mentors provide guidance, tools, and support, and students build confidence so they can complete similar tasks in the future without much hand-holding.

In the journalism apprenticeship, mentors had apprentices practice interview skills by first interviewing one another in the classroom. Then the apprentices brainstormed and wrote down questions to ask their official subjects. On the day of the actual interviews, the apprentices were prepared.

COACHING AND FADING

These are two stages in one. Mentors provide constant feedback to students, but slowly, they fade out of the picture as the students' skills and confidence grow. To help apprentices improve their skills, mentors work alongside them, offering encouragement and constructive criticism. As apprentices improve, mentors gradually back away to allow the students to work completely on their own.

Continuing with the journalism example, mentors encouraged students to practice interviews over the phone. The mentors listened in while students spoke to different subjects. When students had trouble, the mentors jumped in and coached them. Eventually, students were able to complete interviews without a mentor's help.

Getting to the WOW

As you've learned, experiential learning involves real, tangible interaction—mostly through project learning. Apprenticeships are structured around project learning to ensure that students have a chance to demonstrate mastery over the skills they've acquired.

The WOW, or final student presentation, represents the end product—what you and the students will be working toward throughout the apprenticeship. In application, it's the product, performance, or presentation that marks the student's progress. Try to incorporate one or several forms of the WOW throughout your apprenticeship.

Keep your WOW in mind when developing your lessons. This end goal should remain a central theme in your lesson plans and apprenticeship.

LEARNING CYCLE IN YOUR LESSONS

How can you integrate the learning cycle into your lesson plans? Here are some basic guidelines.

- » Expose your students to the skills and concepts they're learning through examples and activities.
- » Help students master the subject matter by moving through this cycle a number of times using different stimuli.
- » Build time into each lesson for students to process (by asking questions and doing structured practice) and generalize (by learning about more abstract theories related to the skill or seeing its use outside of the apprenticeship).
- » Allow adequate time for sharing ideas and questions.
- » Use open-ended questions to stimulate thinking.
- » Use outside examples to tie in concepts for each activity.
- » Encourage students to see patterns in the experiments.