TOPICAL ARTICLES

Integrating Separate and Connected Knowing: The Experiential Learning Model

Carolyn Zerbe Enns
Cornell College

I describe the differences between separate and connected knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) and suggest that the experiential learning model (Kolb, 1981, 1984) is a useful framework for integrating traditional, separate knowing and connected, collaborative learning. The strengths of this model and a list of activities and examples associated with various learning positions are identified..

Critical thinking, objective observation, abstract analysis, and the comprehension of great ideas are usually considered essential components of learning, thinking, and conceptualizing within academic disciplines. Other activities that involve the expression of feelings, personal reflection, subjective reactions, active exploration, and consciousness-raising are less frequently identified as central features of education (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Fisher, 1981). In their popular book on women's ways of learning and knowing, Belenky et al. (1986) associated the first set of activities with *separate knowing*, a form of learning that is dominant in most educational institutions and most consistent with many men's experiences in western culture. They labeled the second set of activities as *connected knowing*, a form of learning that is linked with many women's socialization experiences. Furthermore, they suggested that some individuals, especially women, feel disempowered by the demands of separate knowing and that a transformation of our teaching practices is necessary so that more individuals will feel empowered and capable of meeting their full potential in learning situations.

In addition to recent descriptions of gender patterns in learning, authors have proposed curricular transformations that would lead to greater appreciation of women's experiences; multicultural perspectives; and the intersections of race, class, culture, and gender that influence people's lives (McIntosh, 1984; Schuster & Van Dyne, 1984; Tetreault, 1985). Within this reconstructed curriculum, learners would not be forced to choose between " 'hard' virtues of cognition against the 'soft' virtues of community" (Palmer, 1987, p. 25), but they would encounter opportunities to integrate diverse learning opportunities and modalities. In this article, I examine differences in learning styles and, using Kolb's (1981, 1984) experiential learning model to organize learning, I describe ways of offering both separate and connected educational experiences. The article concludes with specific examples of activities that illustrate the use of both strategies.

Gender and Learning

The Study of Women's Learning and Knowing

To assess how women view reality and draw conclusions about knowledge, the authors of *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky et al., 1986) conducted structured interviews with 135 women who represented diverse age groups, life experiences, social classes, and educational experiences. They built their conceptual framework of women's knowing on Perry's (1970) model of intellectual development during the college years. Perry's study of male, Harvard undergraduates noted that students negotiated three major transitions or growth phases. During initial college experiences, they held dualistic views of the world and subject matter; at middle stages, they recognized and valued uncertainty and multiple perspectives but had difficulty evaluating them; and during final phases, they learned to weigh subject matter according to specific criteria and the relative merits of specific viewpoints. The transitions from one phase to another were often marked by crises and dramatic shifts in thinking patterns.

Belenky et al. (1986) reported that the women they interviewed followed a more divergent, less linear path than the men in Perry's (1970) study: They appeared less dualistic during early stages; were more cautious as they approached the middle stages that involved examining multiple perspectives; and learned to evaluate perspectives in terms of contexts, relationships, and commitments within a community. It appeared that Perry's male subjects had excelled in the development of separate knowing, which focuses on the maturation of traditional methods of objective, impersonal analysis and evaluation. According to Belenky et al., these young men learned to value the mastery of ideas and abstract principles, to distance themselves from the content they studied, and to establish themselves as experts. In contrast, many women learned most effectively by empathizing with or understanding another person's viewpoint and by relating ideas and theories to personal events and meanings. These connected knowers were often uncomfortable with competitive learning environments that require individuals to set themselves apart from others, defend ideas, and debate opinions (Belenky et al., 1986).

Baxter-Magolda (1989, 1990) also conducted empirical investigations of men's and women's learning styles during the college years and reported that although men and women negotiate similar stages of intellectual growth, they may show variations of reasoning patterns within levels of devel-

opment and in the nature of shifts among these levels. Women often demonstrated a more receptive orientation to education than men, and they showed greater concern about comfort in the learning environment. Men were more likely to prefer debating ideas and to make decisions on the basis of fairness, objective analysis, and practicality; women tended to emphasize becoming involved with others through exposure to ideas and tended to evaluate material on the basis of subjective responses and sensitivity to individual differences (Baxter-Magolda, 1990). This information does not imply that men and women should learn in distinctive, separate learning environments, but that our learning environments should become more inclusive.

Connected Learning and Feminist Pedagogy

In addition to describing a unique path of women's intellectual development, Belenky et al. (1986) proposed that specific learning climates assist connected learners in proceeding through the phases of intellectual growth. When connected knowers receive affirmation at the beginning of an educational experience, they feel more confident about their capacities and motivated to take new risks because they are freed from the "tyranny of expectation" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 205) that permeates traditional classrooms. In traditional learning environments, this validation is normally granted only after proving that one is worthy of being inducted into the community of thinkers. Without acknowledgment of their intellectual potential, connected knowers may feel paralyzed; traditional academic standards appear as impediments to learning rather than motivators.

Belenky et al. (1986) suggested that connected learners are likely to benefit from working with teachers who facilitate growth by helping students elaborate on their ideas, encouraging them to claim their own insights, and providing supportive challenges. Consistent with this perspective, the literature on feminist pedagogy describes the liberating learning environment as one in which responsibility is shared, students and teachers engage in democratic practices, participants emphasize mutual goals, and individuals care about each others' learning as well as their own. The goal of feminist pedagogy is empowerment of the self and others within a community that fosters leadership skills and a united learning purpose. Learners become aware of their own energy and potential, as evidenced by increased autonomy and mutuality (Fisher, 1981; Shrewsbury, 1987).

To help individuals claim this empowerment, teachers use classroom interventions that increase students' opportunities to think about their own goals and objectives, decrease students' dependence on formal instruction, and enhance students' investment in courses by clarifying the contribution of each member to the learning process. Students are acknowledged as competent contributors and are encouraged to develop skills in planning, negotiating, evaluating, and making decisions. Teaching methods based on collaboration and cooperation are important because they allow for the mutual stimulation of thinking, the exchange of various perspectives, and the generation of creative solutions to problems. The authority of the teacher is not dissolved; his or her efforts are directed toward sharing knowledge and experience, serving as a creative energy source, and acting as a role model (Schniedewind, 1987; Shrewsbury, 1987). The principles of connected knowing and feminist pedagogy have relevance for both women and men. Many men learn most effectively in educational environments that value connected knowing and that are embedded in principles of feminist pedagogy; many women work most productively in traditional environments that value separate learning. Table 1 summarizes some of the major differences between connected and separate knowing and the learning activities associated with each.

The literature on women's knowing and feminist pedagogy has revalued women's strengths that have often been discounted or ignored. However, Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1986, 1988) expressed concern about the social consequences of theories that emphasize contrasts between men and women because they may be used to exaggerate differences, minimize similarities, and justify inequities between men and women. Crawford (1989) also criticized Belenky et al. (1986) for presuming that gender differences in learning exist without presenting comparative data on men. Age, social class, and ethnic differences may be as influential in defining differences as the gender-related explanations that they proposed. Many individuals who have not been socialized in typical western, middle-class learning and family environments share the learning preferences that have been attributed primarily to women (Freire, 1971). Relatedness and connectedness are often expressed and valued by powerless people, regardless of gender or race, be-

Table 1. Connected and Separate Knowing

Connected Knowing	Separate Knowing
Subjective responses	Objective observation
Personal application	Abstract analysis
Awareness and consciousness-raising	Distinguishing fact from opinion
Empathizing	Evaluating and critiquing
Active listening	Debating
Cooperative and collaborative learning	Individual and competitive learning
Growth through claiming personal, inner knowledge	Understanding great ideas
Mutual goals	Individualistic goals
Sensitivity to individual differences	Practical, fair application of principles
Empowerment through confirmation	Empowerment through proving oneself
Applying knowledge to new situations	Defining problems accurately, clarifying theoretical models
Teacher as role model	Teacher as knowledge source

Note. Information based on Belenky et al. (1986), Fisher (1981), and Shrewsbury (1987).

cause they have limited or no access to traditional methods of influence.

Historically, educational reforms based on the perception of gender differences and the special needs of women have resulted in increased segregation of women and maintenance of power imbalances that reforms sought to eradicate (Fausto-Sterling, 1985). Rather than leading us to use different strategies with men and women, the distinctions between separate and connected knowing should help us appreciate differences in learning styles within and between genders and help us create balanced learning environments that allow for the development of multiple strengths. Learners who are skilled in either separate or connected knowing should be encouraged to expand their frames of reference through experimentation with new styles. Instead of rejecting traditional concepts of critical thinking, we should expand our notions of critical thinking to include affective components, such as empathizing with others and valuing diversity; cognitive aspects, such as defining issues clearly, engaging in logical analysis, and synthesizing ideas; and behavioral elements, such as gathering data, listening actively, and applying knowledge to new situations. If this integration is to be meaningful, we must adopt a pattern for organizing and balancing learning activities. Kolb's (1981, 1984) experiential learning model assumes that various educational experiences are necessary for optimal learning to occur and provides a framework for combining nontraditional and traditional teaching methods.

Experiential Learning Model

Cycle of Four Learning Modes

The experiential learning model (Kolb, 1981, 1984) conceptualizes learning as a cycle of four elements, each of which should be present for comprehensive learning to occur. The four elements are based on two dimensions of learning: (a) a concrete–abstract dimension that represents the degree of specific involvement or analytic detachment from the subject matter and (b) an action–reflection dimension that represents varying levels of emphasis on doing/acting or on observing/reflecting. The first position of concrete experience provides firsthand exposure to subject matter. Personal, direct involvement in activities often arouses initial reactions, intuitive impressions, and affective responses. The learner asks, "How do I react to and feel about the material or my experience?" The second position of reflective observation involves the learner in observing, reflecting on, and seeking out the meaning of encounters. It entails increasing one's awareness of additional aspects and details, as well as considering alternative perspectives and personal values that may be influenced by the content. The central question raised by this learning mode is: "What does this mean to me and to others?" The third position of abstract conceptualization focuses on weighing the strengths and limitations of perspectives, engaging in logical thinking and analysis, and evaluating data in order to formulate and/or integrate sound theoretical constructs. The primary question generated by this dimension is: "What are the merits and implications of this perspective?" A final position of active experimentation emphasizes action, decision making, problem solving, participation, and direct testing of concepts generated by the previous three stages. The core question is: "How do I act on and directly test what I am learning?" Results of the fourth position then set the stage for a new concrete experience.

In summary, concrete experience is associated with the activity of experiencing, reflective observation with examining, abstract conceptualization with explaining, and active experimentation with applying. The experiential sequence is circular, and the completion of each spiral provides the foundation for a new learning cycle. Learning relies on the creative tension between and synthesis of the polarities of concrete personal experience versus abstract conceptualization and of internal reflection versus testing of concepts.

The steps of reflection and abstraction (Positions 2 and 3) are traditionally associated with "mind," or that which is "masculine" and separate, whereas concrete experience and active experimentation (Positions 1 and 4) are traditionally attached to the "body," or that which is "feminine" and connected (Gelwick, 1985). Abstract conceptualization is most frequently related to traditional teaching, lecturing, theoretical writing, and separate knowing. However, any of the four positions can support aspects of connected or separate knowing through creative application and modification of classroom activities.

When any one of the four modes of learning is skipped, individuals show characteristic difficulties in learning (Abbey, Hunt, & Weiser, 1985). When concrete experience is excluded from the cycle, a person may have difficulty identifying personal feelings and reactions, which leads to the formulation of mechanical or sterile concepts. When reflective observation is missed, the individual moves too rapidly from concrete to abstract domains, and conceptual frameworks are formed on the basis of inadequate reflection. When abstract conceptualization is ignored, the learner is likely to engage in poorly organized actions that are not grounded on meaningful concepts. Finally, when active experimentation is eliminated, the person may have difficulty implementing plans and may remain buried in thought.

Individual Learning Styles

Although the ideal learning cycle integrates all four elements of the learning cycle, Kolb (1981) noted that most individuals develop learning styles that correspond with their preferences for specific instructional activities. The Learning Style Inventory (LSI; Kolb, 1985) is a short, self-report inventory that allows individuals to identify strong and weak learning positions on abstract–concrete and action–reflection dimensions. Kolb (1981) identified four statistically significant learning patterns on the LSI. Individuals who prefer concrete experience and reflective observation are referred to as *divergers*. They tend to view concrete experiences from many perspectives and demonstrate strengths in generating ideas, employing imagination, and using emotional data effectively. A high percentage of psychology majors are divergers (Kolb, 1981). *Assimilators*, who prefer reflective observation and abstract conceptualization, enjoy synthesizing disparate observations into integrated explanations. *Convergers*, who exhibit strengths in abstract conceptualization and active experimentation,

apply ideas in practical ways and tend to enjoy working with ideas and things rather than people. *Accommodators* appreciate active experimentation and concrete experience, implement plans effectively, rely on trial-and-error methods, and tend to be energized by involvement in new tasks. Many individuals do not fall neatly into one of these four categories but may rely on a combination of skills.

Applying the Experiential Learning Model

The experiential learning model (Kolb, 1981, 1984) offers a variety of positive features to the psychology instructor. First, it proposes a method for recognizing and validating individual differences in learning styles; no particular style or method, whether connected or separate, is viewed as superior to others. It supplies a structure for involving all students through multiple methods, including personal reflection, small-group discussion, and writing. Students who are hesitant about speaking in large groups can find numerous other ways to participate actively in the classroom. It can be used to help students explore alternative learning modes in a climate of safety, because new skills are built on areas of greater comfort. Finally, it elaborates on a method for integrating disparate experiences within a coherent framework.

A brief description of the types of activities that support each modality will further clarify the nature of each learning position. Concrete experience provides an initial point of reference and response for students. Primary texts and original sources are useful for generating initial reactions to the ideas and theories of psychologists. The following activities also increase active involvement with subject matter: (a) commercial and academic movies and videotapes (e.g., Fleming, Piedmont, & Hiam, 1990); (b) demonstrations and experiments (see Makosky, Sileo, Whittemore, Landry, & Skutley, 1990, and Makosky, Whittemore, & Rogers, 1987, for numerous suggestions); (c) experiential/simulation exercises, role-plays, or drama (e.g., Rabinowitz, 1989); (d) interviews (e.g., Walton, 1988); (e) behavioral observations, problem posing, or a descriptive statement of a problem; and (f) volunteer and internship experiences (e.g., Scogin & Rickard, 1987).

Reflective observation encourages individuals to consider the deeper implications of their reading or initial experiences. Activities that emphasize this mode include: (a) journals (e.g., Berry & Black, 1987; Sugar & Livosky, 1988), (b) letters to significant others or hypothetical persons about important issues (e.g., Junn, 1989), and (c) focused autobiographical statements (e.g., Paludi, 1986). Group discussion, sharing, and brainstorming lend themselves to the deeper observation of issues and can be enhanced through "what if," rhetorical, or reflection questions.

Abstract conceptualization represents the mode of instruction that college students are exposed to in lecture classes and through the writing of papers and essay tests. Debates, research proposals, literature reviews, group presentations, and class poster sessions (Baird, 1991; Lipton, 1986; Rosenberg & Blount, 1988) also enhance evaluation and synthesis of ideas.

Active experimentation allows students to test the concepts they weighed during the abstract conceptualization mode. Many activities allow for the practical application and testing of concepts, including: (a) individual and group experiments, (b) case studies (e.g., Chrisler, 1990; Perkins, 1991), (c) volunteer and internship experiences (e.g., Scogin & Rickard, 1987), (d) movies (e.g., Logan, 1988), (e) interviews (e.g., Walton, 1988), (f) letters to famous psychologists or significant others (Cronan-Hillix, Cronan-Hillix, & Speth, 1990; Junn, 1989), and (g) role-plays and simulations (e.g., Rosnow, 1990).

Some activities may meet the goals of more than one learning position. For example, journals reinforce concrete experience when students record spontaneous reactions and specific experiences (Berry & Black, 1987). Alternatively, they provide a medium for participating in reflective observation about the personal implications of various concrete experiences (Berry & Black, 1987), enhance abstract conceptualization through comparing/contrasting theories and engaging in dialectical reasoning (Hettich, 1990; Jolley & Mitchell, 1990), or promote active experimentation through applying concepts to the real world (Hettich, 1990).

Students are most likely to benefit from this model if they are introduced to the model and are informed about how the instructor will use it. The instructor may administer the LSI (Kolb, 1985) to help students define the four positions, become aware of individual differences in learning styles, and gain feedback about their preferred learning modes (Thomas & Eison, 1987). Following the discussion of learning styles, instructors may identify class activities that will be used to develop each of the four modes of learning, thus providing students with a rationale for how a course will be conducted.

Circular classroom arrangements that encourage members to maintain direct eye contact with each other and facilitate active interaction will contribute to the effective use of this model. Short training sessions focusing on communication skills, such as using "I" messages, good feedback skills, and descriptive rather than evaluative language, will also prepare students to participate actively (Johnson, 1990). The power of cooperative learning can be conveyed through the use of simulation exercises and practice activities described in communication training programs (e.g., D. W. Johnson, 1990; D. W. Johnson & F. P. Johnson, 1991).

Although the experiential learning model provides an ideal format for combining connected and separate learning, the use of this model does not guarantee the integration of separate and connected knowing. For example, Svinicki and Dixon (1987) recommended the following learning sequence that is likely to reinforce traditional separate learning. Students collect data for an experiment (concrete experience), analyze the data, and evaluate how well the experiment predicts results (reflective observation). Students then read a description of a model to refine their theoretical understanding (abstract conceptualization), use the theoretical model to predict actual behavior, and may design another experiment to further test specific hypotheses (active experimentation). Although this sequence allows for active involvement of students, there is no opportunity for personal reflection or application. Instructors must rely on their creativity to combine traditional and nontraditional elements of learning effectively.

Integrating Separate and Connected Knowing: Two Examples

The following examples demonstrate how the experiential learning model can be used to incorporate objective observation, analysis, and personal involvement in specific teaching sequences. Although both of the examples focus on gender-related issues, this model can be used for any material associated with the discipline of psychology. Students' anecdotal evidence and informal evaluations suggest that the following sequences increase student involvement and result in greater depth and strength of learning. Formal assessment of student learning will be necessary in the future.

The politics of personality disorders. These activities examine issues related to the diagnosis of personality disorders and the controversy about their application to women and members of diverse ethnic/racial groups. To explore the position of concrete experience, students are given brief descriptions of selected personality disorders for which the titles or labels have been removed. As a homework assignment, each student locates two individuals (e.g., friends from outside of class) and asks them to guess the characteristics of a person who is most likely to exhibit the behaviors of the described personality disorders. The characteristics that the respondent should predict include the person's gender, socioeconomic class, race, marital status, and age. This experience is adapted from several research studies conducted by Landrine (1989), and more extensive details about the procedure and descriptions of personality disorders can be found in that source.

In addition to this concrete activity, students read articles that are critical of diagnostic categories as they are applied to women. Several articles are especially appropriate: Kaplan's (1983) critique of diagnostic procedures; Franklin's (1987) discussion of controversies surrounding the proposed diagnostic category of self-defeating personality disorder; and Caplan's (1991) witty proposal for a diagnostic category of delusional dominating personality disorder, which codifies exaggerations of a "real man" image and represents the "masculine" counterpart to self-defeating personality disorder. Each of these articles is likely to generate strong reactions and lively discussion.

To encourage reflective observation, students write about their reactions in journals or discuss issues in small groups. The following questions guide reflection and generate discussion:

1. To what degree do psychological disorders of men and women reflect gender role socialization and the exaggeration of gender norms?
2. What are some "masculine" middle-class values that are codified as hallmarks of mental health in our culture?
3. Do labels such as *self-defeating personality disorder* or *dependent personality disorder* contribute to victim blaming? How? Provide examples (perhaps from your own experience) that illustrate how individuals may be labeled inappropriately for underconforming or overconforming to gender stereotypes.
4. The articles you read focused primarily on women's issues. What similar or different factors influence labels that are applied to individuals of diverse race and class backgrounds?

Concerning the position of abstract conceptualization, class members analyze the data they collected for a homework assignment and compare their results to those of Landrine (1989), who found that research participants were more likely to attribute the following personality disorders and status variables to women: (a) histrionic personality—single, White, and middle class; (b) dependent style—married, White, and middle class; and (c) self-defeating pattern—no reliable status variables other than gender. Research participants were more likely to attribute the following disorders and status variables to men: (a) schizoid—single, White, and middle class; (b) compulsive personality—White and middle-class; (c) paranoid personality—White; (d) antisocial—low class; and (e) sadistic—no reliable status variables other than gender. Two disorders were associated with variables other than gender. Single, middle-class, White persons were viewed as most likely to exhibit the characteristics of narcissistic personality disorder, and White persons were viewed as most likely to display characteristics related to borderline personality disorder (Landrine, 1989).

This analysis leads to a lecture/discussion that clarifies the relation between gender role stereotypes and diagnostic categories, the strengths and limitations of current diagnostic procedures, issues of reliability and validity in diagnosis, and controversies regarding experimental categories cited in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (3rd ed., rev.; American Psychiatric Association, 1987), such as self-defeating personality disorder.

At the final stage of active experimentation, students apply their learning by proposing an inclusive and fair diagnostic model or evaluating diagnostic issues in light of a specific case study. The use of a case study of a battered woman, whose behaviors resemble many of the criteria of self-defeating personality disorder, facilitates discussion of the strengths and limitations of the label and encourages students to provide alternative conceptualizations of her actions.

Schemas, information processing, and gender role schemas. This sequence of activities integrates research and theory on gender schemas with a personal application. As an initial concrete experience, students complete the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974) and read several articles that describe gender role research and concepts, such as Bem's (1983) discussion of gender role schemas and Markus and Oyserman's (1989) clarification on the role of gender in shaping self-concept.

Journals or small-group discussion based on the following questions encourage further reflection on the issues discussed in articles:

1. How does gender influence the way individuals process information in this culture?
2. Why are women more likely to develop connected self-schemas and men more likely to develop separate self-schemas? What are the consequences of these differences?

A lecture reviews the history of androgyny research and the reformulation of androgyny concepts within the framework of gender schema theory (Bem, 1981, 1983; Crane & Markus, 1982; Markus, Crane, Bernstein, & Siladi, 1982). Discussion of research on self-schemas and information processing helps students link gender issues to the body of psychological research on self-schemas (Markus, 1977). In addition, an overview of the changing uses of the BSRI encourages students to consider the research implications of these theories.

At the final stage of active experimentation, students participate in a homework project that involves watching several television programs and evaluating gender role messages. Students complete the BSRI for the primary male and female characters and/or respond to the following questions: Do characters exhibit gender related schemas about—relationships? achievement? adjustment? education? sexuality? What behaviors are associated with these schemas? (adapted from Paludi, 1990). Following this application, students may wish to share information and are ready to engage in a new concrete experience and a new cycle of learning.

Conclusion

In recent years, *Teaching of Psychology* has published numerous articles that describe activities for increasing student involvement with subject matter. Each of these activities can be used to meet one or more of the learning modes described by the experiential learning model (Kolb, 1981), which provides a meta-model for organizing teaching efforts within coherent cycles of learning. Diversity is acknowledged and appreciated when the model is implemented in a manner that values different learning styles as well as gender, race, and class variables. As a result, this model will help instructors establish a multifocal, gender-balanced, inclusive approach to teaching psychology.

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Note

Requests for reprints should be sent to Carolyn Zerbe Enns, Department of Psychology, Cornell College, 600 First Street West, Mt. Vernon, IA 52314–1098.

Infusing Black Psychology Into the Introductory Psychology Course

Lisa A. Whitten
State University of New York College at Old Westbury

Students in the introductory psychology course should learn about the impact of social, economic, and cultural factors on psychological development. This goal can be accomplished by infusing Black psychology into the course. Many instructors could benefit from a model for presenting this approach, which can be applied to a variety of topic areas, such as the psychology of women, the disabled, and other disenfranchised groups. Infusing material on race and culture legitimizes these subjects as relevant areas of investigation for psychologists and permits instructors to make connections among the various units presented during the semester. A definition of Black psychology, a lecture outline, suggestions for infusing Black psychology into the entire course, small-group activities, and curriculum resources are presented. Student reactions to the presentation of this material are also discussed.