

Journalism teaching and experiential learning

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TV-journalism can never be thought successfully entirely on a theoretical basis. The students must experience the professions challenges and difficulties by exercising and experiencing the TV-journalistic methods, TV-tools and TV-aesthetics in practice in order to achieve skills within TV-journalism. The article discusses how Kolb's learning circle successfully provides a pedagogic approach in practical journalism learning and teaching. Kolb experiential learning theory says that ideally the learning process represents a learning cycle or spiral where the learner touches four bases in process, that means a cycle of experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting. Kolb describes four different learning styles or learning preferences. This refers to four different ways of experiencing the learning process. Every learner has a preference to learn in different ways and the learning circle offers the learners to fulfil the learning process no matter what starting point the learner prefers. This approach focuses on journalism training as growing a person from the inside, whereas conventional teaching and training is the transfer of capability into a person from the outside.

Keywords: coaching, conventional learning, David A. Kolb, Experience Based Learning Systems, Experiential Learning Theory, International TV-program, journalism studies, learning cycle, learning process, pedagogical approach, TV-journalism.

“Instead of just learning theoretically how to do it when you're abroad, we actually got to experience it. Very, very good.”

(Student evaluation, International TV-program)

This quote is an international student's reflection on a “foreign correspondent workshop” at the International TV-program at the Danish

School of Media and Journalism. The pedagogy of the workshop is based on experiential learning. Experiential learning opposed to conventional learning means that learning and development are achieved through personally determined experience and involvement, rather than on received teaching through academic classes and study of theory.

In the following article I will argue for experiential learning being especially suitable for creating a learning environment for International programs, specific in journalism studies. Kolb’s experiential learning theory provides a useful theoretical framework for a pedagogical and didactic approach to the journalistic learning process. Experiential learning is a process that focuses on developing a person from the inside rather than externally.

The Danish School of Media and Journalism (DSMJ) offers four different programs for foreign students, mainly to students from the 65 DSMJ partner institutions around the world. More than 1,500 foreign students have graduated from DSMJ in the last 20 years. All the programs offered are advanced undergraduate courses, except the TV-journalism program, which in addition is ranked at Master level. The teaching language is English and DSMJ 7th and/or 8th semester students participate in the International programs. Table 1 shows an overview of the four different International programs at DSMJ.

Table 1. Overview of International programs at The Danish School of Media and Journalism

Name of Program	Duration	ECT-SCredits	Number of Foreign Students Per Year
The language of photojournalism	1 semester	30	16
International semester program	1 semester	30	30
Europe in the world DSMJ (In cooperation with Hogeschool van Utrecht, School of Journalism, Netherlands)	1 semester 1 semester	33 (29+8)	18
TV-journalism (current affairs storytelling)	1 semester	30	28

I have been head of the lecturing at the TV-journalism program for five semesters and the focus in this paper will be on the experiences with this particular program. The TV-journalism program offers a 16-week full time study course on “Current affairs and foreign correspondent reporting”. The applicants must have a minimum of two years of either or

both training and experience in journalism from an academic institution. No specific TV-experience is demanded, though most of the students do have such experience, either from journalism training or internships. The study load of the program is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Study load of TV-journalism program

Study Load	Weeks	TV-assignments
Introduction to Danish culture and society Introduction to TV-tools	1	Visual storytelling (1 minute)
Current affairs, theory and production	6	3 Current affairs stories (3–4 minutes)
Workshop and/or excursion to foreign country	3	1 Current affairs story (5 minutes)
Documentary, theory and production	6	1 mini-documentary (15 minutes)

DSMJ offers semi-professional production equipment for the production of the TV-assignments, SONY DSR 250 DV-CAM cameras and Final Cut Express software for editing. The students work in teams of two. That means that there are seven camera packages and seven editing suits available for the 14 students and the equipment is available for the students through the whole course.

Pedagogic approach

The pedagogic approach at the DSMJ journalism programs (Bachelor level) is a combination of theoretical lectures and practical exercises and assignments in journalism production. The expression ‘chalk-and-talk’ (the teacher writes on a board and speaks while learners listen and look and try to absorb facts) refers to a style of teaching or training which contains no experiential learning aspect. The expression ‘hands-on’ is commonly used to describe types of learning and teaching, which are to a lesser or greater extent forms of experiential learning. While the curricula for the International TV-journalism program describe both theoretical and practical approaches to TV-journalism, the course is heavily practice oriented. The pedagogic methods at the course are inspired by David A. Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) and Experience Based Learning Systems (EBLS). Experiential learning is also referred to as ex-

periential teaching, or experiential training and development and other variations of these terms.

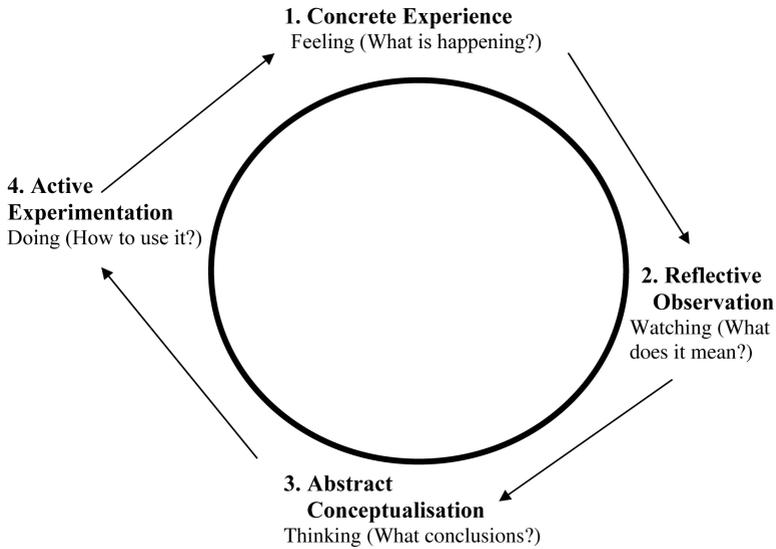
However, the word learning is significant, since it emphasises the learner's perspective, which is crucial to the experiential learning concept. Conversely, the words training and teaching significantly reflect the teacher or training perspective (in the context of the teaching or training organisation – e.g., a school, college, university or employer). Experiential learning is therefore the most meaningful name for a concept that requires motivated students who want to develop as individuals.

Kolb's (1984) learning theory or learning cycle sets out four distinct learning styles (or preferences), which are based on a four-stage learning or "training" cycle. The central principle of the theory is that *immediate or concrete experiences* provide a basis for *observations and reflections*. These observations and reflections are assimilated and distilled into *abstract concepts* producing new implications for action which can be *actively tested* and in turn create new experiences.

Kolb says that ideally (and by inference not always) this process represents a learning cycle or spiral where the learner touches all the bases, which means a cycle of experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting. Immediate or concrete experiences lead to observations and reflections. These reflections are then assimilated (absorbed and translated) into abstract concepts with implications for action, which the person can actively test and experiment with, which in turn enable the creation of new experiences.

A diagrammatic representation interpreting Kolb's learning styles model is shown below (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Experiential Learning Cycle



(Based on Kolb 1984)

The word experiential essentially means that learning and development are achieved through personally determined experience and involvement, rather than on received teaching or training, typically in group, by observation, listening, study of theory or hypothesis, or some other transfer of skills or knowledge.

We might also regard experiential learning as developing a person from the inside, whereas conventional teaching and training is the transfer of capability into a person from the outside. In conventional teaching and training, the needs of the ‘organisation’ (i.e. an employer, school or college, etc.) are the primary drivers of the learning content, design, delivery and assessment. In experiential learning the starting point is quite different – the starting point is the person, and the primary driver is to help the individual learn and develop in their own direction and in their own way. At the TV-journalism program, individual development is crucial because the students come from very different backgrounds, cultures, academic traditions and journalistic approaches. The level of complexity of the TV-assignments at the course is gradually increased;

this means that in order to keep up with the progression the students need to develop individually.

The didactic starting point at the International TV-program is that TV-journalism can never be taught successfully, entirely on a theoretical basis. The students must experience the professions challenges and difficulties by exercising and experiencing TV-journalistic methods, TV-tools and TV-aesthetics in practice in order to achieve skills within TV-journalism. This approach means that the purpose of the teaching is, to some extent that the students shall learn the profession by copying the methods and forms that already exist within the TV-media but as a parallel process develop, reflect and understand the peculiarities of TV-journalism. Within this perspective the pedagogic philosophy of the course is dialectic. Journalism is not an exact science, because a topic or a theme can be covered in many journalistic genres, with a variety of angles and with different journalistic methods. The profession has specific codes of ethics, have guidelines for fairness and balanced coverage and is grounded on different ideological and methodological stands, but a 'story' can never be the 'whole truth' or cover the reality from all points of view or content all available information. Thus – the teaching method is not static but dialogically questions the given and possible solutions and possibilities of the journalistic productions as well as the means and goals of the profession itself.

The concrete pedagogic approach is inspired by Kolb's theories but is not completely comparable, ensures throughout the programme the students are given lectures and exercises on specific TV-journalistic methods and forms and are invited to discuss the practical (and theoretical) experiences. This process can be referred to as part of the *observations and reflections* in Kolb's learning circle.

Whereupon the students shall research, receive coaching on a planned story and produce a TV-story assignment with demands on content and form that correspond to the theory and examples presented in the lectures. This leads in Kolb's theory to *immediate or concrete experiences*. After delivery the student's assessment is to analyse another team's TV-production. Subsequently there is a feedback and evaluation session in class where the students' productions are dissected and discussed by the students and evaluated by the lecturer. Here the *abstract concepts* are manifested and this creates new implications for action which can be *actively tested* and in turn creates new experiences.

In practical teaching, this means that the process starts over again, with new theory presented and more exercises and new TV-story assignments. The TV-assignments given are gradually more complex according to content and form and are sequentially followed by more comprehensive written reflective deliveries. This practical application of teaching and learning offers the students a clear progress in journalistic experience and theoretical knowledge as well as the possibility to learn from each other and develop individually through analysis and reflection.

Kolb describes four different learning styles or learning preferences. This refers to four different ways of experiencing the learning process. *Diverging* (feeling and watching), *Assimilating* (watching and thinking), *Converging* (doing and thinking) and *Accommodating* (doing and feeling). Kolb claims that most people clearly exhibit clear strong preferences for a given learning style. The ability to use or 'switch between' different styles is not one that we should assume comes easily or naturally to many people. Simply, people who have a clear learning style preference, for whatever reason, will tend to learn more effectively if learning is orientated according to their preference. For instance – people who prefer the 'Assimilating' learning style will not be comfortable being thrown in at the deep end without notes and instructions. People who prefer to use an 'Accommodating' learning style are likely to become frustrated if they are forced to read lots of instructions and rules, and are unable to get hands on experience as soon as possible. In the International TV-program the 14 students will probably have individual preferences for all the four learning styles. Consequently the students will experience a various and individual progress in the learning process and further in acquiring TV-journalistic skills. But as the course continues for 16 weeks the process of 'lectures – readings – production and analysis' is repeated and accordingly the students develop in proportion to their own learning style preference. So, in the context of Kolb's learning circle (Figure 1), this means that some students develop by starting at the bottom of the circle, others by starting at the top or from one of the sides. The main point is that the students must accomplish the learning cycle, no matter from what point of the cycle they personally prefer to depart.

The workshop

The fourth TV-assignment at the International TV-course is a current affairs story of five minutes produced outside Denmark. This foreign correspondent workshop has been a project of three weeks concentrating on particular objects connected to the practice of travel to a foreign country and report within a short time table. This is in deference to the majority of the students who are foreigners in Denmark, and therefore in general report or angle their stories to their home country or an international audience.

The foreign correspondent workshop is divided into three parts.

- Week 1: Lectures and studies about the foreign country and the challenges and problems of the society. Students do research on the stories to be produced and receive coaching.
- Week 2: Excursion to the foreign country, research, coaching, reporting and shooting for TV-stories
- Week 3: Editing TV-stories, feedback and evaluation of TV-productions.

Through Nordplus and Interlink10 the students have received mobility grants for travelling to another country to exercise as foreign correspondents. Thus, during the last two years the four international TV-classes have been reporting from Estonia, Estonia/Finland, Latvia and Lithuania.

To make a report in a new country, with a different language, to get rid of our stereotypes about Latvia. To organize the work with local people, to respect an "agenda" and to work with kind of pressure because we cannot go back again if we miss something. All of this helped to experience more professional work conditions. (Student's evaluation)

The main assignment during the workshop is for the teams of two students to produce a 'top-down' information based current affairs story from the chosen destination. Current affairs stories are in this context not short news stories but longer background stories of about five minutes. The stories are not necessarily event driven but they are information driven. A definition of the genre could be that a problem should be exposed in a societal context and presented through credible and reliable sources. The story should be analytical and dig deeper into the topic layer

by layer and make the viewer think, understand or reflect. If possible the story should point out and confront responsible oral sources of the problem discussed in the story. The target audience of the report should either be an international audience (e.g. BBC World News, CNN) or the student's home audience.

Foreign corresponding differs from domestic journalism in some particular ways. General journalistic methodology may be more or less the same but at the same time different. There are specific factors that influence the working process when reporting from abroad. When reporting from the home country the basic information concerning the country's historical, social and political domains should be common knowledge for the journalist, when reporting from abroad this might not be so. The domestic journalist also reports to a mass audience that acknowledges the culture, the language and the context in which the journalistic activity takes place. The foreign correspondent however, must first of all gather information about the visiting country's politics, history and culture and further connect the actual topic or problem to be covered in this context. The workshop's starting point is therefore that the students study and comprehend an unfamiliar culture and its history and challenges in a very short time; 1–3 days, and from this deduce an idea for a current affairs story. There is also an option for the students to choose amongst about ten suggestions for topics and do further research to recognize a possible journalistic story.

Within the week of preparations, the students work in teams with research and planning of shooting of the story. During the preparation period there are coaching sessions and lectures about different aspects of foreign reporting, storytelling and journalistic methods. During the research process the students are encouraged to practice on a wide range of research tools, but the choice of tools and to what extent they are practiced is down to the individuals. Since the students work in teams of two, it is highly probable they learn from each other and exchange knowledge and challenge each other's skills. The exchange of knowledge is a continuous process throughout the whole journalistic process since the student's accumulated knowledge and proficiency in practical TV-production and literacy is diverse.

In order to produce a communicative story, the foreign correspondent strives to angle the story with a focus that the home audience can relate

to or identify with. This means that the perspective of the story and the choice of interviewees and sources are vital. Most foreign reporters, also those posted for a longer period abroad, use stringers or fixers as support for their work with research, source finding and while shooting on location. The stringer might be a local journalist or sometimes an interpreter and other times skilled local guides. At the workshops in spring and autumn of 2009, the cooperation with the University of Latvia and Vilnius University was extended, compared with earlier projects, and local journalism students at the institutions were appointed as stringers or mentors for the seven teams from DSMJ. The first contact between the local journalism students and the production teams were established the week before the actual stay abroad. During the stay, the local journalism students participated in the research process and helped out during shooting on location and as interpreters during interviews. This arrangement offers the students broader production possibilities and for sure better access to oral sources compared with working without local helpers. It also challenges the student's collaboration skills and capacity of being in charge of the journalistic process. The latter is crucial due to the ever present risk that some teams lean too much on the local journalist and consequently experience less experiential learning and personal development and reflection during the production process.

During the five days abroad a few excursions were arranged for the whole group to museums and a guided tour of the parliament plus a question-answer session with local MPs. In addition the teams received facilitation by the lecturer. But most of the time the students are assigned to work with the TV-stories and the challenges with doing this are numerous. Most of the teams experience various difficulties with sources: problems with finding willing sources; sources withdraw; sources changing their opinion. The teams also face the challenge of having to change the angle of the story for various reasons: equipment failure; difficulties with finding visual proofs for the story; problems with understanding written sources; subsequent translation difficulties and diverse language problems. Retrospectively, all the teams have managed to produce a full package story. Back in Denmark the story is edited in four days and in the final days of the workshop there is a feedback and evaluation session on the stories and finally an evaluation of the project.

Experiences with experiential learning

Experiential learning is practised at the majority of the journalism programs at the DSMJ. By contrast, during the Danish BA studies, journalism students must attend and pass exams on more academic based subjects, such as media law and social studies. At the International TV-program, the pedagogy is experiential learning but obligatory theoretical lectures are given and reading literature is required. Thus the course offers both conventional training and experiential training. The main differences between experiential learning and conventional training and teaching might be represented as in the diagram below.

Table 3: Differences between Experiential Learning and Conventional Training and Teaching

Conventional learning	Experiential learning
Training-centred/focused – theoretical	Learner-centred/focused – really doing it
Transfers/explains knowledge/skills	Develops knowledge/skills/emotions via experience
Fixed structured delivery/facilitation	Flexible open possibilities
Examples: PowerPoint presentations, chalk-and-talk classes, reading, attending lectures, exam study, observation, planning and hypothesising, theoretical work	Examples: Learning a physical activity, exercises, actually doing the job or task, ‘outward bound’ activities

Experiential training works with success within journalism teaching because journalism is a practical profession, which demands that the journalism student develops from the inside out and not the other way around. The student must mature during the education period and learn through multitasking and practising the journalistic methodologies. But it must be stressed that the students must be highly motivated if the experiential training is going to be fruitful. The students have to be prepared to actively develop their skills and understanding, be receptive to critique and work hard to apply appropriate learning.

Experiential learning enables learning methods to fit each person’s own preferred learning styles and natural preferences. When the students learn and develop in their own ways and use methods that they find most suitable, learning becomes enjoyable.

Experiential learning also brings into play the concept of multiple intelligences because the learning process is not limited by listening, reading and writing but offers learning by experiences and lays the potential for the learning to be at several levels (doing, feeling, watching and thinking). Experiential learning involves the students in working things through for themselves and developing their own understanding, but facilitating and coaching is necessary during the process. Coaching must be provided in a way that encourages the students to think independently and challenging to developing understanding. On the other hand the assignments must be manageable for the students and designed with a clear objective. Creating an appropriate learning environment and access to necessary working tools and equipment are also crucial.

Feedback and evaluation sessions of the practical work can take many forms but must engage the learners. A good feedback session will involve the learner in personal thought, challenge and discussion. But an honest critique and evaluation of the assignments is essential. Real issues should not be swept under the carpet, but equally, criticism must be constructive and help the individual to reflect and understand. When experiential learning succeeds my experience is that the students develop confidence, self-esteem and personal strengths. Last but not least I see them develop into reflected TV-journalists that through personal experience have learned to tell stories with close to professional content and form, and most do it with the heart.

Awareness about the learning cycle and learning styles helps me as lecturer to organise the teaching so that it fits best with the given situation and subject. But for it to work you must believe in the students, that they can and will make experiential learning opportunities work for them. You have to believe that they have the potential to make progress and succeed and be committed to the fact that the lecturer's role is to provide opportunities for the students to learn and progress individually.

Conclusion

Journalism studies can never be taught successfully entirely on a theoretical basis. Journalism is a practical profession and journalism students must practise the many different methodologies, production chains and

genres of the vocation in order to develop as individuals and through that mature into reliable, credible journalists with integrity.

At the international TV-program at DSMJ students from 12 different nationalities have been represented in a class of 14. The students come from very a broad variety of backgrounds, cultures, academic traditions and journalistic approaches. When creating a learning environment for these students, experiential learning works especially well. In such a complex group the practical approach prompts the students to develop individually according to their own starting point. The students have various mother tongues and latent language difficulties and potential cultural conflicts could be minimised through working relationship and close cooperation to achieve the stated goals.

Kolb's theory on experiential learning offers a comprehension setting for how practical journalism training can be implemented in the curricula of journalism educations.

Experiential learning offers motivated students the opportunity to develop in their own way and has a great potential for the learning to be at several levels. As lecturers it is crucial to believe in the students, that they can and will make experiential learning work for them. After all experiential learning is reflective and analytical and the ultimate aim is to provide mature students for the jungle of the media business.

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Appendix

Cooperation with DSMJ partners: On a partner level DSMJ has cooperated with University of Tartu, Estonia, University of Latvia, Latvia and Vilnius University, Lithuania, on the foreign correspondent projects. The level of cooperation has varied, but in all cases the DSMJ partner's contributions have been important for accomplishing the projects.

- Project Estonia spring 2008: Mart Raudsaar from University of Tartu gave lectures at DSMJ about Estonian issues and gave coaching to students. Also gave coaching in Tallinn, during production period.
- Project Estonia/Finland fall 2008: Mart Raudsaar from University of Tartu gave coaching to students on email and face-to-face coaching after arriving in Tallinn.
- Project Latvia spring 2009: Olga Preskurova from Latvian University gave a skype-lecture from Riga about Latvian issues. Provided coaching on stories in Riga and participated in and delivered evaluation on all the stories to the students at DSMJ.
- Project Lithuania fall 2009: Mantas Martisius delivered input to topics and themes for actual stories from Lithuania and helped organizing the excursion.

DSMJ's contribution to the partners has been to organize stay and lecture sessions for the two guest lecturers in Århus and Kate Kartveit has been giving guest lectures at University of Latvia and Vilnius University.

Žurnalistikos studijos ir patirtinis mokymasis

Santrauka

Studijuojant TV žurnalistiką neužtenka tik teorinių žinių, studentai turi patirti profesinius iššūkius ir sunkumus, praktiškai išbandydami TV žurnalistikos metodus, priemones, estetiką. Straipsnyje diskutuojama, kaip D. Kolbo moky-

mosi ciklas gali būti sėkmingai pritaikytas praktinio žurnalistikos mokymo ir mokymosi procese. Remiantis D. Kolbo patirtinio mokymosi teorija, mokymosi ciklą sudaro keturi etapai – patirtis, refleksija, mąstymas ir veiksmas. Kolbas aprašo keturis mokymosi stilius, kurie atspindi skirtingas mokymosi praktikas. Nepaisant šių skirtumų, kiekvienas besimokantis turi galimybę užbaigti mokymosi ciklą. Taikant šį požiūrį žurnalistikos studijose, asmenybė ugdoma iš vidaus, skirtingai nei tradicinio mokymo atveju, kur žinios perduodamos iš šalies.

Raktiniai žodžiai: kuravimas, tradicinis mokymasis, David A. Kolb, patirtinio mokymosi sistemos, patirtinio mokymosi teorija, tarptautinė TV programa, žurnalistikos studijos, mokymosi ciklas, mokymosi procesas, pedagoginis požiūris, TV žurnalistika.