

“Oh, was *that* ‘experiential learning’?!”
Spaces, Synergies and Surprises with Kolb’s Learning Cycle

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ABSTRACT

We share findings from empirical research into Kolb’s experiential learning (EL) approach, using our reflections as teachers and data from our undergraduate management students. The EL experience emerges as a space where bodies, feelings and ideas move and develop in intimate relationship with one another. This is a space where teachers exercise authority over, and commitment to, the here-and-now, risking corporeal and intellectual exposure. We probe the concept of experience in EL, suggesting that teachers require a kind of ‘experiential expertise’ to draw both on embodied felt sense and on what one has done in one’s own career to role-model the transformation of experience into knowledge, which is at the heart of Kolb’s theory. We explore a blurring of experiential agency, and the tendency for students to appropriate the teacher’s experience rather than dwell on or develop their own. For us, EL is more usefully seen as ‘relationship-centred’ than ‘student-centred’, and we contrast this relational focus with the way EL seems to have been popularised as anti-interventionist, a kind of educational ‘laissez-faire’. Based on these reflections, we suggest powerful connections between phenomenology and theories of space as a way of conceptualising the complexities and richness of teaching and learning experiences.

Key words:

experiential learning; embodiment; phenomenology; space; feelings

THE CASE FOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

In the last few decades, experiential learning (EL) has become increasingly prevalent in management education at undergraduate, postgraduate and executive education levels (Kayes, 2002; Reynolds and Vince, 2007). Its popularity seems related to dissatisfaction with traditional information transfer approaches and a reaction against the 'banking model', where teachers make knowledge 'deposits' (Freire, 1982). Such methods are being supplemented and, in some cases, replaced by a range of more 'student-centred' approaches, one of which is EL (Kirschner et al., 2006). These encourage students to make their own sense of the content, and craft their own connections amongst the various concepts (Biggs, 1999; Säljö, 1979).

We think the popularity of EL reflects something of a 'turn to experience' in a range of disciplines, including management studies (Cunliffe and Coupland, 2011; Sanders, 1982); management education (Yakhlef, 2010; Strati, 2007); phenomenological psychology (Langdridge, 2007; Smith et al., 2009); positive psychology (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Rathunde, 2001); and neuroscience (Gallagher and Brøsted Sørensen, 2006; Gallese, 2003). In their various ways, writers in these fields use the notion of experience as their core unit of analysis, whether subjective experience is investigated in its own right or linked to more objectively observable neurological or behavioural activity. For us, such a 'turn to experience' is beautifully crystallised in R.D. Laing's injunction to defend the 'unreal' against the 'real' (Laing, 1967): Taking experience seriously means honouring and valuing people's subjective, 'unreal' sense-making of their life-world even where this does not seem to match the objective facts of the 'real'.

It is perhaps easier to define EL by what it is *not*. Thus, learning from experience means not merely memorising a pre-defined set of abstract facts and figures, which are subsequently regurgitated in exams. In many ways, EL appears to be as much a movement as a theory (Reynolds, 2009), a practice whose adoption is often a matter of faith (Gosen and Washbush, 2004). A range of (potentially incompatible) techniques are associated with EL, including role-play, simulations, structured activities, outdoors activities, inquiry-based activities and private reflection (Heron, 1999), but none of these techniques belongs exclusively to an 'experiential' approach.

It is easy to see why EL is appealing to practitioners and theorists of management education. The idea that EL invites a more active and questioning kind of student participation chimes with the desire to encourage more active and questioning kinds of

leadership and organizational behaviour (Fenwick, 2005). As Vince (2011:344) puts it, critical management scholars believe that “passive approaches to learning reinforce passive approaches to managing”. The notion that EL is less hierarchical than more traditional forms of learning also invokes instructional designs based on peer-learning and dialogue, thereby potentially making greater use of all the resources and sources of expertise in the classroom (Reynolds, 2009).

However, EL is not without its critics. For instance, Wildemeersch (1989) suggests that valuing student experience above all other learning resources casts the educator as marketer and the student as customer, with a consumerist right to be made happy. Kirschner et al. (2006) argue that supporters of EL confuse student learning with student satisfaction when claiming better outcomes for EL methods. Apple (2001) and Roberts (2008) criticise EL’s orientation of self-direction, where this is used to justify its use with large student numbers and relatively inexperienced teachers, thereby merging the discourses of student-empowerment and institutional efficiency.

In the field of management education, in particular, there has been vibrant debate about EL (Baker et al., 2005; Holman et al., 1997; Vince, 2011). For instance, Reynolds (2009:390) suggests that “experiential learning has lacked a theoretical, particularly a critically theoretical foundation, for it to be established as an accepted methodology”. With this critique of theoretical foundation, the critical management scholarship intersects with arguments from phenomenological quarters (Green and Holloway, 1997). Thus, Hopkins (1993) poses the crucial question: How can we know what experiential learning is, when we do not have a coherent theory of its main constitutive component, experience?

Nevertheless, EL is a powerful presence on the curriculum of many educational institutions, particularly in its most famous manifestation, Kolb’s learning cycle (Kolb, 1984). Kolb proposes that learning is the process of creating knowledge through the transformation of experience. There are two forms of experience, concrete and abstract, and two ways of transforming that experience into knowledge, reflective observation and active experimentation. The cycle connects all four of these aspects, involving the “integrated functioning of the total person - thinking, feeling, perceiving and behaving” (Kolb and Kolb, 2005:194). In some quarters, Kolb’s learning cycle has attained a kind of ‘taken for granted’ status (Beard and Wilson, 2006).

In our university work, EL is now considered a mainstream approach to management education. It is also a core component in teacher training for the Postgraduate Certificate in

Higher Education (PGCHE) - both our own and that of colleagues in other UK universities - in which it is positioned as something akin to 'best practice'. Given the significance of EL for our professional development, we wanted to probe what we were being asked to teach and gauge the extent to which our teaching instincts were consistent with Kolb's formulation. Located at the intersection of the two strands of critique mentioned above - critical management studies and phenomenology - the purpose of the research presented in this paper was to explore both our understandings and our practice of EL. We had two basic research questions: First, what is being experienced in Kolb's EL? And second, how might we enhance our own EL practice?

METHODS

Seminar Design

We based this investigation on my (first author's) teaching of resistance to change, a topic which features on many change management courses. Since most people have probably experienced resistance to some aspect of their lives, we considered the topic suitable for an experiential approach within a broader suite of methods, including formal lectures and a more participative, 'experiential' seminar - all taught by me and observed by my co-researcher (second author). This seminar had three components - group-based work, a role-played negotiation and a structured debrief - all of which explicitly encouraged students to 'draw on experience'. For our seminar design, we tried to stay close to Kolb's model (Kolb, 1984). (See Appendix 1 for a mapping of Kolb's components onto the seminar design.)

Participants

Our students were level 3 undergraduates studying for a BSc in Management Studies, many of whom had just returned from their placement year in industry. Their final year at university is felt to be a transition into the corporate world, and their (and our) assumption is that the majority will seek executive roles. At the end of the first lecture on this topic, all 90 students were invited to participate in a research interview with my co-researcher, who had no involvement in teaching or assessing the course. Seven students (five male, two female) volunteered to be interviewed, and their reflections are our first data source. Six were native English speakers; the seventh was fluent in English as a foreign language. All had

experience of the corporate world, either from their placement year or from careers prior to entering academia as mature students.

We took great care to assure students that there was no connection between interview participation and course performance, and university ethics approval had been granted on this basis. The interviews were not analysed until after their exam (approximately two months later), as we assumed it would be possible for me to identify individual students from the audio-recordings, despite the use of pseudonyms throughout the data collection and analysis stages.

We also treated my reflections as data for formal analysis. Immediately after the completion of each seminar session, I 'brain-dumped' my thoughts, feelings and reflections on how the session had gone, what it had been like to be there, what I had done, and what I had noted in the students' reactions; this was as if I was being interviewed as a participant myself. At this stage, the aim was to download and capture rather than to qualify or thematise.

Interview Design

Our semi-structured interview schedule was designed around the phenomenological concept that experience is accessed through different 'attitudes'. One aspect of experience, approached through the 'phenomenological attitude', relates to the way that our lives have a certain subjective feel to them - a felt sense (Gendlin, 2003). Theoretically, this relates to Husserl's injunction to 'go back to the things themselves' to investigate the raw stuff of consciousness (Moran and Mooney, 2002). In practice, the 'phenomenological attitude' is usually explained as the 'what is it like?' question (Nagel, 1974). To probe this raw sense of experience, we used a number of 'what is/was it like?' questions, such as 'how does/did it feel?' and 'what are/were the sensations of this?'. Inevitably, there was some loss of immediacy to the answers to these questions, despite our scheduling of the interviews as soon as possible after the seminar. To counter this, students were encouraged to try to transport themselves back into the seminar, closing their eyes if this helped, and attempt to relive the felt sense of the learning encounter.

The second aspect of experience relates to what we do when we naturalise it, that is, when we thematise, theorise, order and explain it. This is experience as accessed through the 'natural attitude', a phenomenological concept which refers to the frameworks of understanding with which we structure our worlds, relying on assumptions and explanations from the realm of the natural sciences. The 'natural attitude' is exposed when we try to

make sense of things and do intellectual work with them. The interview questions which were designed to explore experience in this naturalised, thematised sense were framed in terms of 'how do/did you make sense of this?' and 'what ideas do/did you use for this task?'

Both the interview questions for students and my guide for my own reflections were broadly structured into this two-part template, designed to access experience both in its raw, phenomenological sense of 'what is/was it like?' and in its naturalised sense of 'how do/did you make sense of it?' Thus, we had an a-priori assumption that two sorts of things might be happening when we ask participants to 'draw on their experience'.

Analysis

The student interviews were conducted and audio-recorded by my co-researcher. I subsequently read each interview closely for meaning by listening to the audio-tape at the same time as engaging with the transcribed text. Thus, in our overall engagement with the student data we had a kind of symmetry, in that I conducted the seminars and listened to/read the interviews, whereas she conducted the interviews and listened to/observed the seminars.

Our analytical approach was based on the procedure developed for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), an idiographic, hermeneutic method (see Smith et al., 2009, for detail on this technique). This involved creating two columns, one on either side of the participant text. The left-hand column was used to jot down thoughts, reactions, associations, etc, that were provoked by my reading of the data; the right-hand column was used to move towards a higher level of abstraction and begin to translate the data into themes. The themes were then grouped into clusters based on apparent similarity or complementarity of meaning. The result was a table of themes for each participant, structured into a smaller number of higher order, or superordinate themes, which captured the thematic 'gist' of the text. In keeping with the method's idiographic sensibility, only once all the interviews had been analysed individually did the focus shift towards a cross-case analysis for the group as a whole.

The procedure we followed was developed for IPA (an inductive method). However, epistemologically, our approach was closer to template analysis (King, 2004), in that we were specifically interested in the a-priori classification of experience outlined above, making our approach more abductive (Peirce, 1955) than inductive. We worked iteratively between

this a-priori classification and the empirical data, using the template as a guide, but trying not to let it dictate the way in which we were reading our data.

A similar procedure was applied to my teacher reflections, where the data were already in written, albeit 'brain-dumped', form. The generation of themes from this data was a little different - experientially if not procedurally - in that I was analysing my own words rather than other people's. We considered swapping roles for this stage of the analysis, and have my co-researcher analyse my experiential data. We decided against this because of the significance we attached to accessing felt sense, something which seemed much easier to do with first-person than third-person data.

Following my organization of the data into themes and superordinate themes, my co-researcher reviewed my analysis using Smith's (2011) validity criteria for phenomenological research - transparency of process and plausibility of interpretation. This validity check was slightly different across the two data types, in that my co-researcher had conducted the student interviews herself, and therefore had an intimate connection with the student accounts. She did not, of course, have the same connection with my reflections, but relied on her memories of what the seminars had been like to observe and her reading of my 'brain-dump'. We also used Smith's (2011) validity criterion for evidential density, namely, that for a sample size of four to eight, an idea should feature in at least three participants' accounts to be considered a shared experience. The two of us then discussed our findings, working through both similarities and occasional differences in interpretation.

We conducted several iterations of the analysis, producing several versions of findings as we engaged increasingly deeply with the emergent spatial and corporeal qualities of the data, and with the theories that might frame their interpretation. The results upon which this paper is based are summarised in table format in Appendices 2 and 3. In the following sections, we interweave the presentation of results with a theoretical discussion, structured broadly into two parts. The first consists of those themes emerging mostly from the 'what is/was it like?' questions, which we theorise in terms of lived, embodied space.

LIVED, EMBODIED SPACE

The most striking quality of the data that emerged from the ‘what is/was it like?’ questions was its corporeality. When participants were asked to tap into their sense of how things had been in the EL seminar, they seemed first and foremost to reference their bodies, in terms of how these felt, moved and steadied. There was a seemingly intimate relationship between bodies moving / settling and ideas and emotions similarly moving / settling: When one shifted, the others seemed to shift, too.

Moving With and Through Space

When I presented the purpose and design of the seminar (see Appendix 1) to the students, there was considerable initial resistance. This was articulated largely in terms of ‘huffing and puffing’ in irritation at having to move. They had automatically sat themselves in rows, anticipating a lecture-style session, and now they had to shift both their bodies and their expectations:

“At first I thought, oh no! Group work! Getting up and getting all uncomfortable again! Moving all the chairs and stuff. What a pain!” (Heather)

Once this initial irritation was over, however, the students made use of the space in a variety of ways, not just settling in one configuration but trying out several different arrangements. Several students explicitly connected the size of the room and their autonomy to arrange and re-arrange themselves with the idea of having the freedom to work effectively. This particular room was larger than our usual seminar room (through a quirk of scheduling), and students connected its size and openness with the quality of the work they were able to do:

“There was space for the views to move around, maybe.” (Angelo)

“I think we had to follow the ideas around, kind of see where they would take us.”
(Michael)

Such references to ideas and views moving around have sensitised us to the dynamics of space, that is, the ebbs and flows of classroom configurations, not just static decisions over layout: If we want ideas to move, we need to create the conditions for such movement. But it was not just the ideas that needed space to move, it was the emotions, too:

“The emotions were flying everywhere!” (Will)

As bodies, emotions and ideas moved, something was also happening to the relationships in the room: They were moving, too. There was a growing sense of trust which seemed to make this learning feel special, a trust amongst fellow students, but it was also trust of and by me. My relationship with these students felt qualitatively different after these sessions; and in subsequent lectures and seminars with me, they seemed much more engaged and readier to work. They seemed to feel honoured that I was able and willing to share my experiences with them, including my stories of failure and finding things difficult, seeing this as a sign of my commitment to them:

“If you’re that keen to teach me that you’d share this stuff with me, then I’ve got something worth listening to.” (Hannah)

Whilst the students were enjoying moving, I was struggling not to move. I found it exceptionally difficult to hold back from jumping in to help or guide whilst the students were engaged in their group discussions and planning their role-play. In one of the seminars, I found myself talking to my co-researcher simply to ensure that I held back from joining in with the students’ discussions. My desire to intervene was strong, and I experienced it as a straining, a physical reaching-towards the students and their work. This felt like an instinct to move with the students, not just to shape or direct, but also to be part of the dynamic.

To make sense of this theme of movement, we draw on ideas from both phenomenology and theories of space. Writers in both these traditions see movement (its possibility and its prevention) as our most primal sense of selfhood (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962; Thrift, 2004). As Tuan (1977:12) explains, “space is experienced directly as having room in which to move... space assumes a rough coordinate frame centered on the mobile and purposive self”. For phenomenologists and spatial theorists alike, the embodied rhythms of worldly engagement tend to occupy the realm of the pre-conscious and the intuitive (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008; Ingold, 2011). Most of the time, we move without thinking about it. Thus, movement has significance prior to thematic, interpreted, linguistic meaning: Our intimate experience of our own motility shapes our engagement with and understanding of the world.

Our analysis of the way in which ideas, emotions and bodies move together chimes with work on walking (Zundel, 2012) and path-making (Ingold, 2011) as metaphors for a mobile and purposive kind of thinking and learning. Zundel (2012:119) suggests that walking offers a way of rethinking our relationship with space, because walking involves experiencing the

world “not only through the rarefied features of our intellect but through our whole body which is not so much a way of believing *about* the world, but a condition of being *in* it.” Seen this way, learning is about ‘moving with’ rather than ‘thinking about’ ideas.

The conditions for movement are highly subjective for, as Tuan (1977:51) suggests, “ample space is not always experienced as spaciousness, and high density does not necessarily mean crowding”. Thus, what makes a space the right size and layout for the integrated movement of bodies, ideas and emotions is a complex question. Simonsen (2007) relates it to the need for continuous negotiation between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Tuan (1997) connects it with the notion of freedom; a learning space needs to be big enough to move freely but small enough for that freedom to feel safe.

Expressing and Thrusting Into Space

The notion of being and feeling free is strongly associated with expression - of one’s ideas, one’s emotions and one’s self, including bodily emissions and secretions such as sweat or tears. As Merleau-Ponty argues, the precondition for us to be able to conceive space is that we have been thrust into it by our bodies, for “the body is essentially an expressive space...not merely one expressive space among the rest...It is the origin of the rest, expressive movement itself” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962:169).

Our participants experienced a sort of spatial thrusting, and articulated this in terms of throwing themselves into the session, ‘getting into’ it corporeally and intellectually:

“The whole thing only worked because I kind of threw myself into it...You know, we all just had to get into it.” (Heather)

‘Getting into’ the space of the learning encounter seemed to require a kind of de-robing, a shedding of whatever might hinder spatial insertion and expression. For Will, the experience was like a snake shedding a dead skin:

“I think I had to sort of shed a skin to get into it. You know, stop being so embarrassed.” (Will)

Hannah talked about this derobing in terms of putting aside a piece of clothing in order to ‘get into’ the role-play:

“Once you realise you’re gonna have to just do it, you kind of take off that normal cloak, you know, it’s a bit humiliating, but it has to be done!” (Hannah)

For me, the de-robing involved a sense of shedding the normal teaching armoury. Like the students, I too threw myself into the teaching space wholeheartedly. When I was speaking, I found myself drawing on a wide range of ideas and experiences to share with the group, including ‘war stories’ and my less flattering, less ‘text-book’ examples of change management. Even when I was standing back to enable the groups to work on their own, this was an active vigilance; I was intensely attentive to what was going on in the room, acutely enmeshed in the spatial dynamics.

Throwing oneself into a learning space is not without its risks. It is a commitment, a gamble, one makes with one’s body and one’s self. Indeed, we expected the students to mention anxiety, because of our familiarity with the literature on anxiety and learning. In fact, other than the traces of embarrassment highlighted above, the students made very little mention of anxiety. The greatest anxiety seemed to be mine! To shield myself from the anxiety of failing as the ‘one who is supposed to know’ (French, 1997), I had chosen a topic where I had a large repertoire of knowledge and illustrations upon which to draw. But in reality, my anxieties were not related to knowledge or expertise; they felt more closely connected with fears of personal rejection, including vague fears of being thought unattractive, in looks and/or personality. By throwing myself into the sessions so fully, I felt I had brought more of myself into the teaching room. Therefore, if the sessions did not work, it would be a more personal failure, a more personal rejection, because I had laid more on the line. I noted in my ‘brain-dump’:

“If they resist me here, it’s a rejection of *me*. That’s why it’s more scary.”

I noted, too, how reassuring it was to have my co-researcher with me: If I was to be personally rejected by the students, at least I would not be alone! This suggests that EL can be a more threatening teaching activity than more traditional approaches, because it seems to involve committing more of one’s self. Such reflections intersect with theorisations of management education as situated practice - a concept which also relates to spatial dynamics - where what is being laid on the line is the teacher’s whole person (Fahy et al., 2014; Lave and Wenger, 1991). It also seems intriguing that one might have to shed something - a skin, a piece of clothing, a suit of armour - in order to invest fully in EL: This sort of holistic engagement is about less as well as more.

Expanding and Energising

In theories of spatial experience, the body provides the basic template for the notion of capacity (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962; Tuan, 1977). We know what it is like to be full versus empty in a concrete sense, just as we know what it is like to feel full or empty in an emotional, spiritual or psychological sense. Reaching fullness is a sort of spatial expansion, a complement, perhaps, of the notion of spatial insertion as thrusting discussed above.

There were many expressions of feelings of fullness in our data. Indeed, often the sense of being full seemed to tip over into a sense of being ready to burst - a movement from reaching to exceeding capacity. This was related both to ideas and to emotions, and was suggested by the frequent use of the word 'intensity'. All of the students referred in some way to the seminar's 'intensity':

"It was just such an intense experience...I can't think of any other way of explaining it... just so intense!" (Michael)

In Heather's account, such intensity conjured up images for us of a kettle boiling, with a sense of things expanding and bubbling over:

"It would all go very calm while we were thinking about it, and then, whoosh, off we all went, all heated, almost throwing the excitement at each other!" (Heather)

The most surprising aspect of the energy and intensity of these sessions was how much *joy* was expressed. All the students talked about how happy they had been during and after the seminars; and several mentioned happiness in their subsequent exam essays on this topic. And it was not just the students who expressed and experienced joy. For me, the atmosphere we created felt almost euphoric. I noted what I could only describe as a surge of happiness as I felt my way through the sessions - a lightness, a lifting sensation, a wash of elation and vitality. This was probably linked to feelings of relief that the personal rejection noted earlier did not seem to happen. But it also felt associated with a sense of privilege in being able to witness and facilitate what seemed to be really positive, rich learning. I noted feeling incredibly proud of the students, and excited by and for them:

"This is like handing them the keys to the door and watching them work out how to unlock it! The penny isn't just dropping, it's crashing down! So exciting!"

The theme of joy in our data is sensitising us to how little mention there is in the literature about the positive feelings and sensations of learning. There is increasing focus on positive approaches to organization in general (Fineman, 2006; Wright, 2003) and to positive organizational qualities such as compassion (Frost et al., 2006; Lawrence and Maitlis, 2012). However, there appears to be much less on personal feelings of joy and the expansive spatial qualities of such feelings. In my reflections after the first seminar, I used the expression 'pumped up and ready to go' to describe the state in which students appeared to leave the seminar. It was subsequently a source of excitement to find Will using a similar expression in his interview:

"I came out of there feeling kind of *ready*." (Will)

Positioning and Settling

Along with the body's motility, expression and capacity, a significant feature of corporeal space is posture. As Tuan (1977) explains, the postures of upright and prone yield two contrary experiential worlds. When upright, we are ready to act and command, with space opening out before us. When lying down, we lose this sense of mastery; and in sleep, we give into something we need but do not fully understand. "Each day we defy gravity and other natural forces to create and sustain an orderly world; at night we give in to these forces and take leave of the world we have created" (Tuan, 1977:37). From this contrast of postural worlds we derive the powerful differentiation between 'high' and 'low', as applicable to cultural artefacts as to the stance of the body.

Sitting occupies a kind of halfway house between these two postures. It is less controlling than standing, but less submissive than lying down. In the debrief after the role-play, I intuitively moved to sit down with the students. I found myself sitting on a low block, not a chair, effectively bringing all of us closer to the ground, because this meant that (most of) the students also sat on low blocks or even the floor. On reflection, this seemed to be an echoing with my body of the need to settle the ideas, to introduce a slowing of movement to allow things to steady. Such grounding and calming gave the debrief the feel of a 'camp-fire discussion'. I noted that it was just as well I had worn trousers and nothing white, because any self-consciousness about getting dirty might have compromised my willingness to engage so corporeally.

This 'camp-fireness' incorporated a sense of equalising. We were not only getting closer to the ground, we were all at the same level, for the first time in the seminar. If there was a

sense here of equality or equivalence of bodies and ideas, then this would seem to support the idea that EL can encourage a more democratic style of learning (Reynolds, 2009; Vince, 1998). However, in our view, it fostered the conditions for a collaboration involving not symmetry so much as a positive experience of asymmetry. The students seemed most interested in checking the 'fit' between what they had done and what I would have - or had - done in this sort of situation. Our collective corporeal grounding seemed to make it easier to experience asymmetry - not so much a fantasy of equality as a containment, even enjoyment, of inequality.

Thinking about equality/inequality raises the issue of power. Based on this analysis, EL does not remove power differentials so much as recast them. I was conscious of the need to follow where the students led me, and to develop the connections between what they were saying and the theoretical content in real-time. This required a flexing and adapting of each individual session, thereby making power in EL a question of authority over the here-and-now - over this space at this point in time. Such reflections intersect with work on organizational space which sees the ability to construct spatial orderings as a form of power (Dale and Burrell, 2008; Fahy et al., 2014). Our analysis suggests that such constructions are, at least in part, corporeal constructions; they are both guided by, and reflected in, posture, feelings, intuitions, and the initiation of and pause to movement. We use the power of the body to signal when it is time to change gear.

SYNERGIES: EXPERTISE AND EXPERIENCE

Here we reflect on the implications of these findings for our capabilities as teachers. We structure these reflections using the concepts of expertise and experience which, for Gabriel (2004), represent the:

“core discursive clash of our times - the clash between the authority of the expert, based on impersonal generalizations and the claim to objectivity, and the authority of experience, residing in the person who has experienced events at first hand, and can engage with their diverse meanings. I argue for a rapprochement between the two approaches, whereby the expert seriously engages with the voice of experience without raising it above criticism” (Gabriel, 2004:12).

Within the context of teaching, we suggest that such a rapprochement might be approached through more nuanced definitions of both concepts.

Nuanced Understandings of Expertise

Our initial engagement with learning theory had given us the impression that EL requires a putting aside of theory and content to let experience reign instead. We had learned that teaching is either guided or unguided, either directive or experiential, either teacher-led or student-led (Kirschner et al., 2006). In our teacher training, we had been encouraged to believe that good EL teachers hold back their own knowledge for fear of stifling students' efforts to discover things for themselves.

However, we think these sessions were successful because of a number of different *kinds* of expertise, not because I suppressed (my) abstract expertise in order to focus entirely on (their) experience. The content-rich lectures preceded the experiential seminar and were vital to fuel the role-play and discussions. It was the theory in these lectures that anchored these other activities and helped to reduce (both teacher and student) anxieties about the 'point' of the experiential sessions. So, we think it is important to re-emphasise the importance of theoretical expertise, i.e., 'content', even in the most progressive, inquiry-led and 'student-centred' of curricula.

A specific kind of expertise emerged in the debrief after the role-play, which relates to the way in which experience is transformed into knowledge in Kolb's formulation. We think that this transformation is something which may not happen unprompted, and which therefore needs to be actively role-modelled. Thus, I found myself explicitly showing how I relate my own actions to the theory; in short, I opened a window for the students onto the normally private (and perhaps pre-conscious) process of transforming my experience into my knowledge. Expertise in modelling transformation seems to mean overtly linking the emergent ideas, reactions and feelings with the formal teaching-content. It requires intellectual speed, an ability to spot patterns, and a huge amount of energy.

In addition to intellectual and transformational expertise, emotional resilience was needed, particularly in relation to admitting to mistakes and exposing myself to rejection. That emotional resources are vital for teaching is not a new finding. For instance, Heron (1992) refers to the emotional competence required to acknowledge and live with feelings, both one's own and others'. The psychoanalytic literature on learning emphasises the need to

contain anxiety and manage the dynamics of transference, both flattering and more hostile (French, 1997). Here, emotional resilience *is* a kind of expertise, not antithetical but complementary to the expertise of the intellect. Boud et al. (1993) suggest that emotions have become taboo in educational institutions, arguing that our task as teachers is to role-model emotional skills for our students, since “denial of feelings is denial of learning” (Boud et al., 1993:15). Since EL seems to have the power to evoke even stronger emotional and corporeal responses than more traditional approaches, if EL is to feature strongly on the curriculum, we need to ensure that feelings are not taboo in our own development programmes.

Nuanced Understandings of Experience

We grounded our analysis in the distinction between experience as ‘what is/was it like?’ and experience as ‘how do/did you make sense of it?’. We were specifically interested in probing these nuances, dovetailing with commentators who have argued for a clarification of the concept of experience in EL (Kayes, 2002; Ramsay, 2005). We were alert, therefore, to the possibility that the instruction to students to ‘draw on experience’ might be interpreted in a number of different ways.

The interpretation that came most readily was experience as ‘have you done this before?’. For instance, when presented with the role-play scenario (Appendix 1), several students initially complained that they could not do the task because the specific event of a merger had not actually happened to them. This supports the argument in Tomkins and Eatough (2013a) that experience within a management context usually relates to the idea of track-record, that is, a collection of projects on a curriculum vitae or resumé. Such interpretations are significant not only because they suggest the intersection of temporality with the spatiality of experience (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008; Tuan, 1977). In this case, they also highlight an issue of agency - the question of *whose* experience?

Seeing experience as track-record, as line-items on a CV, turns it into a thing or a possession, a matter of having rather than being - as in the job interview-style question, ‘do you have experience of this?’. As such, it becomes something that can be borrowed and lent. Thus, it was my track-record that students seemed to value so highly, my examples and illustrations. The students and I were sharing (my) experience in an objective, packaged sense as well as in the intersubjective, intercorporeal sense of being together in the room. Indeed, in their subsequent exam, several of these students paraded my corporate examples as experiential evidence for their critique of the standard models of

change. This is all very flattering, but is Kolb's formulation not supposed to make use of their experience, rather than mine?

Particularly bizarre was the students' appropriation of my mistakes, as well as my reflections on those mistakes, and their use of these as resources for their answers to exam questions. My concrete past was given a legitimacy which seemed qualitatively similar to, and almost as good as, 'proper theory'. It makes sense that one's own mistakes and failures might be a valuable resource for learning, giving us practice of coping with and recovering from disappointment (Borredon et al., 2011; Harteis et al., 2008). Our analysis suggests that there is more than one way in which mistakes can be valuable for learning, and that this borrowed sense begs a fascinating question of experiential agency.

We are not devaluing experience as track-record. But if we want to shift away from students' apparently default interpretation of experience as 'have you done this before?' towards attending to the 'what is/was it like?', we need to explain how (and why). We would not expect students to be able to use statistical techniques without explanation and training, so why should we expect them automatically to know what is meant by 'drawing on experience'? And it is not just students who may need guidance: Teacher training could more usefully guide us in how to attend to experience in its sensory, corporeal dimensions, perhaps drawing on techniques from empirical experiential research such as focusing (Gendlin, 2003).

We suggest, therefore, that experience be seen as a kind of expertise, too. An experiential expertise would incorporate both the ability to hone in on feelings and sensations and the sense of having achieved, undergone and/or worked on something. In this way, we connect with Boud et al.'s (1993) elaboration of EL as the integration of two qualities and sources of knowledge - what is happening in the here-and-now and what has happened to get us to the here-and-now. In terms of our a-priori phenomenological framework, experiential expertise requires an understanding both of what emerges through the 'phenomenological attitude' and what is available for sense-making through the 'natural attitude'. And within our emergent spatial framework, it relates both to the qualities of lived space, and to the ways in which we interpret and order that space. The interplay between these different spatial dimensions forms the focus of the next section.

SURPRISES: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LIVED AND INTERPRETED SPACE

We all felt that these learning experiences had been powerful, demanding and moving. We had committed ourselves wholeheartedly and absorbed the anxieties of rejection and exposure. Moreover, we seemed to have a consistent sense of the phenomenology of this lived space, that is, what it had been like to be part of it. However, there also seemed to be a consensus that this was not what EL is supposed to be like; indeed, the power of these sessions seemed to derive from the fact that they were different from what is usually understood as EL. This emerged mostly from the questions relating to experience as 'how do/did you make sense of it?' (Appendix 3).

The greatest difference between the lived experience of these sessions and official expectations of EL lay in the question of teacher intervention. Because I intuitively role-modelled the process of transforming (my) experience into (my) knowledge, it is on reflection not so surprising that the students borrowed my concrete experience for their exam essays, because this was experience that had already been moulded and worked into ideas that were 'ready-made' for essays. But this begs the question of whether my teaching style was too interventionist and proactive - the antithesis of 'student-centredness', in which students are supposed to make their own sense of their experience, rather than borrow my sense of mine?

The suggestion that we might have delivered an unusual, perhaps incorrect, version of EL is reinforced by our students' reactions to the interview question, 'what do you understand by experiential learning?'. Their answers reveal an understanding of EL as being orientated around events and largely solitary. This is apparent, for instance, in their equating EL with the keeping of learning journals. For several of them this is pointless, because when they run out of 'real' events to log they are forced to invent them:

"It's just making up examples in order to fill a journal. I shouldn't really be saying this, probably, but it's fabricating things, you know?" (Steve)

Our students equated EL with being left to get on with things on their own, underscoring our sense that EL is often presented as non-interventionist. This is not liberating, but frustrating:

"A complete waste of time, because even if the teacher is there in the room with you, you know they are not going to help you or correct you, so nobody bothers to do any of it properly." (Jo)

As a result, there was considerable scepticism about EL, and a suspicion that, translated into the task of keeping learning journals or letting students work alone, it was simply a way to lessen workload for teaching staff - an educational 'laissez-faire'. This seems to confirm Reynolds' (2009:390) claim that EL has been "over-psychologised and under-facilitated". The positive features we all highlighted - excitement of bodies and ideas moving together, respect for differentials in expertise, joy in working together, etc - these are all excluded from definitions of EL as events-based or solitary.

Understandings of what EL is supposed to be can be seen in terms of theorised or interpreted space, akin to 'construed space' in Tuan (1977), and 'perceived' and 'conceived' space in Lefebvre (1991). It was fascinating to see how different this theorised space was from our lived and shared experience of these sessions. The officially construed space of EL seems to have become one in which events logged privately in learning journals reign over the commitment of interpersonal, intercorporeal and intellectual presence. This lived space felt good precisely because it did involve such presence; but it was not what any of us had come to see as 'proper EL'. For instance, when discussing how much she had enjoyed the seminar, Hannah was surprised to hear that our design had been based on Kolb, as she reveals in the quote we use for our title:

"Oh, was *that* 'experiential learning'?! How funny!" (Hannah)

IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The embodied dimensions of organizational life are starting to receive more attention in organization and management studies (Cunliffe and Coupland, 2011; Essén and Värlander, 2013; Ladkin, 2013). However, as several scholars have recently argued, there has been a relative silence on the role of the body in discussions of organizational and management learning (Küpers, 2008; Strati, 2007; Yakhlef, 2010), and experiential learning in particular (Fenwick, 2003; Michelson, 1998).

Our work reinforces calls for greater focus on the body if we are to realise the potential of EL (Fenwick, 2003; Michelson, 1998). In this paper, we have suggested a number of specific ways in which bodies make themselves felt, including the risk of personal, corporeal exposure with the holistic investment that EL seems to invoke. There is a very practical implication of the relationship between bodies and ideas moving; if the ideas in our

classroom are getting stuck, perhaps what we should do more often is move the bodies, both our own and our students'. As a result of these reflections, we have proposed that the EL teacher requires a kind of experiential expertise, involving the ability to hone in on, manage and role-model feelings and sensations as well as more traditional forms of expertise and achievement.

Indeed, as Fenwick (2003) suggests, the problems with EL often refer directly to the absence of the body, with many versions of EL privileging mental detachment and reflection over the more visceral demands of affective, corporeal engagement (see Boud et al., 1993, and Heron, 1992, for notable exceptions). Ironically, this may be partly due to EL's growing popularity. If EL is used to teach large numbers of students the same, or at least equivalent, content, then an abstraction and generalisation of learning will occur; "because legitimate knowledge is everywhere the same, its production requires the transcending of the specific sites at which human beings are always located - their own bodies, their social context, and their historical moment - an act of both corporeal and social dismemberment" (Michelson, 1998:218).

From a policy perspective, we believe there are significant implications of our discussion of authority over the here-and-now. Such authority involves a corporeal power over spatial orderings and movements, as well as licence and confidence to customise the teaching depending on what actually emerges in a particular session, more so, perhaps, than with traditional teaching methods. Consequently, we now think that EL should probably be avoided where teachers do not have such authority over the here-and-now. If EL is used in circumstances where "the 'means' of experience become secondary to the dominating 'ends' of economy, efficiency, and control" (Roberts, 2008:30), then it will perhaps inevitably remain 'dismembered' (Michelson, 1998).

The experiences reported in this paper were characterised by an enjoyment of relationship. There was a growing confidence to reveal things to each other and to develop ideas in relation to what others were saying and asking. For us, therefore, the lived space of EL is fundamentally a relational space, in which people and ideas do not simply move, but move in relation to one another. This chimes with commentaries emphasising learning relationships (Holman et al., 1997; Sadler-Smith 2008), including Kolb's 'conversational space' as the interplay of communal, sensual and emotional experience (Baker et al., 2005). For Lefebvre (1991), it is lived space which has the power to refigure the balance of popular 'perceived space' and official 'conceived space'. Thus, if we want to change our understandings and

practices of EL, it is to our shared emotional and corporeal experience that we should look for our blueprint.

As engagement in relational space, EL is not a 'minimal guidance' technique, but instead involves a different quality of guidance. It is not 'student-centred', so much as 'relationship-centred'. Indeed, we see powerful connections between teaching and caring (Gilmore and Anderson, 2011), particularly when space is seen in terms of 'fields of care' (Tuan, 1977), and when care is conceptualised as a balance between intervening and enabling (Tomkins and Eatough, 2013b) or between instruction and intimation (Glendinning, 2007). For us, this captures the balance to be struck in EL: EL is not non-interventionist, but instead, demands the ability to manoeuvre between different modes of intervention, shifting sensitively and carefully between directing and empowering. Such balancing informs several of the classic explorations of learning from experience (Boud et al., 1993; Heron, 1992); but in the popularisation of Kolb's learning cycle, it seems to have been knocked somewhat off-kilter. It is a balancing that seems intimately concerned with embodied, spatial engagement, for it means being utterly and actively present.

We are not, of course, making any strong claims for empirical generalisability from such a small sample. A response rate of seven out of 90 is low, perhaps reflecting some of the political dynamics of participation in research involving one's teacher/examiner. We think these findings are interesting because they are possible rather than because they are statistically probable. They reflect the ethos of idiographic research which seeks to foreground the concrete, the particular and the embodied (Smith et al., 2009), and are thus true to the spirit of EL which we are endorsing in this paper (Michelson, 1998).

So, our lived experience of EL seems very different from the solipsism that many detect in Kolb's original formulation (Holman et al., 1997; Kayes, 2002), and which appears to have infused our students' understandings of EL as 'laissez-faire' and a teacher training emphasis on non-intervention. We agree with Zundel (2012) that we need to move away from the heuristic appeal of Kolb's cycle and its stage-like simplifications which encourage splitting between thinking and action, detachment and engagement, mind and body. Instead, we should emphasise the fluid, multi-faceted and often unexpected ways in which things happen when we ask both teachers and students to 'draw on experience'. For, as Hopkins (1993) suggests, our lived experience is perhaps more like live jazz than a Beethoven quartet.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

We have experienced EL as a space where bodies, feelings and ideas move and develop in intimate relationship with one another; where expertise and experience are not antithetical but complementary; where experience means both what one has done and what it is like in the corporeal here-and-now; and where teachers balance intervention with empowerment, instruction with receptiveness. These themes are consistent with contemporary theorisations of embodied learning (Edenius and Yakhlef, 2007; Zundel, 2012) and learning as situated practice (Fahy et al., 2014); and we hope that they will feature increasingly in the specialist literature on EL and the teacher training programmes which draw on it.

Over the course of this work, we have discovered exciting parallels between phenomenology and spatial theory, and we support calls (e.g., Simonsen, 2007) for greater cross-fertilisation of ideas across phenomenology, theories of organizational space and human geography. An experiential, subjective take on 'lived space' (Lefebvre, 1991) allows us to connect with the most intimate aspects of our engagement with the world. The body is more than the subject or object of experience; it is a *principle* of experience (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008). As Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962:117) explains, "far from my body's being for me no more than a fragment of space, there would be no space at all for me if I had no body".

The traditions of phenomenology and spatial theory share a concern for the communal, intersubjective sense of lived experience - glimpsed rather than grasped through the 'phenomenological attitude' - in which bodies move and develop intuitively and rhythmically. And they share the suggestion that difficulties emerge when we move away from such primal, corporeal experience into the domain of construed, constructed space and the territory of the 'natural attitude'. For it is when we theorise, thematise, distance and disengage that we risk alienation from the world, from each other, and from our fundamental nature as corporeal creatures (Lefebvre, 1991; Shields, 1999). If EL has become detached from our most fundamental sense of experience as mobile, expressive and feeling selves to be merely the invention of things to fill learning journals, then we risk precisely the sort of alienation of which both phenomenologists and spatial theorists have warned.

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APPENDIX 1: THE EXPERIENTIAL SEMINAR DESIGN

The explicitly experiential teaching component was a seminar with role-play. Role-play can be scripted or improvised, involving playing oneself or someone else (Yardley-Matwiejczuk, 1999). Roles do not necessarily have to be actively performed for experience to be transformed into knowledge, they can also be imagined. Not all of our students were required or allowed to perform, but all were encouraged to imagine; we consider both performance and imagination as opportunities to draw on experiential resources.

The complexities of the design included the interplay of role-play (the 'realistic') and what was experienced as 'real' (Beard and Wilson, 2006). These might operate across different temporal dimensions as learning from concurrent, retrospective and prospective experiences. They might also involve complexities of identity work. Other dynamics might involve the interplay between conscious and unconscious experience and between first hand experience and the experience of observing others, as well as a host of power and other interpersonal dynamics.

The scenario for the session was designed to tease out rich, multi-dimensional aspects of the experience of resistance to change, and to chime as realistically as possible with students' actual experiences of organizational life. It was based on a proposed merger on cost-efficiency grounds between these students' actual university and another university located in the same city (figure 1). The students were asked to divide into two groups. One group played the role of students and were asked to imagine how they themselves would feel if this merger scenario were real. The other group played the role of change agent and were asked to imagine how they would approach the merger if they were in charge of its implementation, including how they would prepare for any resistance they might encounter. One member from each of the groups was involved in the negotiation; the rest of the students were observers. The negotiation was followed by a structured debrief, designed to encourage students to extrapolate learnings from what they had experienced and observed, and integrate the theoretical with the experiential aspects of resistance.

Figure 1: The Scenario

A strategic decision has been taken to merge the two universities in this city into one new university. This is being done to take advantage of efficiencies to be achieved through the amalgamation of back- and front-office functions (finance, HR, facilities management, admissions processing, research funding, etc). Since the [other] university is the older, better known and more highly ranked of the two universities, the new amalgamated university will retain many of its features, requiring staff and students in [their actual] university to change to new ways of working, including:

- moving from the current campus to a new amalgamated campus in the city centre
- changing the emphasis of degree programmes from the practical, business-orientated approach to a more traditional, academic approach
- changing from seminar group sizes of c.30 students to more personalised tuition in tutorial groups of c.5 students; this involves each student having to write an essay on a fortnightly basis
- changing from first name relationships with tutors to more formal modes of address, using Dr., Professor, etc
- moving from coursework assessment to more examination-based assessment
- all students on Management Studies courses having to switch to PPE (Politics, Philosophy and Economics) degree courses
- moving from degree courses with opportunities for sandwich placement years to more structured academic curricula with no work placements

Kolb's approach consists of two ways of grasping (or encountering) experience - concretely and abstractly - and two ways of transforming that experience into learning - reflection and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). Thus, EL addresses both how we experience something, and what we do with it. For the teaching of this topic to qualify as Kolb's EL, opportunities for all four of these had to be created and presented (table 1).

Table 1: Incorporating the Four Bases of Kolb’s Learning Cycle

Mode	Theory or Practice?	Working Definitions	Teaching Design
Grasping experience	Concrete (orientated to practice)	Meeting resistance first hand Seeing resistance actually being experienced by others Acknowledging one’s own resistance as resistance	Role-play in the EL seminar - possibly multi-dimensional
	Abstract (orientated to theory)	Learning about theories & models	Lectures plus pre-readings
Transforming experience into knowledge	Active experimentation (orientated to practice)	Working to try to integrate theory & experiential instincts of resistance to achieve a ‘good’ outcome for the team	Role-play in the EL seminar – opportunities for both active and passive ‘practice’
	Reflective observation (orientated to theory)	Thinking through what has been experienced Drawing conclusions about the relationship between 1 st & 2 nd person experiences Making connections - specific to general	Debrief phase of the EL seminar Active encouragement to reflect further on the topic (& the interplay of theoretical & experiential aspects) for coursework & exam

APPENDIX 2: LIVED, EMBODIED SPACE

	Superordinate Themes	Themes
A-priori experience as 'what is/was it like?'	Moving with and through space	Reluctance to move
		Freedom to move
		Ideas move
		Emotions move
		Relationships develop & move
		Resisting the urge to move
	Expressing and Thrusting into Space	Throwing oneself into it; getting into it
		Derobing; skin, cloak, armoury
		Vulnerability of inserted self
		Being naked to be more holistic
	Expanding and Energising	Reaching capacity; feeling full
		Exceeding capacity; ready to burst
		Intensity: space and time
		Joy and lightness
		Feeling ready
	Positioning and Settling	Lowering to settle and calm
		Equalising of bodies: scope and limits
		Claiming the here-and-now
		Postures and feelings of power

APPENDIX 3: INTERPRETED SPACE OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

	Superordinate Themes	Themes
A-priori experience as 'how do/did you make sense of it?'	This is not EL	Too much intervention
		Too much direction and role-modelling
		Too much content
		Based on trust and relationship
		Unexpectedly demanding emotionally
		Unexpectedly rewarding emotionally
		Unexpectedly fun
		Unexpectedly useful
		Anxiety of getting it wrong
	Keeping it secret	
	EL is supposed to be... <i>(students' perspective)</i>	Solitary: On one's own
		Solitary: No help allowed
		Waste of time
		Source of dread
		Source of mockery
		Source of suspicion
		Drawing on concrete, past events
		Invention to compensate for lack of experience