# The Experiential Learning Cycle

We are guided by the model of experiential education, which is linked to popular education as developed by Brazilian educator Paolo Freire and others.

The four steps of the model are:

> **Experience**, also called the activity, exercise, or learning tool,

> **Reflection**, in which participants think and feel about what they just went through,

> **Generalization**, in which participants move from immediate thoughts and feelings up to the level of concepts and ideas. When participants generalize they go to a level of abstraction where they integrate their learning into their worldview, their cognitive map which shows where things are and how things work,

> **Application**, in which participants try out their new learning through new behaviors.

a. Experience

b. Reflection

c. Generalize

d. Application
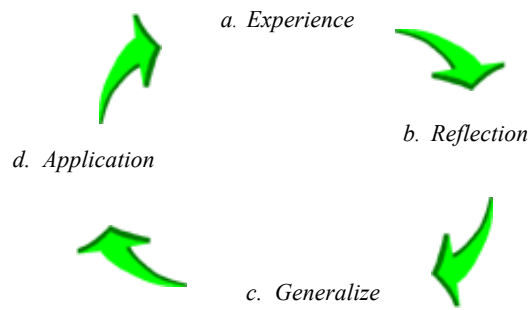
In the experiential education model, the process begins with the immediate experience (the exercise) and moves to reflection on it.

In generalization, facilitators elicit information, including stories, theoretical concepts, sometimes even statistics if they're present in the group – all of which help participants look outside the immediate and into the conceptual. Facilitators then add appropriate stories and other information that touch other learning points the group may not have offered. The facilitators offer theories to help participants push their conceptual notions further.

The experiential education model is a circle, because the fourth step, application, becomes a new concrete experience, which can then be followed by reflecting and generalizing, and applying something new.

Freire kept saying that we never learn simply through action, or through reflection, but through the relationship of action and reflection. One reason why methods of traditional education don't work for training is that they usually get stuck on reflection and generalization and neglect the role of action in learning.

Because participants teach and share with each other, facilitators do not have to waste their time teaching concepts that participants already know. Instead they can focus on what is not present in the group, watching for concepts and stories outside of their experience and bringing in those. The underlying belief stays constant: teaching for *empowerment*, not dependency on outside expertise.

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