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## Desiderius Erasmus and the experience of citizenship today

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The sixth CiCe conference, *The Experience of Citizenship*, took place in Krakow in May 2004, just after the enlargement of the European Union to include Poland as one of ten new member states. Europe in 2004 is in a state of flux, of which this political change is but part. Social and political structures and behaviour are in transformation, and these are leading to new kinds of understanding about the nature of the community, of identity, and of relationships within and towards society. This paper will explore some of these ideas, particularly around what we understand by experiential learning, about being a learner and achieving an identity, and about the relationship of these to communities and citizenship.

This is not the first time that Europe has passed through a turmoil of changing ideas and beliefs about issues of citizenship and identity. The CiCe Thematic Network is part of the European Commission's ERASMUS programme. Desiderius Erasmus lived some 500 years ago: born in Rotterdam between 1466 and 1469, he was the illegitimate son of a priest and the daughter of a Zevenbergen doctor called Geert. 'Geert', in Dutch, means 'the desired one' – so the young Geert Geertsen translated his name into both Greek (Erasmus) and Latin (Desiderius), and added his birthplace (Roterodamus) for good measure. He died in 1536, acknowledged then as the father of humanism, the ideological forbearer of the mode of thinking and learning that has dominated Europe and the world for 500 years (Margolin, 1993; Davies, 1996). He moved around various parts of western Europe in his lifetime, which is perhaps why he was chosen to eponymise the European Union's student exchange programme: more importantly, he revolutionised European conceptualisation of the individual and society, of learning and citizenship. More than through his travels, he corresponded with an enormous number of people all over Europe, and establishing a virtual community: he has been described recently as 'the patron saint of networkers' (MacCulloch, 2003, p 98). To have an early champion of citizenship education who was also a keen networker makes Erasmus a particularly appropriate and exemplary emblem for CiCe.

Before examining Erasmus's radical reconceptualisation of learning and citizenship, we might reflect on the momentous changes that were taking place in Europe at that time, which historians designate as the end of the medieval period, and the beginning of the modern. There are a number of parallels with the changes that we are currently experiencing.

One of those transformations was the undermining of the geocentric view of the universe: and Krakow is where this particular change began. Copernicus came here to study in 1491 to begin his studies of astronomy. It was reputedly exactly 500 years ago, in 1504, that he started the series of observations and theories that resulted first in his *Commentariolus* (1519), and then *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* – "On the

Revolution of the Heavenly Spheres” (1543), the original autograph version of which displayed in Krakow University library.

In parallel with these extra-terrestrial observations, the age of European exploration was also taking place, linking together of the first complete view of the relationship of all parts of the earth. Columbus returned from his fourth and final voyage to the area of Panama and Belize in 1504, just twelve years after his first landing in the Americas. Europe was beginning to realise that the world was more than Europe

The world was divided between the superpowers: Spain and Portugal split the globe into two zones of influence in 1494 in the treaty of Tordesillas. The treaty followed the papal bull issued by Pope Alexander VI the year before, which fixed the demarcation line along a circle passing 100 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands and through the two poles. This division gave the entire New World to Spain and Africa and India to Portugal. However, the Treaty shifted the demarcation line to a circle passing 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands and thus gave Portugal a claim to Brazil.

Another revolution was underway in the arts, painting and sculpture: the discovery of perspective, fresh techniques of painting, the focus on what was seen, rather than what was thought to be, and the move away from purely devotional subjects changed the nature of art. Michelangelo Buonarroti finished his sculpture of David in 1504; and Leonardo completed the *Mona Lisa* between 1503 and 1505.

Leonardo da Vinci was, at a theoretical level, developing ideas of powered flight, bringing together experimentation in engineering with close observation of nature and the wings of birds. Technology was evident also in mass communication: Gutenberg may not have invented moveable typeface, but was able to exploit it efficiently with the roman alphabet from about 1450 in Mainz. Manuscript books had been limited to the elite: multiple printing was to transform the location of information, knowledge and learning. Short runs of book production – initially religious texts – became available, rather like the first limited transmission of television programmes: and then the technology rapidly accelerated. The first best-seller was Erasmus’s work *Adagia* in 1500 – an annotated collection of classical sayings, ‘offering the browsing reader a shot-cut to being a well-educated humanist’ (MacCulloch 2003, p 99). Written in a hurry, to restore his finances after being relieved of all his currency by the English customs officers, the *Adagia* were revised and extended bringing thousands of classical proverbs into everyday use –

<i>Oleum camino</i>	(to pour) oil on the fire
<i>Mortuum flagellas</i>	to flog a dead (horse)
<i>Asinus ad lyram</i>	to put an ass to the lyre
<i>Barba tenus sapientes</i>	wise as far as the beard.

There were other, very much less welcome, innovations 500 years ago. In 1494 the first cases of a terrible new disease were reported in Europe. In its initial impact, syphilis was particularly virulent, killing many as it swept across the continent. Theories as to its origin were abundant: one common factor is that its spread was always blamed on some other group or nation.

Not all the horrors were natural: there were new, man-made forms of weapons development. The development of the musket made for a new mass-produced weapon, highly portable, that could be used to kill large numbers at a much greater distance than had been possible with conventional weaponry. The first significant use of these weapons was in 1444, when 900 Swiss were slaughtered at St Jacobs on the Birs. But the technology flourished, and various forms of firearms proliferated all over Europe in the following decades.

1492 marked not only Columbus's first voyage, but also the *reconquista* – the expulsion of the Moors from Granada in Spain, after some 800 years of settlement there, Ethnic cleansing followed: Muslims were required to convert or leave, and this policy was then applied to first the Jews of Spain, and then the Jews of Portugal. Religious 'acts of faith' – *autos-da-fe* – became fires that burned to preserve the purity of the blood – *limpieza de sangre*.

But 500 years ago we also saw the birth of humanism: the new learning that underpinned so many of these changes. Humanism was the shift from the theocratic world-view of the medieval population to the anthropocentric view of the renaissance:

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;  
The proper study of Mankind is Man.

Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man* (1732)

The development of humanism made possible the idea of human personality and identity, emphasising both the uniqueness and the worth of individuals, both of which are critical to the CiCe network's activities. Humanism began the study of the processes of change and the idea of progress, and underpinned the principles that nothing should be accepted till tried and tested, the fundamentals of modern science. In politics, humanism emphasises the concept of the sovereign state (as opposed to the community of Christendom), and hence to the beginnings of nationalism – the sovereign nation-state was the collective counterpart to the autonomous individual.

The acknowledged leading thinker and disseminator of these ideas was Erasmus. He wrote 30 to 40 letters a day, corresponding all over Europe, 38 million words in all: he 'constructed a salon of the imagination, which embraced the entire continent in a constant flow of letters to hundreds of correspondents, some of whom he never met face to face' (McCullough, p 98). He was an anticlerical priest, a scholar who loathed pedantry, a populariser who wanted that 'every woman might read the gospel ... in their own language ... understood by Scots and Irishmen but also by Turks and Saracens. Would that the farmer might read ... at his plough, and the weaver ... to the tune of his shuttle' (Erasmus 1516).

One of his most significant and relevant works was published in 1504. *Enchiridion Militates Christiani* can be translated as 'A handbook (or a multipurpose tool – Enchiridion has both meanings) for the active Christian'. What Erasmus argues for in this (and in particular in the preface to the 1518 edition), among other matters, is that the

state, *civitas*, was a society in which everyone should be an active citizen, and that this was both a duty and obligation (MacCulloch, 2003, p 104). Erasmus wrote widely on education: for him, children were to be educated from a very young age, and education was all encompassing, not simply that which was defined in the traditional curriculum of disciplines and subjects. Education included social customs and behaviour, including blowing one's nose, behaviour in eating and drinking, and so on: education is an experience that is pervasive through all of social and cultural life, and the experience of social and cultural life is the subject matter of education. Children should learn as they played. The methods he promoted have been described as

‘surprisingly modern, not only in their historical context in that they broke with the scholastic methods of the middle ages, which were based on learning ‘by rote’ and the servile imitation of models considered to be untouchable, but ... a progressive training in literary ‘invention’ and in the acquisition of a personal style by studying different writers and adopting a critical approach to them ...; the preference given to individual tuition over a collective education which takes no account of differences in the characteristics and aptitudes of the learners ...’ (Margolin, 1993, p 7).

Education was also for everyone (though in a more limited sense for women), Erasmus arguing that every child should have access to instruction and education. To educate young people was to educate adults: he contended that the future of individuals and the quality of their society depended on their education: ‘A man is not born a man, but becomes one’: (Erasmus, in 1979, p 31). Human beings, he maintained, are able to improve through a liberal education, based on free will (which even children have) from a wise and skilled teacher using persuasion and gentleness. ‘The Prince of humanism was truly the tutor of Europe’ (Margolin, 1993, p 8). The central relationship was between upbringing, education and society. Through education, people could acquire a rich and an individual culture. Erasmus also argued for a worldview of citizenship: what people had in common was, for him more important than what distinguished them from each other. European dimensions were more important than national ones, and what was universally humanistic should count for more than patriotic sentiments. Zweig's (1934) biography of Erasmus argues that Erasmus' view of Europe was that of a moral concept, and that humanism strove to create a civilisation that could serve as an example for the world. Erasmus was the flag-bearer – and a ‘flag bearer who was a favourite of the great and the powerful ... Emperors and kings, princes and dukes, ministers and scholars, popes and prelates vied with each other for Erasmus's goodwill’.

Those seeking Erasmus's guidance and advice included Piotr Tomicki, Bishop of Krakow and Chancellor of the University, who in 1525 entered a protracted correspondence with Erasmus, trying, without success, to persuade him to come and work in Krakow. Other Poles joined with him – Poland-Lithuania at this time was a remarkable, almost unique, example of a highly tolerant society: straddling the boundary between the Latin church and the eastern Orthodox church, and with many examples of reformation creeds, also giving official recognition to the Jewish community – ‘Poland-Lithuania exhibited one of the most richly varied and interesting of all the local religious

developments in Reformation Europe. The Jagellonian kings ... enthusiastic patrons of humanistic learning and literature - on one occasion Sigismond said sarcastically "...please permit me, sir, to be King of both the sheep and the goats!" (MacCulloch 2003, p 192). Another Pole, Jan Laski, diplomat, academic and courtier, was also an admirer: he arranged to purchase Erasmus's extensive library during Erasmus's lifetime, but not to require its delivery until after Erasmus's death, thus arranging what was in effect a substantial pension for Erasmus in his later years.

Thus in Europe five hundred years ago, within the span of a single lifetime, there were revolutionary changes in society, knowledge and government, which we now see as the birth of the modern era, the transition point from medievalism –

- a redefinition of our planet's position in space,
- a new mapping and exploration of the relationships between different areas of the globe,
- a division of the world by competing superpowers,
- a new construction of the meaning of art,
- leaps of scientific imagination that shift the paradigm in a Kuhnian sense,
- revolutionary changes in communications systems opening up whole new forms of media,
- the development and use of new weaponry that enabled large-scale slaughter at a distance,
- mysterious new incurable and life-threatening diseases,
- ethnic and religious intolerance and clashes, and
- new understandings of citizenship and the construction of individual identity within the commonwealth.

These could be paralleled with our current position:

New theories and understandings of the universe, and the place and time of our galaxy are being developed. Astrophysicists and particle physicists have reconfigured our understandings of linear time, the dimensions of space, and the nature of matter. We are mapping our own planet with undreamed of accuracy, with geodesic navigational systems. Global positioning such as the Galileo satellite are allowing an exploration of the solar system and its planets in ways that parallel the great voyages of discovery 500 years ago.

In parallel with the Treaty of Tordesillas, we still manage to configure the world into competing power blocs, whether East versus West, North-South (Brandt, 1980) or Freedom-loving as opposed to Evil (Huntingdon, 1996).

Communications systems are developing at a near exponential rate: we could parallel our first clumsy electronic communications – wire-driven telegraph and telephone, wire-less transmissions of media – with the early presses of Guttenberg, followed by the explosion of electronic mail and the web: Tim Berners-Lee's invention of the world

wide web just over ten years ago has transformed our organisation and communication of knowledge.

Syphilis hit Europe in 1494: AIDS has hit the world in the 1980s. And, like syphilis, the origin and spread of the disease has been blamed on a variety of groups of 'others', and been used as portent of moral degeneracy, and as a weapon in the armoury of the neo-cons.

Closely allied to this, we have developed, used and proliferated with weapons of mass destruction, although sometimes we cannot find them to be where they have been predicted. The boundaries and nature of artistic expression continue, necessarily, to shock and upset.

Ethnic and religious conflicts have also emerged with new horrors – not just in the past sixty years, but also in Cambodia, Rwanda and Bosnia.

Ideas of citizenship and identity are also changing, just as they did in Erasmus's time, a period of similar transformations. We are understanding identity as now possibly being contingent upon circumstance – location, time, setting and context. We talk of multiple or nested identities. In terms of citizenship, we now have both national citizenship and, from the Maastricht Treaty (1992), 'Citizens of the Union' in a legal sense, the former giving the later. There are also broader ideas of European citizenship, encompassing all those who make their life here, and of global citizenship.

What is the experience that children and young people will have of citizenship in contemporary Europe? How does this accord with Erasmus's understanding of the experience of citizenship and education? This poses two initial questions for the educator: 'what do we mean by experience', and 'how do we learn from this?'

'Experience' is a well-used word, with some quite complicated meanings attached to it. John Dewey's definition might be a useful starting point: to him, experience was the 'complex of all which it is distinctively human' (1929, p 8), and this was central to education. Education 'might be defined as an emancipation and enlargement of experience' (1933, p 340). But the term experience covers both process and content - it includes *what* individuals do and suffer, *what* they struggle for - and also *how* people act and are acted upon, the ways in which they do and suffer – the processes of *experiencing* (Dewey, 1929, p 8).

Dewey thus distinguished two senses of the word: 'having an experience' and 'knowing an experience'. The 'having' comes from the immediacy of contact with events – primary experience; while 'knowing' is about the interpretation of the event – secondary, or reflective experience (Boud *et al.*, 1993, p 6; Dewey, 1929, p 4). They are thus linked: Michael Oakshott argued that 'experiencing' and 'what is experienced' 'stand to one another in the most complete interdependence; they comprise a single whole' (1933, p 9). 'Experience has within it judgment, thought and connectedness with other experience' (Boud *et al.*, 1993).

Gilbert Ryle makes a rather similar point when he distinguishes 'knowing that' from 'knowing how'.

Learning how or improving an ability is not like learning that or acquiring information. Truths can be imparted, procedures can only be inculcated, and while inculcation is a gradual process, imparting is relatively sudden. It makes sense to ask at what moment someone became apprised of a truth, but not to ask at what moment someone acquired a skill. (Ryle, 1949, p 58)

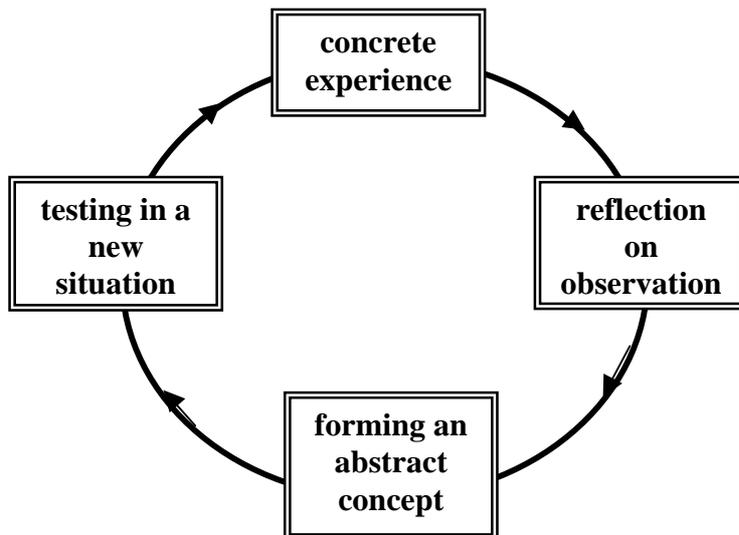
A man knowing little or nothing of medical science could not be a good surgeon, but excellence at surgery is not the same thing as knowledge of medical science; not is it a simple product of it. The surgeon must indeed have learned from instruction, or by his own inductions and observations, a great number of truths; but he must also have learned by practice a great number of aptitudes. (Ryle, 1949: 48-49)

'Learning' can mean quite a wide range of different activities. Säljö (1979) conducted a simple piece of research when he asked adult students what they understood by 'learning'. He found five main categories:

- a quantitative increase in knowledge (acquiring information)
- memorising (storing information to be reproduced)
- acquiring facts, skills, and methods that can be kept and used when needed.
- making sense of, or abstracting meaning (relating parts to each other and to the world)
- interpreting and understanding reality (comprehending the world through reinterpreting knowledge).

The last two are qualitatively very different (Ramsden, 1997). The first three imply a less complex process of learning, external to the learner - something that just happens or is done to the learner by a teacher. But the final two conceptions concern internalised and personal aspects of learning. It is this kind of learning that is critical for citizenship – learning that is done in order to understand the real world and in order to act in the real world. Citizenship education that was only the acquisition or memorisation of facts - even interesting or useful information – would be incomplete and unsatisfactory.

The teacher's role should thus be to help students move from just knowing that 'something happened' to *understanding* what the situation means. What does this mean in specific relationship to citizenship? How will experiencing citizenship create a young citizen who understands and actively participates? A model of experiential learning developed by David Kolb (1976, 1984) represents experience as a critical element in a cycle or a spiral of experiential learning.



Kolb and Fry (1975) put forward a model in which learning can begin from any one of the four points on the cycle. Often it begins with a person taking an action and observing the consequences. Reflecting on these observations leads to the establishment of a rule, or generalisation, or hypothesis – if the action is repeated, then the consequences will be similar. This understanding of a general principle becomes the basis for testing it out in a new context or situation. The new set of concrete experiences may or may not meet the prediction, and thus may need further reflection, and with this a new concept, or a refining of the original concept. To take an example: the four-year old child in the back of the car being driven by his parent experiences the car being pulled over by a police officer, and his parent being admonished for speeding. Reflection: some adults have authority over other adults. Social life is not a simple gerontocracy, where all adults are equal and control children – some adults have powers over others. This concept is then tested against other experience, and the socio-political concept of authority becomes refined to accommodate generalisations about the range of persons with authority, the degrees of power that they possess and the sources for these powers, the limitations on them, and so on. This is learning aspects of citizenship from experience.

There are two particular aspects of Kolb's model that we should focus on here: immediate experience of social life is used by the learner to test emerging concepts, and the feed-back link in the cycle, which is the learner uses to change their theories – and their practice. In the context of citizenship learning, we need to reflect in what are the everyday experiences of children, from which their conceptualisations will emerge; and secondly, what feedback are they likely to get from the behaviour of adults around them, that will support their developing understanding? Kolb is drawing from Dewey in

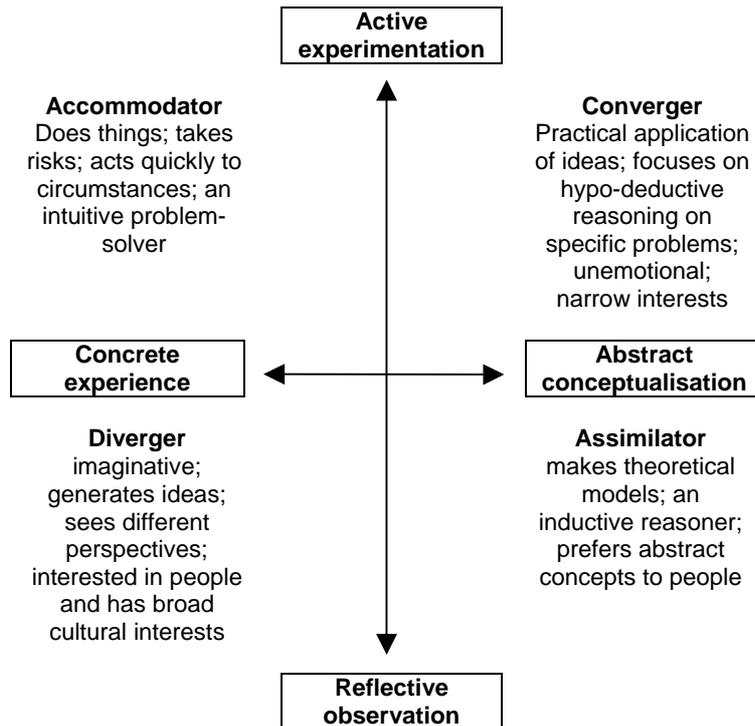
stressing the developmental nature of this process, and on Piaget in the link to cognitive development: stressing the role of experience in learning distinguishes this model from simple cognitive theories of learning processes. It also stresses the responsibility that society has for the experiences afforded young people – this learning is not from idealised models of society expressed through texts, but from the here-and-now of our lived experience. As the Danish Minister for Education put it in 1997:

If education must prepare for democracy, it must be democratically organised...  
We don't *suggest* a connection between democracy and education: we *insist* upon it.

(Ole Vig Jensen, Minister of Education, August 1997, speech at Soroe)

Kolb and Fry developed a set of learning styles based on this model. They argued that different individuals have different strengths in learning from particular parts of the cycle: we have different levels of ability in using either concrete experiences, reflective observational skills, conceptualisation abilities and experimental abilities. Propensities can be placed on two axes one ranging from reliance on concrete experience ranging to abstract conceptualisation, the other from reflective observation through to active experimentation. These polarities lead to individuals falling into one of four 'learning styles'.

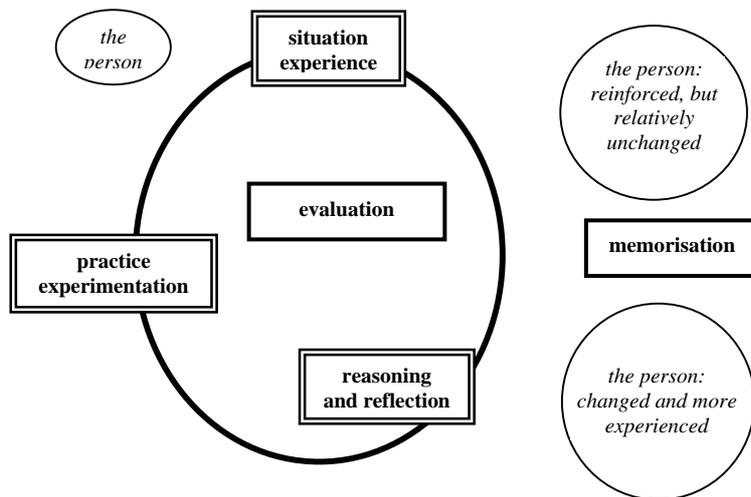
But is this what happens? In terms of citizenship education, what are the experiences of citizenship that young people actually have? There have been a number of criticisms of Kolb's model. It does not help us understand the process of reflection on experiences, though it is useful in helping educators plan learning activities that engage learners (Boud, 1985, p 13). The four styles neatly fit the model, and provide symmetry, but this does not necessarily match reality, and there are some kinds of learning (memorisation) and some kinds of learners (information assimilators) that do not fit (Jarvis, 1987). The model is largely concerned with *individual* learning, what happens in the individual mind: and for social learning and citizenship education, the *social* processes of learning are key. In particular, the model does not accommodate different learning conditions and environments, a point returned to below. Do the stages always or inevitably occur in this sequence?



(Derived from Tennant, 1997)

Peter Jarvis (1987, 1995) used Kolb's model to gather empirical data, asking adults explicitly about their own learning styles. From this, he suggested a series of patterns in which experiences of situations resulted in sometimes learning, and sometimes non-learning. This modified version of his resultant model shows both the affinities and derivations from Kolb, and the modifications and variations.

He first brings together the reflection and conceptualisation phases into a single stage of reasoning and reflection. He then adds two further possible stages, of memorisation (acknowledging one of the other kinds of learning noted above, and its possible role in experiential learning), and a stage of evaluation. He also includes the person, showing both their initiation into the cycle, and two possible exit points – one where they are relatively unchanged, and one where they have been changed and are 'more experienced'.

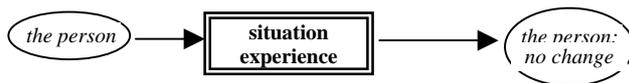


*Adapted from Jarvis 1994*

This model allows Jarvis to plot nine different possible patterns – three forms of non-learning, three of non-reflective learning, and three of reflective learning.

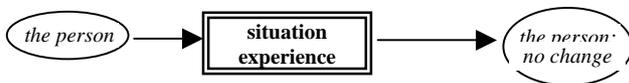
**Non Learning:**

**Presumption –**  
interaction through patterned behaviour, eg saying hello



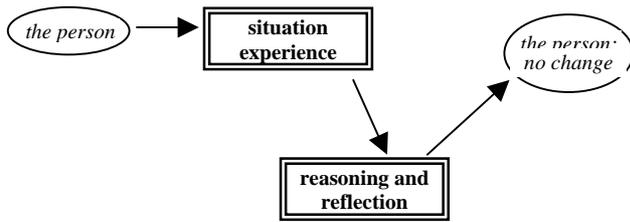
**Non Learning:**

**Non-consideration –**  
no response to a potential learning situation



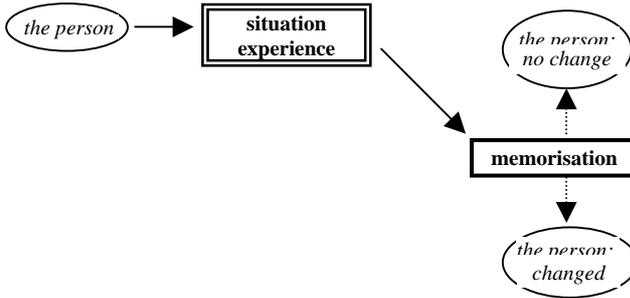
**Non Learning:**

**Rejection -**  
some reflection on experience, but this is rejected



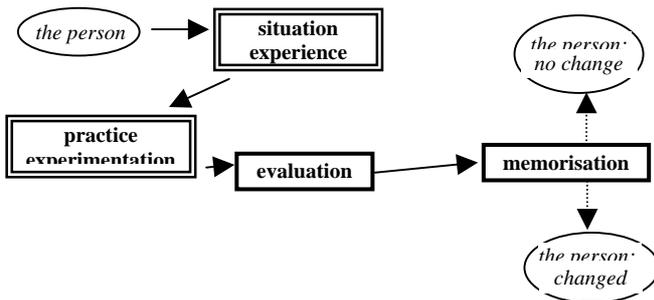
**Non-reflective learning:**

**Pre-conscious -**  
everyday, everybody has experiences in daily living that are not really thought about



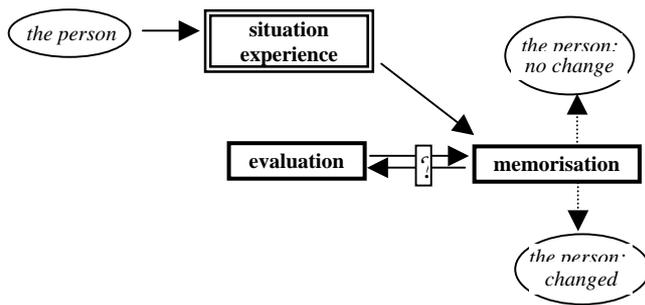
**Non-reflective learning:**

**Practice -**  
often used in activities like training for manual occupations or acquiring physical skills – or maybe also the acquisition of language



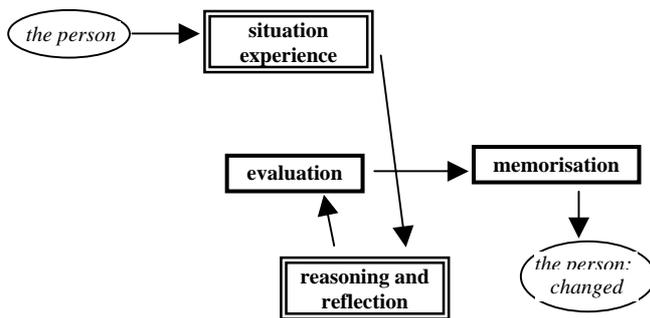
**Non-reflective learning:**

**Memorization** –  
 may or may not include some element of evaluation



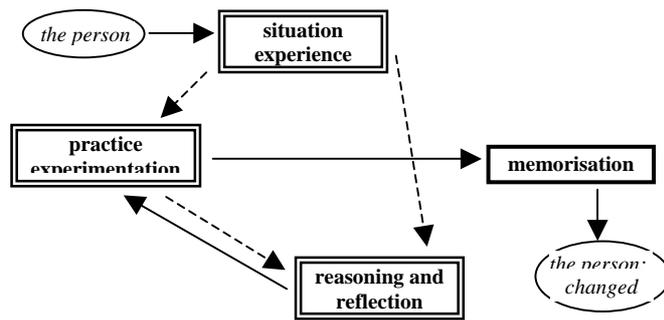
**Reflective learning:**

**Contemplation** -  
 consideration of experience, evaluation and an intellectual decision about this

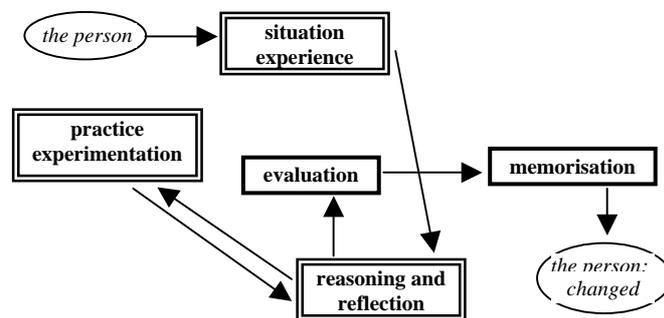


**Reflective learning:**

**Reflective practice –**  
similar to Schön's description of "reflection on and in action"

**Reflective learning:**

**Experiential learning –**  
learning pragmatic knowledge



This offers a more complex evaluation of experiential learning. It has been pointed out that there are still problems with stages, because several activities may be happening simultaneously. Nevertheless, what does the model imply about children's and young people's experience of citizenship, and what they might learn as a consequence of this experience?

The American writers Stan Bowles and Herb Gintis considered the nature of schooling in western capitalist societies (1976, 1980). They looked at both the reasons behind the development of state education, and the practices of schooling found in different kinds of school – elementary, secondary high and state colleges. Schooling, they said, takes place in the form it does in order to effectively prepare pupils for their future role as workers in a capitalist economy. This preparation is achieved through the 'Correspondence Principle'. Much of our experience at school is a preparation for our future roles as workers. Capitalist Society needs a docile, obedient, motivated workforce - school prepares us for this:

1. A subservient workforce: those who conform do best at school. Behaving in a compliant and dependable manner is rewarded by being labelled a success, while the child who is aggressiveness or demonstrates independence is categorised as a failure. At school we learn to obey.
2. Acceptance of hierarchy: those who do what they are told are described as successful learners. Workers learn to follow the boss's orders, because as pupils, they learned to follow the teacher's orders. We are inducted into the hierarchical structures of the workplace through the hierarchy of the school.
3. Motivation by external rewards: pupils are not interested in the subject knowledge they are taught at school, but are encouraged to go to school to get examination passes, an external reward. This is a preparation for the world of work where we do not work for the love of the job, but for the external reward of a wage.

Schools introduce pupils to living their lives by the clock (through the school timetable) – necessary if one is to work regular hours in a factory; they introduce children to uniformity, in dress, behaviour, language and thought – necessary for industry to work efficiently and unquestioningly; they divide knowledge into subjects, much divorced from everyday knowledge and experience – alienating work from experience; they create rewards for achievement in subjects in order to separate and categorise students into hierarchies of obedience – saving employers (and universities) from considering genuine skills and attributes. Thus what happens at school corresponds to what happens at work. And though Bowles and Gintis developed their analysis and theory specifically around education in capitalist America, their descriptions and findings about the nature and purpose of schooling would apply equally to Communist societies.

Bowles and Gintis further argue - this time perhaps specifically in a capitalist context - that achievement in school and a pupil's life chances are determined to a great extent by their family background - their class. Conformity leads to the working patterns necessary for an industrialised society; achievement in school relates to social class orientation that can be passed off as meritocracy, allowing those of a higher social class

to be licensed, through more advanced and higher education, into the work patterns and pseudo-independence of the professions and academia (see also Coles, 1988).

So what experience of citizenship is provided by schools in such systems? Obedience to authority; the acceptance of (possibly arbitrary) imposed rules; the division of society into ranks; the acknowledgement of hierarchy. Cultural norms are essentialised. Individual identity is sacrificed to institutional conformity. What kind of experiences of citizenship do our educational institutions – nurseries, schools and universities – actually provide?

Because the message of experiential learning is that people learn from their environment and experience, and that what young people will be learning from non-democratic institutions, from un-civil learning establishments, will be non-democratic and uncivil patterns of behaviour. Moreover, if at the same time we are teaching, in the formal curriculum, different messages about democratic values and the norms of civilisation, it would not be surprising if young people were cynical about the political process, apathetic in their civic participation, and generally contributing to the growth of the democratic deficit. One wonders what Erasmus might have made of this.

There are alternative scenarios. One of the most interesting analyses of the past decade has been the notion of learning through legitimate peripheral participation in learning communities. The idea of situated learning, developed by the social anthropologist Jean Lave and the former teacher Etienne Wenger, stresses that learning is social, that it comes about through participation in everyday life, and that it is continuous through life. Not only does this significantly resonate with Erasmus's views of education, but it also has important implications for citizenship education, and the institutions we need to provide the experiences in which citizenship will develop, and it is this idea of a learning community that will now be developed.

Wenger argues that there is a widespread supposition that learning is an individual activity. Schools, although they are social settings, strive to develop individual's abilities and understanding, and it is the individual who 'learns'. Learning is generally supposed to have 'a beginning and an end; that it is best separated from the rest of our activities; and that it is the result of teaching' (Wenger, 1998, p 3). Lave suggests that we should reconceptualise the relationship between learning, educational institutions and learners as a social process. Together, they published a seminal work, *Situated Learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*, in 1991, followed up by further individual works (Jean Lave (1993) and Etienne Wenger (1998a, 1998b)). Their work is not about schools, but about 'apprenticeship' in informal learning institutions - for example, among Yucatec midwives in Central America, Vai and Gola tailors in West Africa, US Navy quartermasters, and non-drinking alcoholics in Alcoholics Anonymous). Their ideas have been moved on to situations of formal schooling more recently by Barbara Rogoff (1990).

Lave and Wenger argue that communities of practice are ubiquitous, and that most people are involved in a number of them, at work, school, home, or at leisure. Human

beings are constantly engaged in the pursuit of enterprises of all kinds: as we define and pursue these in social groups, we interact with each other and with the environment, and change or tune our relations with each other –

In other words, we learn. Over time, this collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations. These practices are thus the property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise. It makes sense, therefore to call these kinds of association *communities of practice* (Wenger, 1998a, p 45).

Communities of practice have varied practices, from the formal to the informal, but in each members are joined through common activities and by 'what they have learned through their mutual engagement in these activities'. Wenger says that communities of practice define themselves in three ways:

- By their joint nature and purpose, which is always being re-negotiated by members through their practice;
- By their functioning, and the way that members knit a social entity together; and
- By their production of a shared repertoire of resources – whether these are routines, vocabularies, common understandings and beliefs (Wenger, 1999b)

This is not the simple acquisition of skills and knowledge for a task, but the establishment of relationships and communities with a sense of joint enterprise and identity, with a shared set of ideas and commitments, and shared resources: it is about ways of doing and approaching things that are shared to some significant extent among members. The relationship of this to citizenship, and to civic behaviour, is evident. Citizenship is above all a community of practice, rather than a simple set of structures and knowledge. Lave and Wenger thus are focusing on everyday experiences of being members of groups, and the informal experiential learning that creates a community of practice. They are coming at experiential learning from a different – and more revealing – direction than that taken by Kolb and Jarvis: as Hanks puts it in his introduction to their book: 'Rather than asking what kind of cognitive processes and conceptual structures are involved, they ask what kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p 14). This idea of a kind of apprenticeship is not learners acquiring a model of the world, but of learners participating in a community that has a model of the world – 'being active participants in the *practices* of social communities and constructing *identities* in relation to these communities' (Wenger, 1998, p 4).

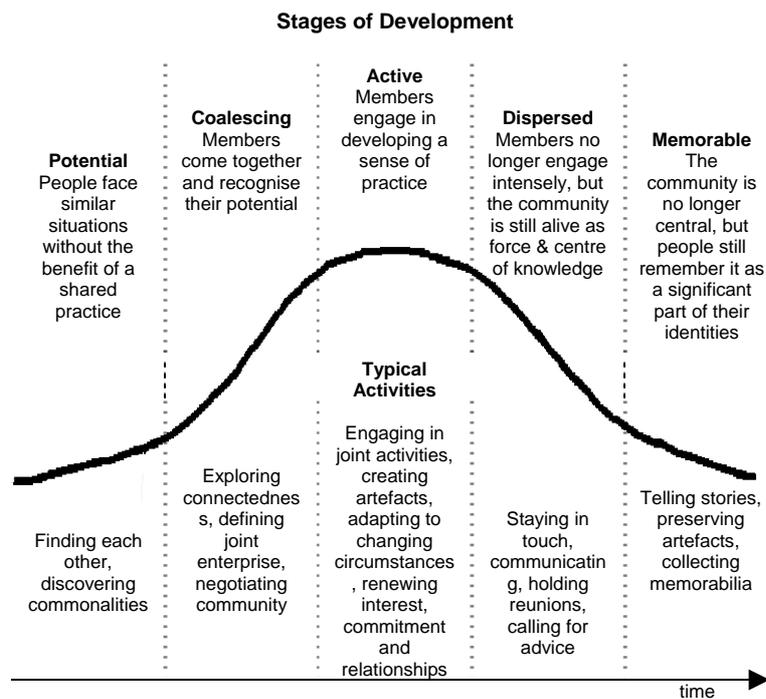
A learner will incrementally gather knowledge through this informal apprenticeship, simply through being with people who are expert (have more knowledge). Lave and Wenger described this in their 1991 book: novice midwives, tailors and quartermasters gradually acquiring expert knowledge and skills. Since then, other studies have looked at the contribution of informal learning to the development of professional knowledge in engineering, medicine, law and in community workers (Gear, McIntosh and Squires, 1994, Cullen *et al.*, 1999). Another study showed how Brazilian carpenters with little formal education manage to build a much better understanding of the mathematical

ideas related to their carpentry through informal relationships than did carpenters enrolled in formal apprenticeship classes that teach the same ideas (Carragher and Schliemann, 2000).

There is a sequence in this. People begin by joining a communities and learning at the periphery. As their competence develops, they move towards the centre of the community. Learning is not the acquisition of knowledge by an individual, but the process of social participation, and the *situation* defines the process.

the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community. "Legitimate peripheral participation" provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. A person's intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a socio-cultural practice. This social process, includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills. (Lave and Wenger 1991, p 29)

Lave and Wenger are advocating a more complex idea of relating experience to learning. 'For newcomers, the purpose is not to learn *from* talk as a substitute for legitimate peripheral participation; it is to learn *to* talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p 108-9). There are two key corollaries: knowledge cannot be abstract or out of context; and new learning occurs in the community of practice (Tennant, 1997). These may not always be true.



Wenger, 1998a

Barbara Rogoff has shown this kind of *Apprenticeship in Thinking* (1991) is a social activity that requires ‘guided participation’ from more experienced practitioners, and that this can be found in the way that young children learn about their social environment. For example, many children will, by the time they reach the stage of formal schooling, already have some familiarity with letter shapes, with their own names, and with other words around them – from the sides of buses, advertising and the like - as well as from books. In their seminal comparison of the informal learning at home of four year olds with their learning in Nursery class, Tizard and Hughes (1984) found that, irrespective of social class, that the mother-child relationship provided a rich informal learning environment:

... the most frequent learning context was that of everyday living. Simply by being around their mothers, talking, arguing and endlessly asking questions, the children were being provided with large amounts of information relevant to growing up in our culture (p 250-251).

On the other hand, the Nursery class – despite its informal approach was quite different -

The questioning, puzzling child we were so taken with at home was gone... conversations with adults were mainly restricted to answering questions rather than asking them, or taking part in minimal exchanges... (p 9)

Rogoff has taken Lave and Wenger's ideas to incorporate her own work on guided apprenticeship in school settings. She has describes an innovative school in Salt Lake City, where teachers, students and parents work together on the approach that 'learning occurs through interested participation with other learners' (Rogoff *et al.*, 2001). And more recently, in *The Cultural Nature of Human Development* (2003), she draws attention to the need to examine the cultural processes that shape children's development, rather than simply focussing on determining when children can accomplish particular skills. All children grow as members of cultural communities, so understanding how childhood is supported, constrained, and constructed in any community is a significant part of understanding child development and learning.

Legitimate peripheral participation and the idea of a community of practice has great significance for learning about citizenship in a meaningful way, and the experience of citizenship that society and its institutions needs to provide for young people.

Firstly, learning about citizenship is going to be a relationship between people, within a community of practice. What kind of democratic relationships exist in our learning institutions that constitute practice? In the introduction to Patricia Murphy's book *Learners, Learning and Assessment*, McDermott points out that

Learning traditionally gets measured on the assumption that it is a possession of individuals that can be found inside their heads... [But] learning is in the relationships between people .... Learning does not belong to individual persons, but to the various conversations of which they are a part. (in Murphy, 1999, p 17)

Practising citizenship, taking part – first tentatively on the margins, and then with increasing confidence, with increasing fluency and control – critically depends on being able to take part in a set of relationships that demonstrate and substantiate democratic civic values and practices. Without these relationships, without this participation, the culture of citizenship will not flourish, will not even start.

Secondly, it is, in our educational institutions, the responsibility of the teachers to enable participation in the community of practice. We need to consider how we both legitimate and ensure access for all students to be able to collaborate in the dialogue. In the Salt Lake City school, Barbara Rogoff observed that the teachers gave precedence to 'instruction that builds on children's interests in a collaborative way ...learning activities are planned by children as well as adults, and where parents and teachers not only foster children's learning but also learn from their own involvement with children' (2001, p 3). This in itself is a model of socio-political education, developing a community of respect for the learner and for the group, for relating the priorities of the individual to those of the group, and for identifying rights, duties and obligations. It

also is a vehicle for the exercise of the skills of citizenship: recognition of others, reasoning, argument, debate, resolution.

Finally, there is a central and critical relationship between knowledge about citizenship and 'doing citizenship' – the practice and experience of citizenship. Situated learning for democracy requires learning to be situated in democratic practice. We need to think carefully about what we mean by practice, and how this bears on knowledge. Education in this sense requires informed action and action with a direction of purpose.

This idea of a learning community would not have been totally alien to Desiderius Erasmus. The relationship between learning and everyday life he identified in his writings, the belief that one is 'not born a man, but becomes one', and the obligation for everyone to be an active member of the commonwealth, an active citizen, all of these could find a place in the ways in which we organise the experience of citizenship for children and young people in our countries and our institutions. It is particularly fitting that our network came to Krakow in Erasmus's name.

Erasmus owed his financial stability to the Polish protestant reformer, Jan Laski, who bought his library in reversion, providing Erasmus with the equivalent of a pension. Other contacts included Bishop Piotr Tomicki who had pleaded for Erasmus to work in Krakow in 1525. He never came. Tomicki's great nephew Andrzej Zebrzydowski studied with Erasmus in 1528, and eventually became Bishop of Krakow: when he died here in 1560, he described himself on his tomb in the Franciscan Church as *magni illius Erasmi Rotherodami discipulus et auditor* ('a follower and scholar of that great man, Erasmus of Rotterdam').

Erasmus is a fitting patron to the European Community's Thematic Networks of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and particularly to a network devoted to citizenship education, identity and the idea of Europe. Like Erasmus, we too are constructing 'a salon of the imagination'. But we must also ensure that we construct a democratic experience in our nurseries, schools and universities for our pupils. We must provide an experience of citizenship in which young people can participate and from which they will learn.

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