

Expanding Awareness and Contact through Experiential Learning

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ABSTRACT | A Gestalt approach to change and adaptation focuses on awareness and contact and therefore requires learning. Experiential Learning is the primary holistic process of adaptation, which integrates interdependent pairs of opposites to be most effective. We explore how Experiential Learning can provide a framework for Gestalt practitioners to make the learning process and our approach to it explicit, thereby increasing awareness. In addition, through the process and content of Experiential Learning, we provide suggestions for using Gestalt experiments to build flexibility in using learning styles that empower us to have choice in the way we make contact. We build awareness that learning is present in every life experience and is an invitation to be engaged in each experience. We become aware *that* we are learning, *how* we are learning, and—perhaps most importantly—*what* we are learning.

KEYWORDS | experiential learning, interdependent opposites, learning as a process, multidimensional learning, polar differentiation

Concepts can never be presented to me merely, they must be knitted into the structure of my being, and this can only be done through my own activity.—Mary Parker Follett (1924)

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Gestalt practitioners are in the business of change. The way we change can be described in the way we learn, a process that is so familiar and automatic that it recedes into ground. In this article, we make learning figural with Experiential Learning by describing the central role of experience, and the awareness of that experience, in learning. Like the concept of figure and ground, the learning process includes pairs of interdependent opposites that involve all parts of the whole person. We make decisions, however, unconscious, to preference certain poles and avoid or underutilize others, interrupting our ability to learn completely and to make contact. But, with awareness, we view the dilemmas of the learning process as a continuum of choices, and we are free to move in any direction, overcoming the habit of being pulled to one extreme or the other. Stevenson (2010) identifies the result of this awareness by explaining how meaning-making polarities start as a polar differentiation (opposites) that becomes an insight as the polarization dissolves into a multidimensional learning that the whole is more than the sum of the parts:

The insight unleashes creative energy and creates fresh possibilities. In this way, the usual meaning-making process of polar differentiation is set aside in a state of pure being through a deliberate act of polar *indifferentiation*. The closer we come to simply being, the more we open a space—a “fertile void”—in which fresh possibilities can arise. (113)

In what follows, we maintain that understanding the learning process and our own approach to using it is the key to self-transformation and growth.

Gestalt Awareness and Experiencing

The Gestalt practitioner’s role is to heighten awareness of the limiting human tendency to prefer one circumstance to another in a way that blinds us to other possibilities. This begins by raising awareness so that we do not impose old meaning on new experiences, rushing to closure before we have extracted new meaning, but stay fully present in the “here and now” as both a participant and a witness.

Awareness of one's subjective experience is paramount for learning. Mary Parker Follett (1924) drew from both Gestalt theory and the opposing school of behaviorism in creating her approach to learning and development. As a truly interdisciplinary and radical thinker, she placed experience and human interaction at the center of her theory of human development. Experience, according to Follett, was the primary source of creativity, thoughts, and purpose:

All that I am, all that life has made me, every past experience that I have had—woven into the tissue of my life—I must give to the new experience. . . . We integrate our experience, and then the richer human being that we are goes into the new experience; again we give our self and always be giving rise above the old self. (136–37)

It is not *experience*, but *experiencing* that is the source of learning. Because of our habits and stereotypes, we live through many experiences without actually experiencing them. Through a Gestalt perspective, we accept that learning and change can only occur when the individual perception and meaning making are interrupted. John Dewey (1933) concurred when he proposed that, to initiate reflection and learning, our habitual experience must be interrupted by deep experiencing, such as when we are *stuck* with a problem or difficulty, or *struck* by the strangeness of something outside of our usual experience. But we can also strip our biases from our experiences in more deliberate ways.

Without new experiences there can be no real learning; people only recombine and reiterate what they already know. Yet, the opening to new experiences and living those experiences fully with awareness in the moment—the key to learning, renewal, and growth—is not necessarily in a client's repertoire. Their habits and beliefs are fixed Gestalts that tend to engage automatically, turning a new experience into an old pattern of response. Ironically, what we think we know can be the greatest barrier to furthering our learning; thus, the Gestalt coach makes awareness explicit by revealing these fixed Gestalts.

Awareness develops by paying attention to what is going on in the internal and external environment. Edwin C. Nevis ([1987] 2001) describes awareness as a growing consciousness or comprehension arising from the use of the five senses. As we pay attention to the rising

sensation, we receive enough information to develop an important figure from the undifferentiated ground; for example, noticing a tasty apple in a bowl of fruit. Erving Polster and Miriam Polster (1973) suggest that this awareness is a resource available at all times through an ongoing process, rather than simply at special moments. We can learn how continually to tap our resource through being fully present rather than waiting for insights or special moments.

Experiencing aims to overcome habitual perceptions, thoughts and actions, and to reach direct, pure experience through mindful awareness and attention. This mindfulness is the core of Buddhist meditation, the discipline of anchoring the mind in the present moment. This is often accompanied with a practice of awareness and acceptance through breathing. Kabat-Zinn (1994) describes mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way—on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally” (4). In mindfulness theory, nonjudgment is accepting the current state as part of a constant flow of changing experiences. This theory suggests that letting go of judgment strengthens the mind, and it challenges the illusion that we can control our experiences by overthinking them. We often find ourselves responding to situations automatically, without questioning our habitual responses, as if we were only half awake. Mindfulness helps us wake up to the present moment, experience it more vividly, and react to it in more intentional ways (Dunoon and Langer 2011).

In order to be transformed by experiences, we need to be fully awake for them. In some spiritual traditions we humans are thought to be basically asleep, going through life in a semiconscious way, strangely disengaged from our own lives. In both Gestalt practices and Experiential Learning, we emphasize awakening to attend consciously to our experiences and then to choose deliberately how they influence our beliefs and choices. By placing experience at the center of learning, intentionally guiding the learning process, and paying attention to how we are going through the steps in the process, we create ourselves through learning. How and what we learn determines the way we process the possibilities of each new emerging experience, which in turn determines the range of choices and decisions we see. The choices and decisions we make to some extent determine the events we live through, and these events influence our future choices. Thus, we create ourselves by choosing what

we pay attention to, and how we process and respond to that experience. For many, this learning choice is relatively unconscious and automatic. We suggest that, by raising awareness about how we learn through Experiential Learning, we are empowered consciously to choose, direct, and control our life, and empower our clients to do the same.

Learning as a Process

Learning is *the* primary holistic process of adaptation to the world. As a holistic process, it requires all parts of our being and applies to all life experiences. Gordon Wheeler (1991) describes growth through learning and adaptation as the primary goal of any individual. As new ground is brought into our awareness, it is often in direct opposition to how one has made meaning of the world. Through creative adjustment, we make meaning in a way that narrows the conflict between what was held true and the new broader meaning that may result. This process of managing conflicts requires an integration of both growth and conservation.

David A. Kolb (2015) synthesizes the work of nine foundational scholars from education, psychology, and philosophy to generate an ideal process of learning and developing from experience (the learning cycle); and he describes nine approaches to using it (learning styles). Experiential Learning is based on several unique perspectives on learning and development that correspond to Gestalt principles, wherein learning is a recursive cyclical process as opposed to a linear, traditional information transfer. It is best conceived as a process, not as a modality focused on outcome. To be effective, the process of learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation. The approach of Experiential Learning requires deep trust in one's own experience and a healthy skepticism about information. It demands both the perspective of quiet reflection and passionate commitment to action in the face of uncertainty. It begins with the awareness that learning is present in every life experience and is an invitation to be engaged in each experience. Three foundational scholars whose work contributed to the development of Experiential Learning were influenced by Gestalt principles: Kurt Lewin (1951: field theory and life space), Carl Rogers (1961: deep experiencing), and Mary Parker Follett (1924: learning relationships).

The Learning Cycle

The Kolb Experiential Learning Cycle (2015) identifies the ideal process of learning as a recursive cycle with four distinct modes: Experiencing, Reflecting, Thinking and Acting (see Figure 1). The experiential learning cycle is a learning process initiated by a *concrete experience*, which demands *reflective observation* about the experience in a search for meaning that engages *abstract thinking*, leading to a decision to engage in *active experimentation*. The process is holistic: it involves all aspects of an individual (affective, perceptual, cognitive, and behavioral).

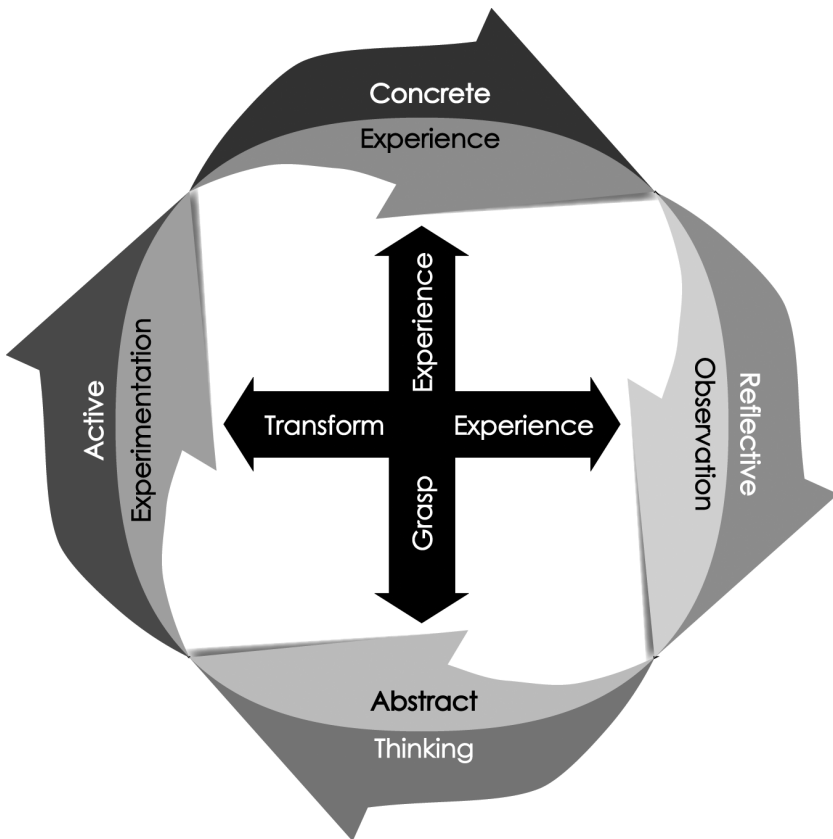


FIGURE 1 | The Experiential Learning Cycle. *Source:* Adapted from Kolb (2015); permission granted.

Although we may recognize this step-by-step process as the process for conducting Gestalt experiments, it is the same process that we use to interact with others, make decisions, solve problems, innovate, and work on teams. The learning cycle process can be used to manage effectively any situation in life involving change and adaptation. For example:

- *Concrete Experience (Experiencing)*. Attend to your experience in the moment.
[Coach feels: I notice that I am feeling foggy and distracted. My breath is shallow and I am getting sleepy.
Ask: Am I present in this moment? How do I know? How am I experiencing myself?]
- *Reflective Observation (Reflecting)*. Pause to reflect on that experience to make meaning.
[Coach reflects: I wonder what these feelings might mean? Have I have felt this way in the past? If so, what did it mean? Is the client focused and present? I am losing interest and I wonder if the client feels that way too. Does the client discuss her feelings?
Ask: What are other points of view? Am I allowing time to struggle and find answers?]
- *Abstract Thinking (Thinking)*. Next engage abstract thinking to generalize and make a decision.
[Coach thinks: I have not heard the client mention her feelings once during our session. This generally means that she may not acknowledge what those feelings are. She is preferencing Thinking over Experiencing (feeling). I can use the polarity model framework.
Ask: What does the evidence show? Am I accurate?]
- *Active Experimentation (Acting)*. Take action to implement your decision.
[Coach says: “I notice you have not mentioned your feelings. Would you be willing to try an experiment?”
Ask: What can we do to progress? What action can we take now?]

When the coach and/or client uses all four modes of the Learning Cycle, we can experience an effective, well-balanced, learning and living process that keeps our respective subjective experience at the center

of learning. If one or the other habitually clings to some modes and ignores or resists others, we block part of this learning process from being expressed and disown parts of ourselves. Hence, our knowledge of polarities in the learning cycle sheds light on the reason we prefer some modes and avoid or underutilize others.

The cycle contains two pairs of interdependent, dialectally opposed modes of learning: experiencing and thinking; reflecting and acting. We *grasp* information through two ways of knowing the world: the subjective, immediate Experiencing (concrete experience) and abstract, conceptual Thinking (abstract thinking). We transform experience into knowledge by interpreting through Reflecting (reflective observation) and acting on the information through Acting (active experimentation). In Gestalt thought, we call this polar differentiation, leading to creative indifference, a more holistic understanding of the situation (Stevenson 2010, 121ff.). Due to this tension, we often find that people creatively adapt by forming preferences for parts of the cycle and avoiding or underutilizing others. After all, how can we feel and think at the same time? How can we watch and do simultaneously? The preference to use certain modes of the Learning Cycle and inhibit others is self-reinforcing, because we unconsciously select learning situations that will support our preferences based on past success or gratification, and we avoid situations that call for using those parts of the learning cycle that are less familiar.

We typically find that moving through some parts of the cycle are within our comfort zone, whereas other steps can be unpleasant or even painful. If we linger too long in one step of the process or skip it entirely, we interrupt the full cycle. By attending to Experiencing and Reflecting, we raise our awareness, generate ideas, and wonder about what might be, but staying there too long impedes our ability to decide or get anything accomplished. By using Reflecting and Thinking we pay attention to the details and generalize about meaning, but without balance from the other modes, we may be so paralyzed that we never take action to create a new consciously aware experience. Thinking and Acting can ensure that we set our goals and know how to measure success; however, without the inclusion of the opposite modes, we may create the same results again and again. Acting and Experiencing allow us to experiment with new behaviors and seize new opportunities, but using only those steps may create unnecessary risk or leave us aiming at the wrong goal.

Learning Styles

Just as contact styles describe the way in which we manage or resist the Cycle of Experience, learning styles describe the way we navigate the dialectically opposed modes of learning on the learning cycle. The learning space is divided into a typology of nine learning styles that correspond to preferences for the four modes of the Learning Cycle. The nine styles are Experiencing, Imagining, Reflecting, Analyzing, Thinking, Deciding, Acting, Initiating, and Balancing (see Figure 2).

The *Experiencing* style is illustrated by the ability to find meaning from deep involvement in experience. The *Imagining* style is distinguished by the ability to create meaning by observing and reflecting on experiences. The *Reflecting* style is identified by the ability to connect experience and ideas through sustained reflection. The *Analyzing* style is determined by the ability to integrate and systematize ideas through reflection. The

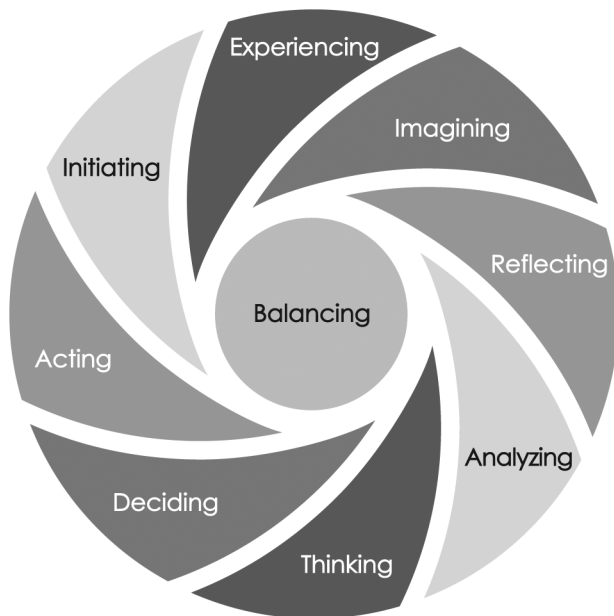


FIGURE 2 | The Nine Learning Styles. © 2017 Kay Peterson and David A. Kolb. All Rights Reserved. Source: Adapted from David A. Kolb and Alice Y. Kolb (The Kolb Learning Style Inventory 4.0. Experience Based Learning Systems, Inc. 2016).

Thinking style is discerned by the capacity for disciplined involvement in abstract reasoning, mathematics, and logic. The *Deciding* style is highlighted by the ability to use theories and models to decide on courses of action. The *Acting* style is illustrated by a strong motivation for goal-directed action that integrates people and tasks. The *Initiating* style is differentiated by the ability to initiate action to deal with experiences and situations. The *Balancing* style is explained by the ability to adapt flexibly by weighing the pros and cons of Acting versus Reflecting and Experiencing versus Thinking.

Due to personality type, education, and cultural influences, we establish preferences for certain modes of learning, emphasizing some parts of the learning cycle over others. These stylistic preferences become habits or patterns of learning that turn into “fixed Gestalts.” They ultimately influence how we view current situations, perceive and decide future choices, and influence what we are likely to resist. By the time we reach adulthood, preferences for navigating the Learning Cycle are relatively stable; however, this approach is not a fixed personality trait but more like a steady state or habit of learning. Recognizing our learning style is the most powerful form of awareness for self and other that we have discovered. In understanding which styles we prefer, we can also shed light on our blind spots and challenges. In a Gestalt approach, we pay attention to the process of awareness and unawareness. As Gestalt practitioners, we understand from “The Paradoxical Theory of Change” (Beisser 1970) that what is less developed, out of awareness, unowned, or resisted, can be as valuable to discover for our development as what is in awareness.

The learning styles are nine ways of navigating the Learning Cycle, nine steps in any process, and nine parts of the whole person. On this map of wholeness, we can easily see where our strengths lie and identify the parts of ourselves that are mere potential, yet to be developed. By making the learning process explicit and identifying our own approach to it, Experiential Learning builds a new awareness regarding our preferences, strengths, and challenges, and provides a means whereby we can view ourselves “in process” as the coach and client continually transform through learning and development. This process can inform our flexibility when making contact with the environment, and shed light on how we can learn to increase our range

by moderating our resistances to that contact. We can recognize the opposing needs of the learning cycle and begin to see our preferences and resistances as a matter of choice. We can develop range in our use of learning styles that have yet to be expressed by using the learning process itself.

Learning Flexibility

Most of us have a learning style preference with some backup style range; yet, we have other styles that remain unrealized potential typically in styles that are opposite our own preference. Because each of the learning styles has an upside and a downside, it is important to identify those we use and the ones we avoid. To be most effective, to continue to mature, and to reach our full potential, we *learn* to resolve the conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation inherent in the learning process. Yontef (1976) believes that awareness is integrative: when we are aware, we do not alienate aspects of ourselves. Kolb (2015) adds: “In higher forms of adaptation, such as creativity or personal development, conflict among the adaptive modes needs to be confronted and integrated into a creative synthesis” (42).

We can change and expand our learning style to become flexible in order to adapt to situational needs and improve contact. Learning flexibility is the ability to use all of the Learning Cycle at will to modify our approach for the context (Sharma and Kolb 2010). Ideally, a flexible learner can navigate the entire Learning Cycle, tapping the strengths of each style at will. This flexibility can help us to expand our range in managing our contact styles, too. Flexibility has many benefits. People who have high learning flexibility are happier and have greater overall flexibility in life. They see more possibilities in any given moment, they experience less conflict and stress, and they are able to handle more complexity. With flexibility, we perceive ourselves as self-directed and exhibit later stages of adult ego development (Sharma and Kolb 2010).

By developing learning flexibility in our clients, and ourselves, we are expanding our capability to manage the Gestalt process and our range in contact styles. The next section provides ideas about how to build

awareness of the nine learning styles, as well as experiments to support learning to use styles that may be undiscovered or underutilized.

Using Awareness to Build Learning Style Flexibility in Our Clients and in Ourselves

(1) *Begin with “what is.”* Before we adopt unfamiliar styles with more flexibility, we must accept ourselves just as we are. Gestalt psychologist and Experiential Learning foundational scholar Carl Rogers (1961) believes that, paradoxically, when we accept ourselves just as we are, we can change. Change occurs when an individual becomes what one *is* rather than trying to be what one is not. Although it is easy to “resist” looking at our strengths and weaknesses completely, we can practice becoming more curious and accepting of ourselves, and helping our clients to do the same. Only then, can we change and become more flexible in our approach, as Beisser (1970) claims: “Change does not take place by trying coercion, or persuasion, or by insight, interpretation, or any other such means. Rather, change can occur when the (client) abandons, at least for the moment, what he would like to become and attempts to be what he is” (77).

(2) *Consider the mental model.* The learning cycle model and awareness of the importance of learning flexibility alone may be enough to build our flexibility in nondominant styles. As practitioners, we can benefit from understanding that the way we learn is also the way we coach, consult, and continue to build flexibility. Our learning style preference defines where on the learning cycle process we prefer to enter and dwell, and provides insights into how we might resist clients whose styles are different from our own. For instance, we share an Imagining style preference; therefore, we are eager to generate ideas, show empathy, and dream about ideal outcomes. However, if we are not consciously aware of using all learning styles—and the corresponding steps in the Learning Cycle—we might luxuriate in time to the neglect of setting a goal or conducting an experiment. Through style awareness, we consciously set goals at the beginning of each session and make certain

that we take some action toward the goal. Our effectiveness relies on dynamically moving around the cycle to consciously touch all the bases. Likewise, when we meet clients who have a Deciding or Acting style preference that lies opposite to our preference on the learning cycle, we initially may resist their immediate attention to one goal when we would rather linger in the Imagining step in the learning process. In effect, each coaching session becomes a way of practicing to be more flexible.

(3) *Dampen current preferences.* Another flexibility-building strategy is to stop overusing our own preferred style. Our awareness of using a specialized learning style can help us to moderate automatic behavior.

(4) *Go deeply within our Learning Style.* A typical approach to building flexibility involves deeply exploring one's own style through overexaggeration, that is, the extremes of how this style does and does not serve one's effectiveness. The awareness of how it does not serve clients can lead to their gradually trying out a nondominant style.

(5) *Using Gestalt Experiments to Build Flexibility: Gestalt Polarity experiments to get "unstuck."* If flexibility is so beneficial, why does everyone not develop it easily? The deeper one is attached to a specialized, preferred learning style, the more one may see the opposite style as foreign or negative.

Lewin (1951) makes it clear that we can view this "stuckness" toward a desirable goal as a dynamic state, a quasi-stationary equilibrium, composed of many opposing forces. Nevis ([1987] 2001) reminds us to recognize that all resistance is not an absence of energy, but a mobilization of energy. This energy system involves polarities, pairs of opposites that work in a complementary fashion and require one another (Woldt and Ingersoll 1991). Although they are interdependent, people rarely experience polarities with equal ease. Ingersoll and O'Neill (2005) state that one "typically sides with half of a polarity, condemning the other half as 'different from' or 'threatening to' the half it is identifying with" (144).

The Gestalt-inspired polarity thinking approach provides a method of getting unstuck when inertia has a client locked into a preferred learning style (Johnson 1996). As coaches, we can help the client to recognize that valuing the upside of the preferred learning style so that he ignores the downside. As such there will be a tendency to tolerate the downside of the preferred learning style because one might only see the downsides of other styles.

(6) *Using Gestalt experiments to embody Learning Styles.* Learning styles are deeply engrained; they are evident not just in how we think but also in how we feel, perceive, and behave—even in our gestures, posture, and movements. We may find its flexibility to be elusive if we simply base our knowledge on an abstract description of that style. Physical flexibility may provide a way for us to gauge our general flexibility in life and learning, too.

Movement encompasses more than gestures or physical exercise. Sensations, emotions, and thoughts are organized patterns of movement (Keleman 1987). The body is constantly moving on a continuum from subtle, autonomic movement patterns (such as a beating heart and breathing) to intentional physical movements (such as gesturing and walking) to change and to adapt. People generally embody their learning style by moving in ways that are characteristic of the skills and attitudes of the learning style they favor. After all, an individual who gravitates toward the Acting style will need be quicker, stronger, and more free flowing movement than someone who spends more time in the Reflecting style, where the movements are more minimal, sustained, and controlled.

For example, Lance, an accountant, prefers the Analyzing style. Lance spends most of his day sitting behind his computer, focusing on details for his clients. In fact, when once he paid attention to his movements over the course of a day, he found that he was in only a few positions for about 80 percent of his day. Lance sits in a chair facing forward—typically with his right leg crossed over his left leg and his arms narrowly reaching out to his keyboard. He keeps his lower back rigidly straight and his shoulders slumped forward. His movements are slow and controlled; in fact, he often keeps his body in the same position

for minutes at a time and senses tension in his shoulders. His vision is focused intently on the computer screen. His breath is shallow and high in his chest. At least three days per week, Lance enjoys running to get exercise. When he runs, his movements are rhythmical and repetitive in a front-to-back motion. Lance rarely moves from side to side or in ways that require a twist at the waist. He recognizes that it has been a long time since he moved with any free, easy spontaneity like he might have as a child on the playground. Like most adults, Lance spends so much time doing the same things everyday in habitual activities that his movements are habitual, too. He might even find that he only moves in about ten different ways on a regular basis, unlike young children who move in hundreds of ways.

Our own flexibility—in life and learning—may be evident through our own movements. We can notice if we are typically loose and relaxed, or more controlled with some tension. Do we make our body narrow by crossing our arms and legs, or are our shoulders wide and arms open? Understanding our movement preferences—postures, gestures, tension levels, and even the way we breathe—can change the way we experience the world and the impact we have on others.

Peterson, DeCato, and Kolb (2015) suggest that individuals have preferred movement affinities, and hypothesize that practicing movement affinities, especially those associated with nonpreferred Learning Styles, may support an increase in physical and mental flexibility. When one is able to move using a full palette of movement, one may be more flexible in both movement and learning and are able to adopt an integrated approach to learning.

Movement is a catalyst for learning. A complex relationship exists between one's brain and body where cognition is influenced by and influences physical experiences in the world (Ratey 2008). Linking the Learning Styles with movement affinities can assist learners to experience each style consciously and to make its expression appropriate and integrated in their daily life. Movement awareness can promote a greater awareness of an individual's preferred approach to learning as well as to promote the flexibility necessary to engage effectively all modes of the Learning Cycle,

and thus all Learning Styles. By “standing in the space” of a learning style, we are able to create a concrete expression of an abstract concept. As we experiment with different forms of movement styles, we can notice which ones are comfortable and which feel foreign. When we identify a client’s learning style, we are able to shed light on habits and patterns the person uses to approach life situations and their resistances. This allows us to have a basic framework for strengths, interests, and energy; and also for blind spots, challenges, and resistances.

Table 1 contains tips for building capacity in each style. The table includes a description of each of the nine learning styles, suggestions for developing the learning style, and the mindset and physical expression adopted in each style. We can use this information to understand a client’s ground, to form a figure, and to create Gestalt experiments that will help our clients and us build flexibility in all nine learning styles.

The Gestalt and Experiential Learning approaches view the “self as process,” not as a static abstract notion. It describes the ongoing, changing, and transforming process in which we continually engage in experiences and choose our reality (Parlett 1991). By understanding our learning style and flexibility range, we can appreciate that we are predisposed to approach experiences using a habitual pattern of organizing our feelings, perceptions, thoughts, and behaviors. Gestalt awareness and experiments can be pivotal experiences for our clients to manage the dilemmas of learning process, and build more range in integrating their ability to use all the learning styles. Through learning from experience, we can continue to expand our ability to make contact in more effective, authentic ways throughout life.

TABLE 1 | Creating Gestalt Experiments for Building Flexibility in Nine Learning Styles

	Developing the capacity	Mindset	Expression
Experiencing Style	<p>Individuals who prefer an Experiencing style emphasize feeling while balancing acting and reflecting styles. Use this style to build self-awareness with five senses and emotions, and to connect, communicate, and collaborate with others. Engage, feel, and connect.</p>	<p>Am I recognizing my emotions? Am I involved and engaged?</p>	<p>Body easeful, open, scanning the environment; awareness of body sensation, emotions, and environment. Communication is open, accepting, intuitive, and empathetic.</p>
Imagining Style	<p>Individuals who prefer an Imagining style learn primarily through experiencing/feeling and reflecting. They are best at viewing concrete situations and exploring them from many different points of view. Their approach to situations is to observe rather than take action. Use this style to empathize with others and to consider their opinions. Create, diverge, include.</p>	<p>What are the possibilities? Have I judged too soon?</p>	<p>Light, gentle gestures, luxuriating in time, scanning the environment especially to include everyone and everything. Communication invites trust and openness, offers a helping attitude and empathy.</p>

Reflection Style	Individuals who prefer a Reflecting style emphasize thoughtfulness while balancing feeling and thinking. The learning strengths of this style are a capacity for deep reflection informed by the ability to be both feeling oriented and conceptual. Use Reflecting style to make sense of feelings and thoughts, to recuperate, to consider the best action. Listen, examine, process.	Reflecting requires space and time. Impulsive desires and pressures to take action can inhibit reflection. You can enhance your ability to reflect by deliberately viewing things from different perspectives and striving to feel empathy. Meditating can also foster deep reflection. Gathering and making sense of information can help you develop the Reflecting learning style.	Can I slow things down? Have I observed and deliberated?	Indulges in the time required to observe. Sustained and deliberate movements create a thoughtful, cautious attitude. Watches patiently, waits to act until certain on intention. Communication requires sustained reflection before the spoken word.
Analyzing Style	Individuals who prefer an Analyzing style learn primarily through thinking and reflecting. They are best at understanding a wide range of information and putting it into concise, logical form. They are less focused on people and relationships and more interested in abstract ideas and specific concepts. Generally, they find it more important that a theory have logical soundness than practical value. Analyze, synthesize, plan.	Analyzing requires both logical thinking and reflection to organize information and create a plan. An extreme focus on details enhances Analyzing, but diversion and interruptions inhibit your ability to analyze. Coming up with theories, analyzing data, and integrating information to get the full picture can help you to develop the Analyzing learning style.	As a Planner, focus on using your analytical skills to plan and manage projects with precision.	Controlled, precise movements. Takes time to reflect before acting and moves in a controlled manner to minimize the risk of making a mistake. The combined movement qualities provide the ability, including stillness, required to focus on a task for long hours; naturally cautious and neutral, inquiring. Communication is concise and logical.

(Continues)

TABLE 1 | Creating Gestalt Experiments for Building Flexibility in Nine Learning Styles (Continued)

Thinking Style			As a	
<p>Individuals who prefer a Thinking style draw both on the rich inner world of reflection and abstraction and outer world of action. They are deep thinkers who are able to inductively develop a particular concept or idea and deductively evaluate its validity and practicality by testing those ideas in the real world. They thrive on creating conceptual models that can be applied or generalized to other situations. Skills of the person who prefers Thinking include: uses quantitative tools to analyze problems, frames arguments with logic, communicates effectively, makes independent judgments. Generalize, interpret, think critically.</p>	<p>Thinking requires the ability to represent and manipulate ideas in your head. Intense emotion and sensations or pressure to act quickly can disrupt the thinking process. Engagement in thinking can be enhanced by creating scenarios for action. Using numbers to analyze problems, making independent judgments, and framing arguments with logic can also aid in the development and expression of the inking learning style.</p>	<p>Questioner, focus on using data to find solutions and reach conclusions.</p>	<p>Focused, precise movements that narrow the focus. Strong in commitment to be thorough. Controlled in emotional expression. The intense focus creates a reserved, no-nonsense attitude.</p>	
Deciding Style	<p>Individuals who prefer a Deciding style emphasize thinking and acting in learning situations. People with this style are best at finding practical uses for ideas and theories. They like to solve problems and make decisions based on finding logical solutions to issues or problems. Commit, decide, converge.</p>	<p>Deciding requires making an independent judgment through thinking and committing to one course of practical action. Ambiguity and remaining open to new ideas can inhibit deciding. Determining standards of success and measuring your progress toward that goal develops the Deciding style.</p>	<p>What do I want? What is my goal? How will I know I am successful?</p>	<p>Strong intention focused on one course of action; alert and determined; efficiency with quickness, even abruptness. Strong, direct, and quick movements are forceful. Communication is pragmatic and goal oriented.</p>

Acting Style	Individuals who prefer an Acting style are equally comfortable functioning in a practical world that can make use of feelings and actions as well as in a subjective world that requires thinking abilities. They combine the ability to find solutions to questions or problems based on technical analysis and also pay attention to the needs of people and sources of information in concrete situations. Act, execute, implement.	Acting requires commitment and involvement in the practical world of real consequences. Acting brings the previous learning styles of Experiencing, Imagining, Reflecting, Analyzing, Thinking, and Deciding; and tests them in reality. Spending too much time in the other learning styles can inhibit Acting. Checklists, timetables, and taking even a small action toward a goal can help you develop the Acting style.	What can I do right now? Am I holding myself back? How can I keep things moving?	Quickness that implies high energy, intuitive readiness to take action. The strength and easy flow of energy moves to action without worry of risk. The assertive attitude is dynamic and commanding. Communication is dynamic and rapid.
Initiating Style	Individuals how prefer the Initiating style learn primarily through acting and feeling. They have the ability to learn from “hands-on” experience and function well in ambiguous and uncertain situations. They enjoy achieving goals and involving themselves in new and challenging experiences. Their tendency may be to act on intuitive “gut” feelings rather than on logical analysis. Influence, motivate, seize opportunity.	Initiating requires trial and error based on feelings to seize new opportunities. Too much analysis inhibits Initiating, while bouncing back from temporary setbacks and motivating others enhance Initiating. Improvisation, positive thinking, and redefining your definition of failure can help you develop the Initiating style.	What action would I take if I had no fear? What is at the edge that I may not notice? What is the best opportunity?	Spontaneous emergence with free flow, ease, and exuberance. Focus on many things in rapid succession. Optimistic, extraverted, influencing behaviors. Communication is improvisational and persuasive.

(Continues)

TABLE 1 | Creating Gestalt Experiments for Building Flexibility in Nine Learning Styles (Continued)

Balancing Style	Individuals who prefer a Balancing style tend to shift between the opposites of action and reflection and feelings (experiencing) and abstraction (thinking). This ability to scan the waterfront of different perspectives allows them to bridge differences between people with differing opinions, approaches and styles. Adapt, bridge, compromise.	Balancing requires moving between acting, reflecting, feeling, and thinking as the situation demands. A strong adherence to one specialized learning style inhibits the Balancing style. Uncovering blind spots and adapting to people and situations can help you develop the Balancing style.	Where are my blind spots? Am I adapting? Have I weighed all options?	Flexible, responsive. Communication is flexible and conciliatory.
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Source: Peterson and Kolb (2017).

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