

Experiential Learning and Reflective Practice in the Teaching and Profession of Law in Australia

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"You must build up your life action by action"

[Marcus Aurelius, Meditations](#)

Practical Exercise

Source: “Why Staying Silent Enables Injustice”

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/oxet6arH2h8>

One Of the Greatest Lecture In
The World.



Overview of this Research

- 1 Introduction:** Contemporary legal education is experiencing transformative change, driven in part by the rise of Generative AI and the erosion of practical legal training requirements.
- 2 Research Focus:** The role of experiential learning and reflective practice in bridging the gap between doctrinal knowledge and professional legal competence.
- 3 Theoretical Foundations:** Drawing on David Kolb's experiential learning cycle and Donald Schön's model of reflective practice.
- 4 Future Directions:** A structured model for embedding these pedagogies within Australian legal curricula to enhance academic and professional outcomes.

The Problem: the shifting sands of Legal Education and Technology

GenAI Disruption

- Challenges the traditional paradigm of how law is taught and practised
- Questions the value of rote doctrinal learning
- Demands new skills: critical evaluation, prompt literacy, ethical oversight

Erosion of PLT Requirements

- Practical Legal Training requirements increasingly diluted from 75 days to 15 days
- Graduates entering practice with limited hands-on experience
- Raises serious professional accreditation concerns

The Urgent Need

- Rapid skill acquisition models are required
- Self-directed learning and professional awareness
- Higher order skills: legal reasoning, ethics, client-centred thinking

"These transformative technological changes represent a watershed in legal accreditation."

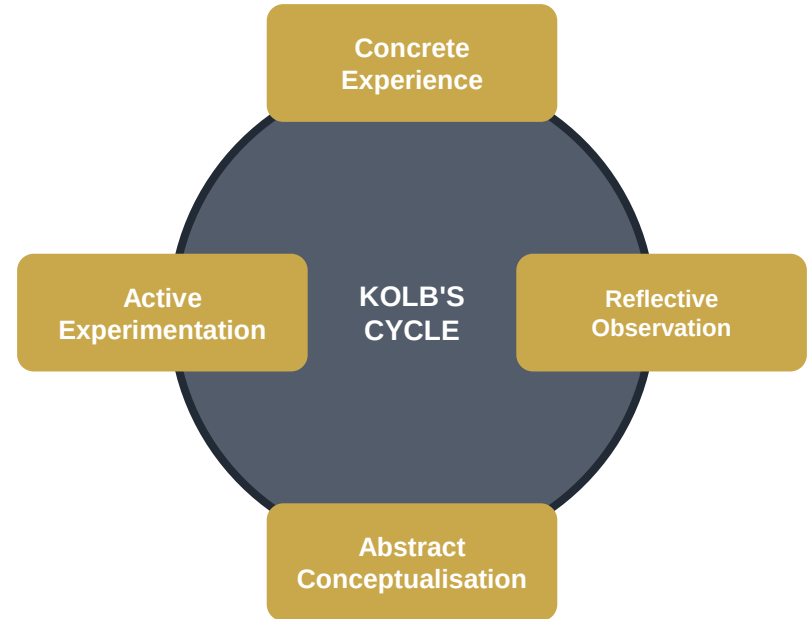
Experiential Learning: Kolb's Theoretical Framework

David Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

- Concrete Experience – Doing / having an experience
- Reflective Observation – Reviewing / reflecting on the experience
- Abstract Conceptualisation – Concluding / learning from the experience
- Active Experimentation – Planning / trying out what has been learned

Application in Legal Education

- Legal reasoning and problem-solving in authentic contexts
- Client-centred thinking and adaptability
- Clinical legal education, simulations, and placements



Reflective Practice: Schön's Framework

Donald Schön's Model of Reflective Practice

Reflective practice is a critical mechanism to foster deeper engagement through professional judgment, ethical awareness, and self-directed learning. Schön distinguishes between reflection-in-action (thinking on your feet) and reflection-on-action (retrospective evaluation).

Reflection-IN-Action

Thinking and adapting in the midst of practice — the hallmark of the competent professional. Applied during client interviews, oral advocacy, negotiations.

Reflection-ON-Action

Deliberate retrospective analysis after the event. Identifying what went well, what failed, and how to improve — recorded in reflective journals and portfolios.

Professional Judgment

Developing the capacity to make ethical, contextually appropriate decisions — beyond rule application, toward internalised professional values.

Self-Directed Learning

Graduates who reflect critically become autonomous learners — continuing to develop through experience rather than relying solely on formal instruction.

Selected Research findings

Traditional lecture based learning developed to Problem based learning and now further evolved-

The experiential learning model reports that learning is achieved through practical experience (Toohey 2015 and O'Neill 2015).

Thomson (2015) and Sherry (2018) note that clinical and doctrinal programs operate as a disparate duality. In reality the two are linked. Teaching theory with no practice is to only account for half the learning.

German and Pelletier (2017) report that students derive great benefit from clinics when closely supervised by practitioners.

Selected Research findings

Burton (2016) utilised a reflective court report refined over thirteen semesters in a core final-year Australian LLB

Sheppick (2024) utilised reflective writing introduced into a postgraduate MSc in Law and Professional Practice at King's College London.

Both authors find that reflection builds critical thinking and metacognition, promotes deeper rather than surface learning, and helps students identify knowledge gaps and self-assess. It fosters emotional intelligence and resilience

Issues: student resistance, and therefore need for such items to be summative and clear marking criteria to minimise effect of subjectivity.

Proposed Structured Model for Australian Legal Education

A Three-Stage Curriculum Framework Approach

Experiential Learning Stage	Reflective Practice Mechanism	Integrated Outcome
▪ Concrete experience – a live trial (Burton) or virtual law firm workshop (Sheppick). ▪ Reflective observation – reviewing what happened and how one responded. ▪ Abstract conceptualisation – linking experience to rules of law and cases. ▪ Implications- planning to act differently next time.	▪ Describing and recording the experience as it occurs ▪ Competency-based assessments in negotiation, advocacy and interviewing ▪ Integration of GenAI tools with critical evaluation frameworks ▪ Critical reflection on social, cultural and ethical dimensions ▪ Self-assessment and forward-looking action planning (“Now what?”)	• Authentic, contextualised discipline knowledge. • Address knowledge gaps, strengths and weaknesses identified. • Deeper, transferable understanding; emotional intelligence. • Professional identity; lifelong reflective capacity

This model advances both academic learning outcomes and professional readiness for modern Australian legal practice.

Future Directions: Integration into Legal Curricula

Competency-Based Assessments — Bridging Theory and Practice

01 Clinical Legal Education

Real client files in supervised law clinics. Students apply doctrinal knowledge to live matters, developing empathy, communication, and file management skills.

02 Simulations & Role-Play

Client interviewing, negotiation, advocacy and ADR simulations. Safe environments to practise higher order professional skills and receive structured feedback.

03 Placements & Externships

Industry placement with courts, law firms, community legal centres and government agencies. Embeds students in authentic legal practice environments.

04 Reflective Journals & Portfolios

Structured written reflection on experiential activities. Students synthesise experience, identify strengths and deficiencies, and track their own professional development.

05 GenAI Integration

Critical engagement with AI tools — prompt literacy, output evaluation, ethical oversight — preparing graduates for AI-augmented practice.

06 Peer & Supervisor Feedback

Formative feedback loops from supervisors, peers and clients. Encourages dialogic reflection and accountability.

Implementation

A Three-Stage Curriculum Framework



This model advances both academic learning outcomes and professional readiness for modern Australian legal practice.

Conclusion and Key Takeaways

01

The integration of experiential and reflective learning into core legal curricula is essential for preparing graduates for modern practice.

02

A structured model embedding these approaches across the law degree, from foundational to capstone, it is hypothesized will yield measurable improvements in professional competence.

03

Students who are stimulated to embrace their experiences and proactively reflect can identify strengths and deficiencies for future skills development ongoing lifelong learning

04

This collaborative approach between academia and legal practice is required in order to serve the interests of students, institutions, and the profession as a whole.

05

GenAI is not a threat to be avoided but a tool to be integrated critically itself requiring the higher order skills that experiential and reflective pedagogies develop.

Questions

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