

# Educational Support Cell (ESC)/TLDE Tips & Strategies

## ***Building the Optimal Training Environment***

**Trick title** As I sit here in front of my computer I think, “We aren’t building training environments; we should be concentrating on creating environments for ***learning***”.

Training.....Education....Learning? We have had many discussions over the years as to whether the USAJFKSWCS is a training environment or an educational environment. I would argue, as would my colleagues in the ESC and beyond, that what we do at SWCS is both training and education, the sum of which becomes our ***LEARNING*** environment. [Stay tuned for a future ESC Tips to delve into this further.]

The nuance about using the term, *learning*, is that it puts the emphasis on what the student is doing, not what we are doing (as instructors). The importance resides in the learning process and not in the teaching.....in educational terms, we are looking at creating a learner-centric environment.

Recently, I was in a discussion about creating learner-centric environments and a person responded, “It’s all about the *stuuudent* (said all drawn out and whiney).....what they need...”

No, not really.....it’s all about our students’ learning, and if we don’t teach them so that learning takes place, then it doesn’t really matter what environment we’ve set up—training or education--they aren’t getting it. So let’s dissect an optimal learning environment—what criteria do we need to get this right?

You all know the answer; you know what a good learning environment is like. You’ve all been in situations that have been conducive to your learning, and you’ve all been in environments where the clock runs backwards and you can’t wait to get out.

Let’s look at the learning environment in terms of the foundational components on which the environment should be built and the critical factors that should be pulled through the experiences.

### **Foundational Components (Perspectives)**

First, consider 3 requisite components in constructing an optimal learning environment. All are important, but even if you just focus on one for your course, learning will increase.

**Authenticity.** An effort is made to allow students to see the correlations between what they are being asked to do and what they will be doing in their missions. This is the WHY as in “*Why is this important?*”

The ESC provides support for the uniform application of USAJFKSWCS educational processes across the Institution to include:

-Support to Curriculum & Instruction [Courses and Instructors];

-Support to Leadership & Professional Development Initiatives;

-Support to the development and implementation of program evaluation and assessment systems; and

-Support to the design and implementation of SOF Career Pathways.

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**Purposefulness.** Instructors take the time to ensure that the connections between tasks/content and real-world applications are understood. Time is used deliberately for the purpose of achieving the known end-results.

**Engaging Learners.** Students' minds are working oftentimes harder than the instructor's. The work can be to answer a question, solve a problem, prove a point, figure something out.....

### **Critical Factors**

Lastly, understand that certain critical factors run through all effective learning environments. These complement the components and ensure that learning occurs. If you are a high-achiever, use all 3.

### ***Whatever perspective you take, learning must be ...***

**Relevant.** There is an effort taken to know thy students (target analysis), who they are and what they already know or can do to make your instruction relevant to them, personally. This necessitates a clear connection to assessments (pre-and post-) to assist in determining what students know already and need to acquire.

**Accountable.** Responsibility is placed on the student to do something with the new information or skills beyond just regurgitating a traditional check-on-learning. A wholly accountable environment also requires the student to bring newly acquired information to the class *prior* to it being taught.

**Motivational (Instilling Curiosity).** Explore ways to peak students' curiosity or desire to know or to do. You deal with hard-charging personalities daily; harness that passion for what they need to know and be able to do. Tap into student motivation and your students will move above and beyond your expectations.

Remember: the inclusion of whiz-bangs and role players does not automatically make an optimal learning environment just as the presence of a PowerPoint slide doesn't preclude one. The Army Learning Model (ALM) – soon to be updated to the Army Learning Concept for 2020 to 2040 - provides guidelines and frameworks in creating these optimal learning environments.

Over the next editions of ESC/TLDE Tips & Strategies, we will be exploring the ideas laid out in this edition. What is the relationship between Training & Education? What do the foundational components look like when you have them? How do we integrate the critical factors?

For additional assistance or to further this discussion, contact the Educational Support Group (ESC) at TLDE.

Part I: The  
Optimal Learning  
Environment

Part II: Training  
and Education

Part III:  
Foundational  
Components

Part IV: Critical  
Factors