

Educational Support Cell (ESC)/TLDE Tips & Strategies

Learning through Social Interactions

We can agree that at the end of a day, how an individual student performs or what they know is the crux of his/her evaluation. However, we shouldn't go into the instructor role without understanding the value of social learning. After all, our primary venue for learning first happened socially. We watched (and watched and watched) people do things and listened (and listened and listened) to people say things, then we did and spoke, too.

Constructivism

Constructivism is the educational philosophy that gives us the belief that one learns by doing. Much of how we build curriculum is based on this premise. We teach something and then allow time for students to do something with what they learned. Need to learn about human engagement? Use a role-play and engage a human. Need to learn the mechanisms of a gun? Take the gun apart and put it back together. ***Constructivism: Learning by Doing.***

The tenets of Constructivism have roots deep in educational theory.

Learning From Others

We understand the idea of vicarious learning. You and I can discuss an article we read, and I can pick up some new ideas or a different perspective just by participating in a discussion with you on what you thought about the text. Using this same premise, we can have 4 teams of students make a training plan for a G-base, then have each team brief out the plans to the others to determine if each team has considered all relevant variables. This type of approach can enhance critical thinking as students consider and discuss one another's approaches to the same problem set. This allows students to test their own judgment against others' and makes way for some great learning opportunities.

Similarly, we can compress the learning curve and allow for students to have support in their own learning through peer observations.

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.

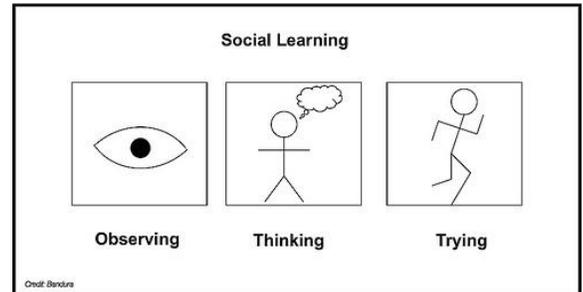
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What is interesting about this approach is that the doing doesn't always have to be done by the individual who is learning.

Vicariously, we can learn from others' attempts as well as our own. I can observe you approach a situation and, based on how you address it, can learn some valuable lessons.

These activities enable a social construction of knowledge. What my peer did can be added to what I think and, cumulatively, can improve my future performance. An even more robust approach is to develop observation tools for peers to use to determine what to look at and look for. These can assist when holding discussions after the event as students will have captured points to make that can be woven into the discussion by the instructor.



*The Danger of **Unchaperoned** Social Constructions of Knowledge*

The danger of allowing students to construct learning in an unchaperoned environment surfaces when what they *think* they know isn't accurate. Then they construct inaccuracies and just plain **wrong** responses. Think of the old adage—*The Blind leading the Blind*—that is our danger in leaving students without cadre supervision.

A second danger is that the lessons are there and are obvious to a seasoned observer (read: instructor), but none of the students recognize the learning points.

The fail-proof safety net is to have an instructor assigned to the students to assist with guiding or coaching the learning so that the correct take-away is acquired. Having an instructor present isn't enough. That instructor must have the ability and bandwidth to watch the team or individual, develop the learning points, and then guide the discussion so that learning will take root. One instructor to oversee 12 groups of student is not enough just as one instructor to oversee 2 teams who are separated by two clicks in a wooded area doesn't work either.

Conclusion

Learning through social interactions can be a strong, foundational building block for the ultimate goal of producing students who can work with autonomy in an austere environment. Learning from one another through discussion and observations is a time-tested educational strategy. Having cadre with coaching mindsets is important to this process to allow for free discussion and exploration of ideas as students arrive at the correct learning points, guided by cadre's facilitative themes.