

Five Foundational Ideas on Learning

- Learning is an **active process** of engaging and manipulating objects, experiences, and conversations in order to construct a mental picture of the world (1-3). Learners build knowledge as they explore the world around them, observe and interact with phenomena, converse and engage with others, struggle to make explanations, and make connections between new ideas and prior understandings.
- Learning **builds on prior knowledge**, and involves enriching, building on, and changing existing mental models, where “one’s knowledge base is a scaffold that supports the construction of all future learning” (4).
- Learning that is **authentic to the learner** leads to deeper understanding. Situating in authentic context, not in the abstract, provides learners with the opportunity to engage with specific concepts on a need-to-know or want-to-know basis (5, 6). Enacting authentic interactions with and between learners cultivates trust and appeals to emotions and attitudes towards learning (7).
- Learning occurs in a **complex social environment**, and thus should not be limited to being examined or perceived as something that happens solely on an individual level. Instead, it is necessary to think of learning as a social activity involving people, the things they use, the words they speak, the cultural context they’re in, and the actions they take (8, 9); knowledge is built by members in the activity (10).
- Learning complex ideas deeply involves considerable mental effort and persistence, which requires **sustaining learners’ motivation and engagement**. In other words, it is necessary for learners to be engaged in, or actively committed to, the experience, task, or activity (11). Motivation and engagement are multi-faceted and malleable, and affected by interactions between individuals and the context.

References

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