



Learning Principles

People can learn how to learn, and have the right to do so

The most important advantage we can give students is to support them to become proficient, self-directed learners. It is possible and necessary to teach the conceptual understanding, competencies and the dispositions of character that underpin lifelong learning. This applies to all learners, regardless of their learning profile

Learning demands common meaning, through a common language

In order to get better at something we need to know what it is and what it is made up of. Common labels for learning and its component parts will help learners and teachers recognize learning, be able to analyze it, discuss its features and set goals to improve it. This set of labels must start with clear definitions of learning itself and include labels shared by all in the learning community for its most important parts.

Learning is both a personal and social activity

Individuals have different starting points and different interests. They will follow different learning pathways and will learn at varying paces. Time for individual reflection is critical, but at the same time it is often social interaction, which stimulates a new direction in thinking. Substantive conversation, by making us articulate our own ideas clearly and allowing our ideas to be challenged and added to by the perspective of others, leads us to deeper understanding.

Learning is both cognitive and emotional

Learning is about making and strengthening neural connections, but this process is strongly influenced by emotions. The brain chemicals activated by our emotions can imprint memories more strongly and so help us learn. Emotions also drive motivation and attention, both central to learning. The connection between emotions and learning can be a double-edged sword. Our emotional responses to our learning experience can both augment and disrupt learning, potentially shaping how we see ourselves as learners, either enhancing or inhibiting our future success.

Learning is transfer

All learning involves transfer from previous learning. Our previous learning affects not only how we interpret what we perceive, but what we actually perceive (or don't) in the first place. Another double-edged sword as current conception can either support or inhibit future learning. Despite the ubiquity of transfer, most research suggests that the kind of transfer we hope to achieve, where learners can make use of their learning in unfamiliar contexts, is rare. But the bottom line is if there's no transfer, effectively there's no learning.