> **For the instructor, there are many resources available on the internet in regards to Authentic, Purposeful, and Engaging learning. This Tips and Strategies should not be the end of your search, but the beginning.**

Flexible Thinking: Finding the right perspective on the learning environment

In Tips 15.6 (*Building the Optimal Learning Environment*), we started the first of a four part series exploring the foundations and factors of an optimal learning environment. This edition, Part III, looks at three related, but distinct perspectives on the optimal learning environment.

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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Why use different "perspectives" and not just a simple "step-by-step" methodology?

Each educational situation is unique. There is not a defined process that will work effectively every time, in every situation. By offering these different perspectives on learning (and these three are by no means the only answers), we offer instructors the opportunity to find the right perspective to achieve optimal learning in each unique educational situation. Which of these three perspectives is the best? That's easy. The best, most efficient perspective to use with your classes is … the one that works.

Perspective #1: AUTHENTIC LEARNING

There is no standard definition for "authentic learning," but in general, it is an instructional approach that provides students with the opportunity to explore, discuss, and discover concepts, context, and connections that make learning highly relevant (in other words, "mission-specific" or "mission-relevant") to the learner. The students are significantly involved in the learning process during authentic learning. They come to understand the "WHY" (As in "*Why is this important?*")

Some Characteristics of Authentic Learning

- Authentic learning is centered on authentic, relevant, real-world tasks that are of interest to the learners.
- Students are actively engaged in exploration and inquiry.
- Learning is closely connected to the world beyond the walls of the classroom.
- Students become engaged in complex tasks and higher-order thinking skills, such as analyzing, synthesizing, designing, manipulating, and evaluating information.
- The resulting products are concrete allowing them to be shared and critiqued; this feedback allows the learner to be reflective and deepen their learning.
- Students have opportunities for social discourse, collaboration, and reflection.
- Authentic learning provides students with the opportunity to examine the problem from different perspectives, which allows for competing solutions and a diversity of outcomes instead of one single correct answer.

Perspective #2: PURPOSEFUL LEARNING

Establishing Purpose: In preparation to teaching a lesson, answer these questions: What learning should be taking place? Why is the learning in this lesson important to the student? How will you measure student performance? How does this lesson fit into the "bigger" picture of the course as a whole? Do the students know what they are trying to learn and why? Being able to answer these questions is all about establishing a clear purpose to the learning.

Purposeful Learning Considerations	
Purpose = Expectations	If you have high expectations for students, then they will rise to the occasion. If you have low expectations for students, then they will settle. You can't have high expectations without a clear, focused purpose (known to instructor and student).
Lesson Objectives versus Establishing Purpose	A *lesson objective* is in the mind of the teacher; *establishing purpose* refers to the act of carefully communicating the objective to students. Note the subtle difference. If you are clear on the purpose and the students are not – the battle is half lost.
Purpose and Attention	Closely tied to Perspective #3 (Engaging Learning), the idea that clear purpose and student attentiveness are closely related is important to keep in mind.
Purpose and Responsibility	In a facilitative environment, the better a student understands the purpose of the lesson, the more responsibility the student can (and will) take on.

Indicators of Success—Establishing Purpose
The established purpose focuses on student learning, rather than an activity, assignment, or task.
Students understand the relevance of the established purpose.
Students can explain the established purpose in their own words.
The instructor designs meaningful experiences and outcomes aligned with the established purpose.
The instructor has a plan for determining when the established purpose has been met.

Perspective #3: ENGAGING LEARNING

If they are quiet and orderly, then they are engaged – right? It is important to realize – particularly in the SWCS environment – that it can be difficult for an instructor to accurately determine if their students are engaged and learning at the optimal level. Our Soldiers in training are very good at being polite and "looking" interested. Therefore – in order to create the optimal learning environment - an instructor must actively look for ways to determine just how involved the students are. Look at the five classic levels of learner engagement below.

Levels of Learner Engagement		
Authentic Engagement	Work is associated with a result that has a clear meaning and immediate value to student	**This is the goal. Can be difficult to tell if engagement is "authentic"**
Ritual Engagement	Work has little or no inherent meaning or immediate value to student, but student associates it with extrinsic results that are of value	**Today's students are very familiar and "well-versed" with this**
Passive Compliance	Student is willing to expend necessary effort to avoid negative consequences, although student sees little meaning/value in the task	**Indicative of the student who is just doing enough to get through and move on**
Retreatism	Student is disengaged from the task and expends little or no energy attempting to comply with demands (not disruptive, though)	**This is not typical of the SWCS student, except on rare occasions (more typical of middle school or high school students)**
Rebellion	Student refuses to do task, disrupts others, and/or tries to substitute other activities in lieu of assigned task	

This 3rd perspective requires the instructor to consider the learning environment from the point-of-view of student engagement. What can be done by the instructor to ensure authentic engagement instead of ritual or passive. It requires constant probing, assessment, feedback, and student interaction just to find out.

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