

Learning Defined by Bill Lynch

Imagination: *A recombination of mental images from past experiences into a new pattern.*

Learning: *Any relatively permanent change in behavior as a result of experience or practice.*

Creativity: *The ability to find new solutions to a problem or new modes of expression: the bringing into existence of something new to the individual and the culture. Writer Arthur Koestler added the requirement that the new creation should be socially useful.*

- Definitions taken from Betty Edwards Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain, 1999

"One of life's most fulfilling moments occurs in that split second when the familiar is suddenly transformed into the dazzling aura of the profoundly new... These breakthroughs are too infrequent, more uncommon than common; and we are mired most of the time in the mundane and the trivial. The shocker: what seems mundane and trivial is the very stuff that discovery is made of. The only difference is our perspective, our readiness to put the pieces together in an entirely new way and to see patterns where only shadows appeared just a moment before."

- Edward B. Lindaman Thinking in Future Tense, 1978

"All truly wise thoughts have been thought already thousands of times; but to make them truly ours', we must think them over again honestly, till they take root in our personal experience."

- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

Jonassen declares, "Constructivism is concerned with the process of how learners construct knowledge. How learners construct knowledge depends on what they already know, which depends on the kinds of experiences they have had, how they have organized those experiences into knowledge structures, and the beliefs they use to interpret objects and events that they encounter in the world". He further declares, " Constructivist approaches to learning strive to create environments in which learners actively construct their own knowledge, rather than recapitulating the teacher's interpretation of the world." (Computers as Mindtools for Schools, 2000). With this in mind, I propose to define **learning as applying past experiences or practice to new situations for synthesis and lasting personal benefit.**

I come from a unique educational background. I started at the age of three at the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art Creative Arts Center in Kansas City studying fine art and theory. At that time the emphasis was placed highly on creativity and application of method. Subsequently up through high school the emphasis was very much the same. There was a lot of emphasis on application and method, yet very little in the way of research or synthesis of the old and the new. My undergraduate work in college began to reveal to me the necessity of drawing upon old experiences and applying them to new and unique requirements and situations. Around this time something that had been looming in the distance was now coming to the forefront of art and design education - technology.

Incorporating the new technological tools became a necessity for my success in the design field. Not only was my success due to my ability to master certain technologies, but moreover my ability to use technology in ways that complimented the formal non-technical training I had been receiving my whole life. This realization allowed me to deliver products that were foundationally viable. I have learned that for technology to be a truly creative learning tool, it must be "invisible". The concern has to be with the communication that the end result delivers, not the technology.

This theory provided me with a chance during online facilitator training to use my "imagination" and develop the first online graphic design course Fundamentals of Design. It quickly became the system model for what is now the Art Institute Online. I can directly attribute the success of that project by being able to "organize(d)...experiences into knowledge structures..." (Jonassen).

The constructivist learning theory and my life experiences are what I feel has helped me become the teacher I am today. As an instructor at Art Institute of Houston I raised more than a few eyebrows when I talked about "invisible technology" and "learner-centered projects". Most instructors had always taught (literally) by the book. Courses were often not much more than tutorials on computer application usage. I have found that projects in the classroom must have personal relevance to the student and appeal to their interest. For this reason I started giving students choices. Choices in assignments are critical in the constructivist classroom and very beneficial as long as goals and objectives set forth in the class are realized. For example I taught a class called Digital Design and Typography utilizing the computer program Adobe Illustrator. I had many lessons and lectures in the class and three major projects due during the course of the quarter (11 weeks). Of these projects I allowed students to pick the content of their project as long as it fit a specific category that I felt would benefit their portfolios. First was the "Food Poster". Anything they wanted to due as long as it had type, had to due with food and had personal relevance. Second was the "Life Poster". Anything they wanted to due as long as it had type, had to due with something alive and had personal relevance. Third was the "Technical Poster" Anything they wanted to due as long as it had type, had to due with something technical and had personal relevance. Everyone in the class for synthesis of lessons and learning objectives later formally critiqued these projects. The results were astonishing. Every winner of the student awards show for the past two years have been form this class. Needless to say, instructors in all classes are now taking this learner-centered highly constructivist approach to their lessons.

Concern for a beneficial, personally relevant education experience by the student is of utmost concern to me. I have tirelessly attempted to reveal new resources that enhance the individuals learning experience. I am very fortunate to have had so many great courses in this program that have allowed me to facilitate utilization of some of these resources in the classroom. For example in a course during completion of the program I was able to develop a Resource Center Acclimation that not only exposes students to dependable resources in their field of choice, but requires cooperation with other students and critical reflection on their part to evaluate their own capacities in relation to their academic and professional goals. In conclusion my personal view for constructivist learning theory to be successful in the classroom is that the material must be personally relevant to the learner, the instructor must use a variety of media, resources and methodologies and students must be able to critique and question each others conclusions to find personal lasting meaning.

Sources: Edwards (1999) Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain
Lindaman (1978) Thinking in Future Tense
Jonassen (2000) Computers as Mindtools for Schools