

# Situated Learning

*Situated learning essentially is a matter of creating meaning from the real activities of daily living . . .*

Situated learning is an instructional approach developed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in the early 1990s, and follows the work of Dewey, Vygotsky, and others (Clancey, 1995) who claim that students are more inclined to learn by actively participating in the learning experience. Situated learning essentially is a matter of creating meaning from the real activities of daily living (Stein, 1998, para. 2) where learning occurs relative to the teaching environment. The following are examples of situated learning activities:

- Field trips where students actively participate in an unfamiliar environment
- Cooperative education and internship experiences in which students are immersed and physically active in an actual work environment
- Music and sports (physical education) practice which replicate actual setting of these events, e.g., orchestras, studios, training facilities
- Laboratories and child-care centers used as classrooms in which students are involved in activities which replicate actual work settings

*Situated learning . . . suggests that learning takes place through the relationships between people and connecting prior knowledge with authentic, informal, and often unintended contextual learning.*

These examples illustrate that students are actively involved in addressing real world problems. As the practice implies, the student is “situated” in the learning experience and knowledge acquisition becomes a part of the learning activity, its context, and the “culture in which it is developed and used” (Oregon Technology in Education Council, 2007). Students form or “construct” their own knowledge from experiences they bring to the learning situation; the success of situated learning experiences relies on social interaction and kinesthetic activity.

Traditional learning occurs from abstract, out of context experiences such as lectures and books. Situated learning, on the other hand, suggests that learning takes place through the relationships between people and connecting prior knowledge with authentic, informal, and often unintended contextual learning. In this situation, a student’s role changes from being a beginner to an expert as they become more active and immersed in the social community where learning often is “unintentional rather than deliberate” (Oregon Technology in Education Council, 2007). Therefore, the social community matures and learns through collaboration and “sharing of purposeful, patterned activity” (Oregon Technology in Education Council, 2007, para. 14, citing Lave & Wenger).

*Situated learning involves students in cooperative activities where they are challenged to use their critical thinking and kinesthetic abilities.*

Situated learning involves students in cooperative activities where they are challenged to use their critical thinking and kinesthetic abilities. These activities should be applicable and transferable to students’ homes, communities, and workplaces (Stein, 1998). While immersed in the experience, students reflect on previously held knowledge and by challenging the assumptions of other students.

## **Developing Classroom Activities**

Stein (1998) recommends the following guidelines to develop situated learning classroom activities:

- “Learning is grounded in the actions of everyday situations.
- Knowledge is acquired situationally and transfers only to similar situations.
- Learning is the result of a social process encompassing ways of thinking, perceiving, problem solving, and interacting in addition to declarative and procedural knowledge.
- Learning is not separated from the world of action but exists in robust, complex, social environments made up of actors, actions, and situations” (para. 3).

*Select situations that will engage the learners in complex, realistic, problem-centered activities that will support the desired knowledge to be acquired.*

Stein (1998), citing Young further clarifies ways instructors can design “situated learning in the classroom:

- Select situations that will engage the learners in complex, realistic, problem-centered activities that will support the desired knowledge to be acquired.
- Provide a scaffold for new learners, knowing the type and intensity of guidance necessary to help learners master the situations. As learners acquire additional skills, less support will be needed.
- Recast your role from content transmitter to facilitator of learning by tracking progress, assessing products produced by learners, building collaborative learning environments, encouraging reflection, and helping learners become more aware of contextual cues to aid understanding and transference.
- Assess the intellectual growth of the individual and the community of learners . . . through discussion, reflection, evaluation, and validation of the community’s perspective” (para 12).

*. . . situated learning experience should encourage students to tap their prior knowledge and to challenge others in their community.*

### **Summary**

Situated learning environments place students in authentic learning situations where they are actively immersed in an activity while using problem-solving (critical thinking) skills. These opportunities should involve a social community which replicates real world situations. In the end, the situated learning experience should encourage students to tap their prior knowledge and to challenge others in their community (Stein, 1998, para. 3).

### **References**

Clancey, W. J. (1995). *A tutorial on situated learning*. [http://methodenpool.uni-koeln.de/situierteslernen/clancey\\_situated\\_learning.PDF](http://methodenpool.uni-koeln.de/situierteslernen/clancey_situated_learning.PDF)

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Stein, D. (1998). *Situated learning in adult education*. <http://www.ericdigests.org/1998-3/adult-education.html>