Culver Learning Tenets

Central to the successful execution of Culver's Mission is the development of students as thinkers and learners. Culver's Learning Pillars and Competencies articulate our educational priorities in developing leaders and citizens of character, while the learning tenets below are an evergreen list of understandings about how people learn best. These tenets are not a prescription for a particular pedagogical approach, but rather an acknowledgment that teaching, in all its forms, should be an evidence-based practice. When we build a culture and design learning experiences that are mindful of these tenets, we create the conditions for meaningful, enduring learning.

1. **Learning is an active process within an individual**. During learning, people build intellectual frameworks to organize and understand ideas and to understand how new ideas relate to what they already know.[i] This takes effort and must be completed by the learner; it cannot be done by anybody else.
2. **Learning is built on prior knowledge.** What people already know, whether it is accurate or not, serves as a foundation upon which new knowledge is constructed. Learning is the activity of creating connections between what is already encoded in the mind and new information. Inaccurate or incomplete prior knowledge can be a barrier to new learning.[ii]
3. **Learning is often challenging and uncomfortable.** People can be challenged in learning when they encounter concepts and skills that are difficult to master, requiring focused, effortful practice over time.[iii] Other times, people's understandings and beliefs may be challenged by ideas and perspectives that conflict with their own.[iv] Though both types of challenge may cause discomfort, they are normal parts of learning.
4. **People learn at different paces.** There are a variety of reasons people learn at different paces. Learning is best done when it is aligned with a person's development.[v] Learning is built by the learner upon their unique prior understanding.[vi] Learning is situational, happening within specific social, cultural, and physical contexts.[vii] Learning can also be hindered or advanced by self-perceptions of intellectual ability.[viii] Each of these will impact the pace of an individual's learning.
5. **People become better learners when they critically reflect on their own thinking, biases, values, and motivations.** People's best learning occurs when they think, speak, and write accurately about their own thinking; doing so in a community of diverse thinkers can help people more effectively identify their own biases, values, and motivations.[ix] This type of reflection fosters intellectual tenacity, encouraging people to take greater responsibility for their learning and ideas.[x]
6. **People learn from feedback, practice, and reflection on successes and failures.** People learn best when they know the learning goals towards which they are working; have opportunities to practice those learning goals multiple times[xi]; and receive and use specific, timely, well-scaffolded feedback to help them improve their learning[xii]. Reflecting on their experiences helps people make sense of and assimilate what they have experienced in order to build understanding.[xiii]
7. **People build self-efficacy when they are empowered to make decisions about their learning.** In order to make meaningful decisions about their learning, people must have accurate information about their own skills and understandings.[xiv] When armed with this information, people who are empowered to shape their own goals and processes are more likely to believe in their ability to grow and achieve mastery of what they are learning. [xv] Self-management strategies and "voice and choice" promote deep, lasting learning and motivation.[xvi]
8. **People learn with and through others.** While learning and thinking is an active process within an individual, it is also more effective when done in concert with others. Confronting those with different ideas, experiences, and perceptions clarifies people's thoughts as they talk through their differences, notice gaps in their thinking, and reevaluate what they thought they knew.[xvii] When properly designed, the

social element of learning can heighten people's focus[xviii], leading to residual thoughts and memories that strengthen recall.[xix]

9. **People build intrinsic motivation when they experience success in learning and when they recognize the value and relevance of their learning**. A common myth is that motivation leads to learning, but the opposite is true: learning leads to motivation.[xx] When people experience success in tasks that are challenging, it feeds their inclination to persist and builds their confidence; competence and confidence thus enter a positive feedback loop and cultivate intellectual tenacity and intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation deepens when this success is tied to learning that feels important and relevant to people, which may be found in what they're learning, how they're learning it, with whom they're learning, and/or why they're learning.[xxi]
10. **People learn best when their sense of social belonging is high and when their physical and emotional needs are met.** People learn best when they are physically and emotionally well, and when they feel respected, cared for, and connected to others.[xxii] A pervasive, cultural belief that every individual can succeed fosters engagement and improves performance.[xxiii] Becoming a valued member of a goal-driven community strengthens the learner's identity, while a mutually supportive, positive, and trusting environment encourages cooperative learning.[xxiv]

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