

## Applications of situated learning:

Where have you seen examples of these principles?

What applications of these principles do you see for your teaching?

# Pearls on Educational Principles Situated Learning

## Pearls on Educational Principles:

- Present an influential idea in education
- Suggest examples of its use
- Give an opportunity to apply the idea to your teaching

Principles  
to Guide  
Teaching  
Practice in  
Medical  
Education

## Office of Research and Development in Medical Education

# Situated Learning

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## The idea:

In the early 1990s, anthropologist Jean Lave and educational theorist Etienne Wenger introduced the model of **situated learning** to describe the effects of the physical and social learning environment on learning. Central to the concept of situated learning is the learner's authentic participation in a "real world" environment with other learners, ideally peers, more advanced learners, and experts, who together form a **community of practice**. In a community of practice, individuals participate in mutual activities and have varying levels of expertise in a domain of common interest. Participation within a "real-world" environment broadens learning to include not only content knowledge, but also tacit knowledge such as a common language and expected behaviors of community members. Learner participation in authentic tasks facilitates their engagement within the community. As newcomers to the field, learners begin their engagement through legitimate peripheral participation in tasks that are less vital to the community, and then increase their level of responsibility to full participation in the central tasks of the community.

The benefits of situated learning for the learner include:

- clear results of knowledge application
- learner discovery of the appropriate conditions for applying knowledge; and
- socialization by community members.

To realize the benefits of situated learning, learners should:

- have opportunities to learn in real-life contexts and participate in authentic tasks;
- feel welcome in communities of practice;
- have contact with experienced community members who demonstrate expert performance; and
- engage in assessments that reflect these opportunities and their participation.

## The examples:

In medical education, **situated learning** applies to education in clinical settings where learners participate in communities of practice and engage in authentic tasks. Such settings include:

- Student-run clinics, like the UCSF Homeless Clinic or Mabuhay Health Center
- FPC and LCE preceptorships
- Third- and fourth-year clinical clerkships

### Related concepts:

Social cognitive theory, constructivism, experiential learning, and informal learning.

### References:

Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.