

Natural Critical Learning Environments

People tend to learn most effectively (in ways that make a sustained, substantial, and positive influence on the way they think, act, or feel) when

- 1) they are trying to solve problems (intellectual, physical, artistic, practical, abstract, etc.) or create something new that they find intriguing, beautiful, and/or important;
- 2) they are able to do so in a challenging yet supportive environment in which they can feel a sense of control over their own education;
- 3) they can work collaboratively with other learners to grapple with the problems;
- 4) they believe that their work will be considered fairly and honestly; and
- 5) they can try, fail, and receive feedback from expert learners in advance of and separate from any summative judgment of their efforts.

Doesn't some learning of this nature come simply from curiosity?

Yes, but we can view curiosity as a kind of problem, a positive problem, a thirst for knowledge not yet fulfilled.

The Natural Learning Initiative is a group of educators interested in promoting the use of natural learning environments, teaching and learning practices that promote and allow natural learning. We are centered primarily at Montclair State University in New Jersey, but we include some interested folks in a number of places around the world. You can be a part of this effort too by joining the growing conversation.

How is Natural Learning related to Active Learning ?

The Active Learning movement has contributed much to the ideas that make up the concept of Natural Learning, but active learning has stopped short of recognizing what is most powerful in its meaning. Natural Learning advances our thinking to the next level.

Active Learning recognizes that it is best to have people actively involved in their own learning.

Natural Learning recognizes something important about the nature of that action.

The action is most effective if the learner decides to do it because she thinks it will help her satisfy a need to know, help solve a problem that she regards as important, intriguing, or beautiful--not simply because someone told her to go talk with her neighbor.

Can you give me some good examples of Natural Critical Learning Environments?

Problem-Based/Case-Based Learning

Natural Critical Learning Environment: The Promising Syllabus

People Learn Best and Most Deeply When . . .

Derrick Bell on Participatory Learning