

Cambourne's Conditions of Learning for Learning

Brian Cambourne proposed that learning occurs most effectively when eight interconnected conditions are present. Although originally developed to explain literacy learning, these conditions apply to learning across all disciplines. At the center of the framework is engagement, which is not a separate step in learning but a condition that influences the effectiveness of all the others. The likelihood that learners will engage increases when the remaining conditions are optimally present.

When we refer to learners, we are talking about both students and educators.

Immersion

Learners need to be immersed in rich and meaningful examples of what they are learning. Learners benefit when they are surrounded by evidence of how knowledge is used in real-world contexts.

Demonstration

Learners need frequent demonstrations of how knowledge, skills, processes, and products are constructed and used. Demonstrations may come from teachers, peers, experts, texts, media, or real-world experiences. **Unlike modeling**, which often involves explicitly showing and explaining a process step-by-step, demonstration encompasses the broader range of examples learners observe as they make sense of how a discipline works.

Expectation

The expectations of teachers, families, peers, and mentors strongly influence learners' behavior and achievement. High expectations communicate confidence in learners' abilities while recognizing that growth occurs at different rates and through different pathways. Learners often rise or fall to the expectations that surround them. Expectations of those to whom learners are bonded are powerful coercers of learners' behaviors.

Responsibility

Learners need opportunities to make decisions about their own learning. They must have some control over what they learn, how they learn, when they learn, and how they demonstrate their understanding. When learners lose the ability to make meaningful choices, they become disempowered and less invested in the learning process.

Approximation

Learners must be free to approximate the desired performance. Mistakes, partial understandings, and imperfect attempts are essential parts of learning rather than signs of failure. Through approximation, learners test ideas, refine strategies, and gradually move toward greater competence. Learning environments that value growth encourage learners to take risks and view errors as opportunities for improvement.

Employment (Use)

Learners need time and opportunity to use, employ, and practice their developing knowledge and skills in meaningful, functional, and realistic ways. Learning deepens when learners apply what they know for authentic purposes rather than only completing isolated or artificial tasks.

Response/Feedback

Learners need feedback that emerges from interactions with others. Rather than focusing primarily on errors, feedback guides learners toward deeper understanding and greater competence. Constructive responses help learners recognize progress, refine their performance, and maintain confidence as they continue learning.

Engagement

Engagement occurs when learners believe:

1. They are capable of becoming successful performers of what is being demonstrated.
2. The learning is meaningful and connected to their goals, interests, or lives.
3. They can attempt, practice, and learn without fear of physical or psychological harm if their efforts are not yet correct.

Engagement is the central condition that makes all other conditions effective. Creating these conditions is one of the most important and complex aspects of teaching. Learners are more likely to engage when they feel valued, safe, capable, and supported. Without engagement, the other seven conditions may be present, but learning is unlikely to occur.

For example, learners must

- engage with immersion by noticing and interacting with their environment
- engage with demonstrations by attending to and making sense of examples
- engage with approximations by taking risks
- engage with responsibility by making choices
- engage with employment by applying their learning
- engage with feedback by reflecting on and using it
- engage with expectation through persistence and challenges

In this way, engagement serves as the catalyst that transforms learning opportunities into actual learning.

**"We achieve what we expect to achieve;
we fail if we expect to fail;
we are more likely to engage with demonstrations of those whom we regard as
significant and who hold high expectations for us."
~Brian Cambourne**

Modified from www.cambournesconditionsoflearning.com,
https://www.mooneewestps.vic.edu.au/uploaded_files/media/cambourne_conditions.pdf, Cambourne, Brian. (1995) "Toward
An Educationally Relevant Theory Of Literacy Learning: Twenty Years Of Inquiry". The Reading Teacher, Vol. 49, No. 3.

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