

The Institute for Career Development's Vision of Learning: A Position Paper **Adopted in 1997**

The Institute for Career Development (ICD) believes that how learning is viewed affects education. This position paper briefly explains nine principles that ICD holds as true for most adults.

Principle One: Learning is no luxury; learning is *necessary for all*.

In 1985, Naisbitt and Aburdene predicted that lifelong learning would become more and more important, arguing that because of rapid technological change, the basic skills of the year 2000 would not be the same basic skills we knew in 1984. As the new millennium approaches, ICD believes that learning is indeed a lifelong process which is often more enjoyable for adults when shared with other adults.

Principle Two: Learning is an *active process*.

ICD believes that people learn best when they are actively involved in and primarily responsible for their learning. Writing and reading are two important ways of actively constructing meaning. Active listening is another way to learn. Interactivity with other learners also matters greatly. A mixture of many types of activity may surpass any single mode of experience.

Principle Three: In order to learn, people must relate new concepts to one or more of their *existing understandings*.

One of the best realizations we have made about learning this century is that a person's prior knowledge is critical. Teachers know that steelworkers' understandings are unique because of their unique work environments. Nevertheless, it usually takes more than firsthand knowledge to generate new understandings (Vella, 1995). For instance, gravity was around for many thousands of years before anyone created a theory to describe its effects. Accommodating new ideas requires adjusting our existing understandings.

Principle Four: Adults are most motivated to learn when they are situated in *meaningful learning contexts* or contexts in which they recognize a need to know.

Workers usually want practical learning experiences in real contexts. When they see an immediate need to know, learners become magnificently motivated. Simulations of real life may fill the bill some of the time because they enable participants to believe in the authenticity of the concepts being considered. Better still, real-life actualities, such as fixing a broken snow blower motor together in class, allow participants to readily transfer new concepts and skills to out-of-classroom situations. To improve the on-the-job performance of individuals, it often helps to include explicit instruction of actual basic skills strategies which are regularly used in the workplace (Mikulecky & Drew, 1991), but such instruction must be presented sensitively and in meaningful ways.

Principle Five: The social environment, or *community*, plays many vital roles in facilitating learning.

Supportive communities naturally allow individuals to experiment freely and to learn accordingly. Whenever significant learning has taken place, both the learner and the environment will have changed (Lewin, in Vella, 1995). As workers join coworkers in learning endeavors, they socialize each other in new ways, extending and reinforcing learning in long-lasting ways.

Principle Six: *Facilitators* are learning catalysts.

In the same way that it requires many workers to produce a coil of steel, it takes many partners to make a learning center or career development program function in a manner that maximizes learning. Instructors, coordinators, learning advocates, local joint committee members and ICD staff all have crucial facilitative roles to play in helping steelworkers learn.

Principle Seven: The ideal *learning environment* varies according to the situation, the individual, and the topic.

ICD seeks to study environments in which learning is natural and efficient. In general, environments which rely on packaged, noncustomized lessons with a single scope of content and a solitary sequence cannot respond to the varied backgrounds, purposes and changing situations which workers bring to class (Soifer *et. al.*, 1990). For some areas of study, a traditional classroom functions well for many, but not all, steelworkers. Environments in which individualized approaches have been established--involving technology or one-on-one instruction--function well for others, again depending upon the topic. At the same time, collaborative learning with coworkers is ideal for many people and subjects. The combination of an instructor; collaborative group members; and technology, such as computers and/or videotapes, may be the ideal learning environment for the greatest number of subjects.

Principle Eight: Learning involves people's *self perceptions and feelings* about themselves and about the topic to be investigated.

How people feel about their own abilities--as communicators or technology users, for example--tremendously affects the speed and facility with which they learn. As much as anything else, the affective domain determines whether the program's learners will be returners. Instructors must pay attention to people's attitudes about the subject matter as well. What preconceptions of the discipline, based on prior experiences, do learners bring to the class? Making learning fun is truly appropriate, for many people relax, feel good about themselves and the subject, and learn best during playful situations.

Principle Nine: Altruism and learning are natural companions for adult learners.

Many adult learners like to give to others at the same time that they are learning. When workers can learn a skill and simultaneously use that new skill to help a less fortunate group or individual, learning becomes doubly meaningful.

References

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