

WHAT?

The learning context refers to the situation in which learning occurs. In Health Sciences Education, three important learning contexts include:

- Self-directed learning (e.g. textbooks, journal articles)
- Classroom learning (e.g. lectures, rounds)
- Clinical learning (e.g. clinical placements)

For teachers, tailoring approaches within each of these contexts can be helpful to support students in achieving their learning goals.

SO WHAT?

Because different contexts will be optimal to meet various learning needs, teachers should be selective about what they aim to accomplish with learners in what context.

#1 Clinical learning can be facilitated by asking good questions that activate prior and new learning but avoid humiliation. Aim to keep learners in their zone of proximal development¹, which describes the area where the learner can perform only with support, but where they can be actively involved.

#2 Classroom learning (e.g. academic half-days or lectures) can be strengthened by considering threshold concepts. A threshold concept² opens up a new way of understanding a topic without which the learner cannot progress in their learning.

#3 Self-directed learning can support connecting workplace learning back to what they learned in the classroom. Students often need some guidance on their self-directed learning; consider suggesting a relevant article or other resource to help facilitate their transfer of learning between contexts.

NOW WHAT?

Challenge yourself to:

- Plan your teaching around your learner's zone of proximal development and threshold concepts.
- Join one of our workshops on active learning and learn more about asking good questions! These workshops are free of charge, and help you earn a certificate. For more details, visit our website³.

REFERENCES

1. Vygotsky, Lev. *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press, 1978.
2. Salwén, Håkan. "Threshold concepts, obstacles or scientific dead ends?" *Academic Medicine*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2019.1632828>.
3. VFMP Faculty Development. Teacher Certificate Program. Web. 16 April 2021. <https://vfmpfacdev.med.ubc.ca/programs/teacher-certificate-program/>