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## Eight Lessons about Student Learning and What They Mean for You

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A new edition of a classic book on the curriculum suggests eight lessons from the learning literature with implications for course and curriculum planning. Any list like this tends to simplify a lot of complicated research and offer generalizations that apply most, but certainly not all, of the time. Despite these caveats, lists like this are valuable. They give busy faculty a sense of the landscape and offer principles that can guide decision making, in this case about courses and curricula.

**1. Assess students' prior knowledge and skills to avoid unfounded assumptions about what they know about the subject matter being studied.** Sometimes students know more than we think they do. Sometimes they hold profound misconceptions about the content. The only way to know what students bring to a course is to collect information from them that reveals their current levels of knowledge and understanding. That information can prevent many course and curricula planning errors.

**2. Don't assume that students know how to learn.** We can debate at length whether they should come to college knowing how to learn, but it's a mistake to plan a course assuming they do. Students must be introduced to appropriate learning strategies and made aware of the strategies that they use, especially if they are using approaches that do not expedite acquisition of the content in this course.

**3. Acknowledge that learning, motivation, and engagement are affected by attitudes and emotions.** What students believe about themselves as learners matters. If they don't believe that they can learn some kinds of content, it will affect their motivation and performance in class. Teachers must discover and address attitudes that hinder learning. Ignoring the role of attitudes and emotions in course planning will likely compromise learning outcomes.

**4. Design academic plans that connect students' personal and academic goals to enhance motivation and engagement.** Students need to see how what they are being asked to learn is relevant to their goals and future plans. Teachers can address students' goals in course planning only if they have discovered what those goals are. Knowing what students care about and where they are headed makes it possible to design courses that connect with students and more effectively engage them in learning.

**5. Recognize that students with different beliefs about knowledge have different expectations of their instructors and different attitudes toward learning activities.** Students are diverse. They bring different cultural backgrounds to the learning table. They should be encouraged to take responsibility for their learning by examining their views about education and considering how those views influence their learning experiences. Again, knowing what students believe and expect makes it easier to plan meaningful learning experiences.

**6. Treat students as apprentices who need assistance in learning the language, ways of thinking, and inquiry methods of academic fields.** Students don't come to our fields knowing how knowledge there is organized or advanced. That must be taught explicitly, and students must be given the opportunity to make connections between course content and their own experiences and prior understandings.

**7. Promote development of complex views of knowledge and recognize that students are at different stages of epistemological development.** "Challenge students to apply, integrate, evaluate, and construct knowledge by engaging them in collaborative, complex problem-solving activities." (p. 181) Students should not just be knowledge consumers. They should also be knowledge producers.

**8. Learn about learning and discuss with colleagues how knowledge about student learning can be put to use in courses and programs.** The abilities of students should be viewed as malleable. They are not fixed and unchanging. Different abilities can be tapped in different courses and by different curricula.

Reference: Lattuca, L.R. and Stark, J.S. *Shaping the College Curriculum: Academic Plans in Conte*

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[This particular list appears on pp. 140-1.]

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