

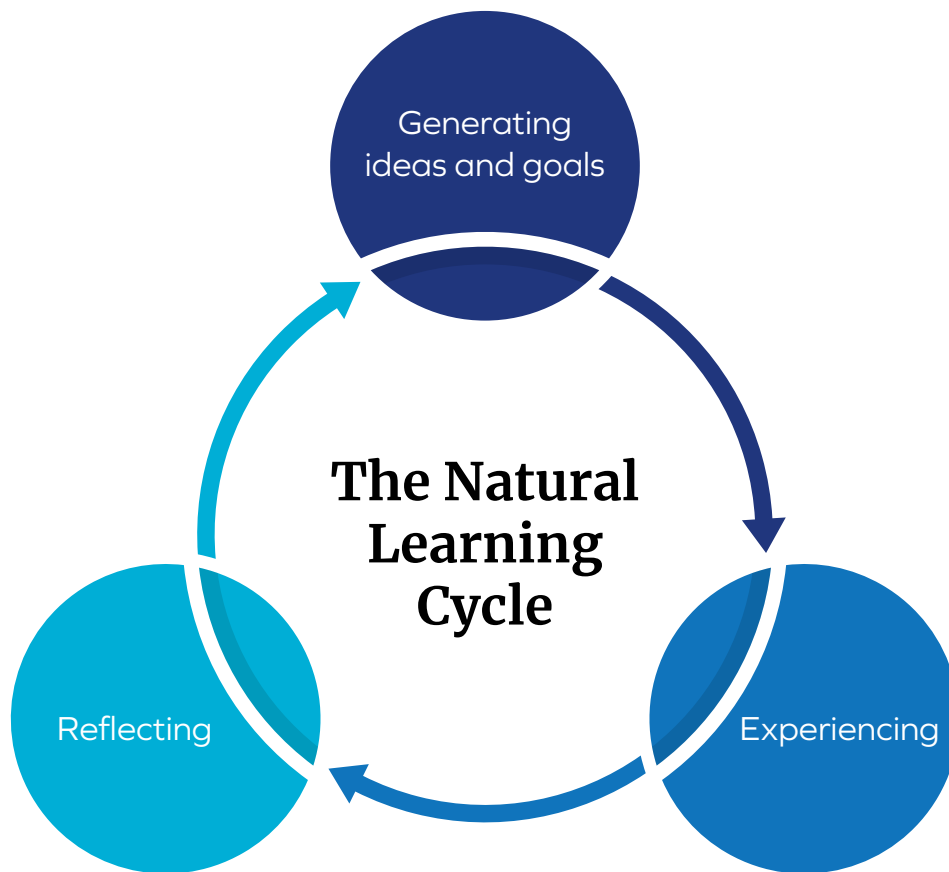


FLY FiVE[®]

The Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum

ENGAGING STUDENTS IN THE NATURAL LEARNING CYCLE





The Natural Learning Cycle

The natural learning cycle capitalizes on the power of experiential learning, which allows learners to have novel experiences with content and puts students at the center of the learning process. The natural learning cycle consists of three phases:

- Generating ideas and goals
- Experiencing
- Reflecting

The natural learning cycle, which is rooted in student-centered, experiential learning, changes the wiring of our brains. Practice and repetition create new pathways and connections of our neurons, eventually coalescing into a neural network that is the physical equivalent of knowledge (Zull, 2004). Using the natural learning process via experiential learning activates the brain in order to create these physical sites of knowledge, which results in long-term learning (Zull, 2011).

Using the Natural Learning Cycle

When presenting a new concept to students, have them brainstorm what they know about it already. What are they curious about? What excites them about this material? Then, have them consider some small goals, which can be as simple as “learning one new thing” about whatever the topic is. Finally, provide activities that support students in experiential learning. Consider the strategies outlined below:



- **Incorporate demonstrations, stories, and metaphors into lessons.** Engage student curiosity and creativity as they explore new concepts. Minimize lecturing and explaining and allow students to take control of how they connect with material by offering them student-centered, interactive options for learning.
- **Use content-mapping and brain sketching activities** (Tennakoon et al., 2019). Concept maps and brain sketches allow students to visually organize information and draw connections between past knowledge and new content, which can make new knowledge easier to understand and remember (Brigham Young University, n.d.).

- **Encourage students to see errors as tools for learning.** Guide students to think of errors as clues that lead them toward deeper understanding (Zull, 2004). Remind them that errors signify gaps in their thinking, and they have the power to bridge these gaps. How can they think through their mistakes and strengthen their learning in a long-lasting way?



- **Integrate peer-to-peer teaching and learning activities.** Incorporate opportunities for students to explain their learning and thinking to their classmates. Students will have the chance to use their learning in a new way, which helps them to integrate new concepts into existing knowledge and express them clearly (Spencer & Guillaume, 2006).

Although experiential learning activities that leverage the natural learning cycle may require a shift in thinking for teachers and students, the rewards are worth it. The natural learning cycle promotes learning that aligns with the biological processes of the brain and builds physical, neural networks of knowledge, which results in learning that lasts. As students put their learning in new contexts, they are building a body of knowledge and strengthening their skills to turn any environment into a learning environment.

References

Brigham Young University. (n.d.). Concept Mapping. <https://ctl.byu.edu/tip/concept-mapping>

Spencer, B. H., & Guillaume, A. M. (2006). Integrating curriculum through the learning cycle: Content-based reading and vocabulary instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 60(3), 206–219. <https://doi.org/10.1598/RT.60.3.1>

Tennakoon, D. K., Raut, N. G. R., & Ahmed, S. (2019, January 7). Engaging the entire learning cycle to ignite enthusiasm and learning. *Faculty Focus*. <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-and-learning/engaging-the-entire-learning-cycle-to-ignite-enthusiasm-and-learning/>

Zull, J. E. (2004). The art of changing the brain. *Educational Leadership*, 62(1), 68–72. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept04/vol62/num01/The-Art-of-Changing-the-Brain.aspx>

Zull, J. E. (2011). *From brain to mind: Using neuroscience to guide change in education..* Stylus Publishing.