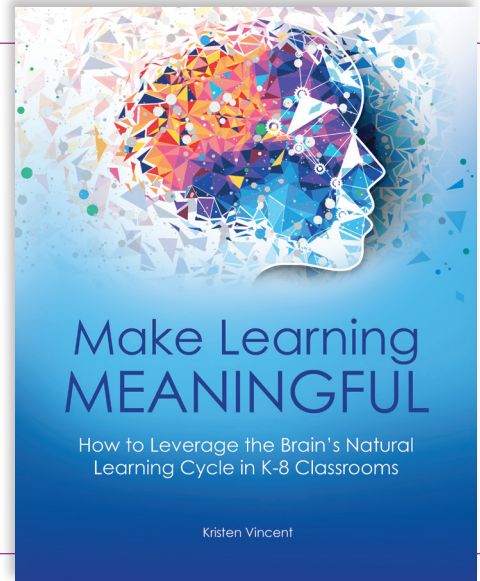


Discussion Questions for

Make Learning MEANINGFUL

How to Leverage the Brain's Natural
Learning Cycle in K-8 Classrooms

By Kristen Vincent



Introduction

Author Kristen Vincent writes, “It may feel uncomfortable or even scary to think about giving over some control to your students and having them make mistakes, but that’s where the magic happens.” Have you ever experienced the discomfort associated with mistake-making that the author describes? How did you handle it?

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Natural Learning Cycle

Reflect on the last time you experienced your own natural learning cycle. Perhaps you were mastering a new skill, trying a new approach to learning in your classroom, or exploring a new app.

With this recent experience, consider how you intuitively worked through the phases of the natural learning cycle. When and how did you set a goal, explore new concepts and skills, and reflect on your progress? Did you progress through those stages in order or did you find yourself moving back and forth between them more than once? What motivated you to move between stages?

Finally, think about your motivation for learning something new in the example you have been considering. What element of intrinsic motivation (connection, autonomy, purpose, mastery, fun) was behind your desire to learn something new?

Chapter 2: The Three Phases of the Natural Learning Cycle

What is your learning goal as you read this book? Consider *why* you are interested in exploring this topic and what you hope to accomplish after learning more about the natural learning cycle. Remember that effective goals have five characteristics: specific, attainable, relevant, well-defined, and appropriately challenging.

Chapter 3: Preparing to Leverage the Natural Learning Cycle

Reflect on the epigraph for this chapter, the quote from Thomas Fuller: “All things are difficult before they are easy.” To ensure that your students are ready for new challenges, think about how you will set your students and your classroom up for success. What are practices you already use in your classroom? What new ideas from this chapter are you ready to try?

Now consider the goal that you set for yourself after reading Chapter 2. How can you set yourself up for success in your work toward that goal?

Chapter 4: The Role of Teacher Language

The skillful and intentional use of positive teacher language is an educator’s most powerful tool. How can you use the phases of the natural learning cycle to support you as you reflect on ways to improve your use of teacher language in your classroom?

Chapter 5: Academics

In this chapter, you read examples of the natural learning cycle in action at different grade levels and a range of academic content and skills. What similarities stood out to you between these examples, despite the grade and subject differences? Were there strategies the teachers used that could be effective in your classroom?

Chapter 6: Discipline

According to the author, “Like any other content area subject, discipline can be learned.” Explicitly teaching discipline and clearly modeling the rules students should follow are important practices in a classroom where students feel safe and significant. In this chapter, you read examples of foundational experiences, including creating rules, modeling expectations, using role-play, and having a class meeting. In your

classroom, where are the opportunities for strong foundational experiences with teaching discipline? How can you use these experiences to support students in actively working toward and reflecting on their goals?

Chapter 7: Social and Emotional Learning

Students are constantly using their social and emotional skills in and out of the classroom, and it can be challenging to observe and track students' progress of specific social and emotional skills. How can you bring more awareness of the development of these skills to the tools you already use to observe your students? How could student self-reflection about personal social and emotional skills become part of your classroom routine?

Afterword

As you incorporate the natural learning cycle into your lesson planning and classroom routines, author Kristen Vincent has this advice: “Watch for your students’ intrinsic motivation to increase. When that occurs, it will be the ultimate indication that the natural learning cycle is being internalized and leveraged effectively by students.”

What are signs of engagement and motivation in your students? What behaviors would you expect to see from motivated students? How can you sustain motivation when it develops?