

The 5 E's of Learning

Podcast Transcript

Hello, and welcome to today's podcast: The 5 E's of Learning.

Before we get started, let me read a disclaimer.

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I am Kathleen Bethke, a training specialist for the Y4Y group. I have been working in the 21st Century Community Learning Centers field for 17 years. I spent 10 years working as a project director for two different programs in Texas, and seven years as a training consultant doing 21st CCLC program professional development.

I want to welcome you and say that I hope you will find this short podcast helpful as you implement quality afterschool programs.

So, let's get started.

The 5 E's are built on the constructivism model. Constructivism is a learning strategy that draws on students' existing knowledge, beliefs and skills. The goal is to help students learn to combine or synthesize new understandings from their prior learning and the new information they are gaining.



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Simply put, we want students to understand how the knowledge and skills they are learning in school can be applied to more complex situations in their real world.

Teachers using the constructivism model of learning will monitor student exploration, guide student inquiry and promote new patterns of thinking. The teacher asks students to work with their own data and learn to direct their own explorations. This approach should ultimately lead to students beginning to think of learning as lifelong, and seeing that knowledge is accumulated and always evolving.

Each of the 5 E's describes a phase of learning, and each phase begins with the letter "e": Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate and Evaluate. Some people in the field use the word "elicit" for "engage" and the word "extend" for "elaborate." They still mean the same thing. The 5 E's allows students and teachers to experience common activities, to use and build on prior knowledge and experience, to construct meaning, and to continually assess their understanding of a concept.

The first E stands for "engage": This phase of the 5 E's starts the process.

An "engage" activity should help students make connections between past and present learning experiences, get them excited about the activities and help them narrow down what they want to explore. Students should become mentally engaged in the concept, process or skills to be learned.

What an observer would see:

- Experts sharing expertise and/or mentoring students
- Mind mapping what students know and want to know
- Brainstorming
- Optional ice breakers or community-building activities

The facilitator's role:

To motivate, create interest, capture what students know and want to know, and guide, if necessary, using questions such as these:

- Why did this happen?
- What do you already know about this?
- What have you discovered about this?
- What else do you want to know about the topic?

The second E stands for "explore": This phase of the 5 E's provides students with a common base of experiences. They identify and develop concepts, processes and skills. During this phase, students actively explore their environment or manipulate materials.

Students may discover new skills, or question and probe. They might examine their own thinking and the thinking of others. They may also establish relationships and new understanding.

What an observer would see:

- Students performing an investigation
- Students reading authentic resources to collect information
- Students exploring and using authentic tools

The facilitator's role:

- To act as a guide on the side, not a sage on the stage
- To observe and listen as students interact
- To ask good questions
- To provide time for students to think
- To encourage cooperative learning

If students look for help, teachers can use guiding questions to help redirect thinking —questions such as these:

- Where can you find more information on this topic?
- What careers would be connected to this topic?
- What tools or resources would you need to work in the field?

The third E is for “explain”: This phase of the 5 E's helps students explain the concepts they have been exploring. They have opportunities to verbalize and analyze the findings from their exploration to demonstrate new skills or behaviors. This phase also allows the facilitator to guide students so they can clarify and modify their understanding if necessary. This phase also provides opportunities for teachers to introduce formal terms, definitions and explanations for concepts, processes, skills or behaviors.

What an observer would see:

- Student analysis and explanation
- Small-group discussions
- Comparing, classifying, error analysis

The facilitator's role:

- To encourage students to explain their findings in their own words
- To provide new vocabulary, definitions and explanations
- To ask for clarification and/or justification
- To accept all reasonable answers (in other words, do not debate)

The facilitator should listen and build on discussion using guiding questions such as these:

- Where did you conclude?
- Why did you decide that?

- How would you compare that with...?
- What would happen if...?

The fourth E stands for “elaborate”: This phase of the 5 E’s extends students’ conceptual understanding and allows them to practice skills and behaviors. Through new experiences, the learners develop deeper and broader understanding of major concepts, obtain more information about areas of interest and refine their skills.

What an observer would see:

- Students making decisions and applying new knowledge (such as vocabulary or definitions)
- Students engaged in problem solving
- Students recording observations, explanation and solutions
- Students preparing to present their conclusions/solutions to an interested audience

The facilitator’s role:

- To intentionally design the environment to allow students to use previous knowledge in more complex situations
- To encourage students to use new terms and definitions
- To encourage students to apply or extend the new concepts
- To use guiding questions to ensure students apply the knowledge to the real world

Questions might include these:

- Who would be interested in or benefit from hearing your findings?
- How does this affect...?
- What could/should you do with this information?
- How can you best present your findings/knowledge?

The fifth and final E stands for “evaluate”: This phase of the 5 E’s encourages learners to assess their understanding and abilities, and lets teachers evaluate students’ understanding of key concepts and skill development.

What an observer would see:

- Students demonstrating an understanding of the knowledge and/or skills
- Students evaluating their own progress
- Students able to answer open-ended questions
- Students applying reasonable explanations or providing reasonable responses to situations, events or problems
- Students able to present their understandings to an interested audience

The facilitator's role:

- To observe student behavior as they explore and apply new concepts and skills
- To assess student knowledge and skills
- To encourage students to reflect on and assess their own performance, and perhaps the performance of their peers
- To ask open-ended questions to provoke thought

Questions might include these:

- What would you change?
- What did you like/dislike?
- What new knowledge/skills did you attain?
- Is there anything else you wonder about?

As we wrap up today, I want to make one very important point about the 5 E's and using them in any activity: They don't always happen sequentially.

What I mean is that within any given activity, you and your students may start with "engage" and move into "explore" and then "explain," and then need to go back to "explore" and again to "explain" before you move on to "elaborate" or "evaluate." In fact, it is unlikely that you won't have to take students through several times before they get to the higher levels of learning, where they are able to elaborate by applying the old knowledge and the new knowledge to a complex situation and then be able to evaluate their own thinking and performance.

I hope you found this podcast helpful. Go back to your program and try using the 5 E's in your afterschool activities.

This is Kathleen Bethke signing off. Hope you have a wonderful day.