



LEARNER'S SELF-ENGAGING SPACE: A STEP TOWARDS CREATING COGNITIVELY ACTIVE LEARNERS

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Abstract:

The end result of the teaching learning process has to be actualised at the learners end and by the learner himself / herself. In spite of effective teaching, the onus of learning rests upon the learner. Do our current pedagogical / andragogical practices give the learners space to uptake, digest and reflect upon the learnt content in an own unique way? Probably not. The author recommends a practice called LSS – Learner's Self-engaging Space in teaching where the teacher discontinues talking giving learners a silent cognitive space to reflect and consolidate the learning. The learner would thus get a better opportunity for information uptake. S/he would be able to 'construct' knowledge independently and with reference to his / her unique context. The author further describes the logistics of LSS and highlights its benefits.

Key Words: *Engaging Learners, Constructivism, Pedagogical Practices, Cognitively Active Learners.*

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“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I remember, involve me and I learn” – Xun Kuang

Research into the teaching learning process has opened up the floodgates of evidence-based ‘dos and donts’ for practicing teachers. Right from an overall wrap up of Kuang given above to several researches diving deep into the nitty-gritties of the learning process, have highlighted the role of engaging learners in learning process. The focus has been how to enhance, accelerate or ease out the learning process for a learner by a teacher. Constructivism, for example, advocates facilitating the learner to connect new knowledge with previous knowledge. Concept attainment Model too highlights facilitating inductive thinking among learners by providing ample opportunities. Educational thinkers like Gijubhai Badheka, Tarabai Modak or Ramesh Panse have described a teacher's role to be of a helper in unfolding knowledge. Thus, there is a generic acceptance that although the role of a teacher is rather visible, the **‘doer’ in the learning process is the learner**. Learners are expected to combine content pieces in order to draw independent conclusions; teachers are expected to facilitate the process.

The well researched and the tried / tested concept of active learning is very relevant here. The website of the Harvard University which advocates active learning, claims “Active learning includes type of instructional activities that engages students in **learning beyond listening, reading and memorizing**. Active learning commonly includes collaboration between students in pairs or in larger groups (but it also includes) independent activities that involve reflection or writing.”



Many teachers mistake active learning to exclusively mean ‘learning by doing’ (learning where a learner is involved in some physical motor activity). ‘Learning by doing’ is definitely active learning, but the term active learning need not be restricted to physical motor activity. In a much deeper way, **active learning is also where the learner is active cognitively** not necessarily with his / her hands and eyes. LSS provides the opportunity and space for working on the concepts and connecting dots in learning. **Active learning has three dimensions:** Any physical motor engagement of a learner, collaborative engagement in pairs / groups and engagement with himself / herself to make sense and reflect. The present article and the concept of LSS target the third dimension. Search engines are crammed with strategies to engage learners. Enthusiastic teachers do use many of these thanks to some internal or external ‘push’. But are the teachers’ strategies and efforts per se adequate enough (how much ever sincere and creative these are) to complete the process of learning at the learners end? They are essential but not adequate enough to complete the process of learning. A teacher may use fancy strategies to bring the morsel to the mouth, may even ensure that the morsel is tasty but swallowing has to be done by the learner. There is many a slip between cup and lip. **The end result of learning has to be actualised at the learner’s end.** After the rigorous back and forth construction of knowledge during the teaching learning process, ultimately the ball for the **uptake of knowledge** lies in the court of a learner. The simple questions need to be addressed here are – when exactly in the process of teaching learning, does a learner do ‘learning’? Only when listening to teacher or interacting with the teacher? In a current classroom conditions and practices, where is the **space marked for learner’s unique personal uptake of the information to be able to ‘construct’ it into knowledge?**

The article shifts the readers’ attention from ‘how’ to ‘when’ of learners’ role in the process. The focus of this article is not to discuss how to increase the learner participation in the learning process, but it is to discuss how to ensure that expected participation by simply giving them the space to do so. The objective of the article is to present a strategy called **LSS – Learners’ Self-Engaging Space** used by the author while practicing andragogy for several years.

Meaning of LSS: LSS simply refers to teacher taking a silent pause while teaching in order to give learner a **defined space clearly marked for processing** the exposed information in his / her own unique way. The teacher is expected to remain silent after spells of talking / interacting / presenting the content during the teaching learning process. This requires to be done in order to step back from the driver’s seat handing over the wheel of uptake to the learner.

What LSS is not: LSS is not a soft break which is given to (adult) learners on the basis of the research into the attention span of the adults. It is well accepted today that the attention span of an adult learner is 8 to 10 minutes (7). Adult learners therefore need a soft break every 10 minutes to be able to sustain the learning process effectively. This means the learning discontinues during the soft break. On the other hand, the learning process continues during an LSS, in fact, learning is expected to get more personalised and in-depth during LSS.

LSS is also not a pause which teachers often take after asking a question. That pause is necessary and leads to thinking among learners. LSS is not introduced to substitute that pause. The learners use the post-question



pause to answer the readymade questions given by the teachers. Purpose of LSS is to gear up learners to ask questions to themselves and connect dots. They may or may not share what they did during the LSS.

Logistics of LSS: For the interest of those who wish to practice and explore having LSS while teaching, here are a few details which need to be researched further before formalising.

How long? The duration of the LSS depends on the complexity of content, the level of learners and frequency of LSSs. In general, 120 – 180 seconds would be enough to set the process. The duration needs to be flexible and both, the teacher and the learners may decide these on the spot.

How many? The frequency of LSSs depends on the lecture duration and nature of content. In general, LSS may be taken every 20 minutes but number of minutes is not a parameter for taking LSS – it is the completeness of a point being covered. It is like paragraphing in a written text – point structure is more relevant than the number of words while deciding where to change the paragraph.

When? It could be after a new point / after an expected difficult spot in teaching / after a key point / or at regular intervals used habitually. A teacher who is using LSS for a while and the learners who are exposed to it earlier would figure out when LSS is needed. Ideally, learners should be able to request an LSS while a teacher is teaching.

What exactly is to be done? After a point is covered or to be covered, the teacher takes a pause (stops talking) and lets learners process and reflect upon the exposed information. Before discontinuing talking h/she reminds the learners that it is time for them to interact with themselves and consolidate learning points. They may write their notes, simply close their eyes to understand, mark the doubts or star mark important points. They complete the note taking and enhance its use for later reference. The teacher observes the learners during the LSS to decide how long the LSS needs to be stretched. The teacher may share probes / questions before taking the LSS to direct the learners' thinking but it is neither essential nor recommended.

How do learners respond to LSS: They process the learning cognitively, use paper pencil if they wish and separate the 'un-understood' part from the 'understood'. They may share this with class or not. They may take time to form this cognitive habit (it is a very common experience to see the students go blank when a teacher tells them to 'think, process and consolidate' learning) but once they do it, learning would be more effective.

LSS also provides time for teachers to reflect on how more value can be added to the point covered or to be covered. This is absolutely essential and is in general, missing in current teaching practices.

Obvious Benefits of practicing LSS in a typical classroom situation are illustrated here on the basis of the professional judgement acquired after practicing it for more than a decade. All these can be accepted in a careful manner since evidence-based research to support the claim is awaited.

Connecting dots of learning: The human brain is special, but the collection of cells does not make it special. According to 'Brain.Facts.org' - "It is the connections between those cells that make the brain so amazing." (3) The best way to ensure better connections is ensuring experience and exposure to the child accompanied by an opportunity for processing the information in a unique way. The process of learning too emphasizes equipping learners to be able to connect information pieces effectively. Such connections are at least of two types. Firstly,



connecting previous knowledge to the new knowledge – to be able to make sense using already known information (as prescribed by the constructivism). Secondly, it also refers to connecting relevant points learnt under different subject heads holistic integrated learning prescribed in NEP 2020). LSS is expected to facilitate both if learners are groomed to use the space for the purpose.

Separating the ‘understood’ and the ‘un-understood’ areas of learning: Researchers have chased the questions– “How do we know that we know something? The feeling of knowing has an important role in school settings because it is a key determinant of students studying” (6). Hence, it is very important for learners to process the information and separate what s/he has understood from what s/he has not. In a typical class setting a teacher keeps teaching without a pause for learners to digest the information and reflect upon it. LSS is such a pause which allows learners digest the information and identify ‘un-understood’ parts. In an article, “why students think they understand when they don’t”, the authors say: “Students often think they understand a body of material and believing that they know it, stop trying to learn more.” But during examinations, it becomes evident that they had not understood it to the level where they can independently describe it. Cognitive science tells us, why students are commonly mistaken about what they know and don’t know. “Familiarity fools our minds into thinking – we know more than we do” (6). But this thought is illusive and LSS may **facilitate learners to move from familiarity of the concept to the attainment of the concept.**

Reflecting or adding original unique perspective: Learners, particularly the adult learners are unique in their objective and context of learning. Teaching, however, cannot be and is not done with reference to the context and the objectives of each of the learners. It is left to the learner to tune the generic or broader knowledge to his / her specific needs. In that case, the curriculum transaction is expected to give space to learners to be able to reflect upon how the given information is to be understood in her / his unique context. LSS is one such opportunity which learners can be trained to use for unique reflections.

LSS ensures additional benefits like:

- The learners are expected to reflect upon the learnt content after the class. Most of them keep it pending. This time lag between teacher teaching and the learner struggling to learn it later can be decreased if the teacher provides an opportunity to consolidate the content there and then.
- LSS places the onus of the success of the teaching learning process on the learner.
- LSS is expected to help attaining attitude related Course Learning Objectives where reflections play a direct role.
- Learners’ ‘Teach me face’ is illusive for teachers where learners create the impression that they are in the learning loop of the class when they actually may not be. LSS can pull back such wanderers.
- LSS facilitate metacognitive thinking – it facilitates thinking about thinking which is an aid to learning.

The author’s conviction out of her professional judgement is: LSS is applicable to pedagogy and heutagogy as effectively as it is during andragogical practices. In fact, there are clear reasons to believe that creating silent spaces in the learning process where the learner is left to himself / herself to process the newly exposed information is more required for dependent learners (children). LSS will benefit the child learner due to the



points referred above without doubts. Moreover, being in the habit-forming conditioning age, a child learner is likely to cultivate a cognitive habit or style wherein s/he constantly sees information in a unique independent way relevant to him / her. This would help the learner walk the path of becoming more independent and reflective learners.

To conclude, LSS, unique personal learning space, is yet another tip for teachers, easily doable and with no side effects. It may not guarantee a learner actually processing the information uniquely every time but they are entitled to an opportunity for sure. Teachers are recommended to do it 100% of the time. Even if the students use and draw benefit for 50% of the time, the purpose of creating cognitive spaces will have been served.

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