

Education has always
had a purpose in my
life



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During my upbringing close people around me have always placed a weight on education. The outlook I grew up with was that qualifications help gain better jobs.

A close family member returned to education during my early years of my life so she could become a teacher. Her purpose to study and become qualified was to gain a profession. I saw the values of her studying as it would gain us a better quality of life. The purpose of education to gain a profession was never such a motivating factor to me as the outcome seemed so distant.

Each stage of my education had its own purpose which then opened doors I wanted, this allowed me to carry on and develop further when I wanted too. This is still true to this day; I feel I have never left education. Looking back on my education I can see what I have gained from it, not only the qualifications but also the added values. These include the ability to communicate with others, respect for others, morals and citizenship. I still believe that 'if the effort is put in the rewards will follow.

This is something that was said to me at a very young age which I followed and I have found that this has worked for me. My past experiences are the reason why I am now in the classroom as a teacher. I was unsure what type of profession I wanted to get into until I had one very negative experience in a classroom. This experience was while I attended a First Aid Course through a local college and was completely shocked at the way in which the course was run. The course was very trainer lead and focused on the trainers past

experience, very little active learning took place and the main teaching strategy used was lecturing.

A lecture is an event where information passes from the notes of the teacher into the notes of the student, without passing through the brains of either. " (Petty 2003: 127) None of the learners were engaged or got the full potential. This negative experience has formed foundations to my teaching career. Another experience of mine whilst in secondary education which I found negative was being made to read out loud to the whole class. I hated this experience as English was never a strong point and due to that I now, as a teacher only ever ask for volunteers to read out loud as I remember how it feels. I understand the importance of using a range of learning styles in my teaching again because of my past experience as a learner.

During the very negative experience previously mention the main learning style used was behaviourist, very teacher lead and focused on rewards or punishments. The rewards were very rare but came in the form of praise and the fact you wouldn't be asked another question. The punishments came more frequently in the form of more questions in front of the whole group if you got a question wrong; this lead to humiliation if you got a few questions wrong. This whole approach was a form of bullying and belittling and it also gave the learners a fear of failing. This learning experience certainly did not include any of the humanist approach. The learner did not feel in a safe, supported environment with any mutual agreed goals.

The teacher acted in a form of a bully not like a facilitator supporting peer to peer learning or active learning activities. The disadvantages of the

humanist approach to learning are that the learners have to be self motivated and want to learn. The group that I was with was a group of middle aged people who had all paid to attend the course for their own personal reasons, so they were certainly motivated at the start of the course. As the style was so behaviourist and trainer lead with humiliation and bullying then the learner's motivation was lost and the humanism approach would not have been effective if it was not used from the beginning of the course. This experience has certainly emphasised to me the importance of using the right learning style for the group and topics covered. If the group of learners are a young group who have been told to attend I would use more behaviourists approach to keep control of the learning experience.

The behaviourist approach will not be as needed if the group of learners wanted to attend and have self motivation. Another angle from that past experience is to focus on the bullying and belittling from the teacher.

Humiliating the learners and giving them a fear of failing will have had a detrimental effect on the learning. This is the failing learning engine: - Learners can easily fall into this negative, vicious cycle if praise or reinforcements are rare. Frequent and immediate praise is a great motivating factor, " Never underestimate the pleasure, satisfaction and educational value which pupils get from satisfactorily completing an action however simple" (Marland 1993: 47) The effects of satisfaction and motivation should lead to success as in the reverse to the negative learning cycle: " Learning Cycle" (Petty 2003: 39) Valuing and rewarding the learner's effects and encouraging positive learning can only aid the learner.

This needs to be remembered during any teaching session, unlike some of my past experiences as a learner. I am the Director of a small Health and Safety Training company which I set up over six years ago to meet the gap in the market for high quality tailored training. The reason why the company was set up comes back to the very negative experience I had at a local college. The company has also values and commitment to delivering the highest quality and tailoring the courses to suit the needs of the individuals. The structure of the organisation is clear with roles and responsibilities clearly given to employees, with myself overseeing all areas of the company.

This means that all the power and decisions are made by myself with no barriers or ranking system in place which could hinder any potential decisions or ideas for change. All employees are asked to attend regular staff meetings to help communication. Trainer's forums are also a very important part of the company. These run frequently and the aim of them is to share thoughts, experiences, ideas, any problems that trainers may have encountered during teaching and to give an opportunity for Continual Professional Development. This show how the company is always striving for further development and improvement. The company's Vision is: " Delivering high quality to those who care" (North West First Aid Ltd 2008) and its mission statement is: " North West First Aid Ltd will: - Deliver the highest quality training Maintain excellent standards Encourage further development of all who come into contact with the company" These were created during a staff meeting in 2008 where all employees shared ideas and created them, giving complete ownership and meaning.

There are strict rules in place for employees; these include dress code, use of company equipment and general behaviour. These are in place to ensure all employees are treated fairly and all work as a uniformed team. The general behaviour rules again were created by the employees giving them ownership but the company dress code is something that was implemented from myself and comes from my standards. To keep the meaning and culture of the organisation going one has to pay particular attention when recruiting staff. As the company is still small all employees who work in it must share or grow the values and meaning of the company.

As such a small team we constantly need to be remembering and implementing the values of the company just like larger organisations To put our ethos into action we must realise that values are ineffective without processes and structures that implement the values. Talk is not enough; a bias for action is necessary: we need to be practical, hands on, focusing on implementation. (Runshaw College, 2002) The current system in place for all teaching staff is to have their views listened maybe implemented and developed into company procedures creates a very positive meaning. This is very much like the positive motivation learning cycle but instead of it being for learner this is for teaching employees.

This creates a sense of belonging; they feel respected and motivated to realise the values. This improves student learning and the company's performance. With my position within the company I am in a very fortunate position to change or implement any changes as and when I feel needed to suit the learners, teachers or the company's interests. These happen on a daily basis for instance when I recommend a teacher to take a certain

teaching resource which I feel will benefit a particular group such as the interactive DVD aimed at young people when a teacher is delivering a course for a youth group. Different learning strategies will be used depending on what the learning outcome is, what subject is being taught and how the subject is being assessed. Other factors that need to be remembered are how much time is allocated to that learning outcome and what resources are available.

“ Whole-class interactive teaching is not a single teaching method, but a family of highly structured methods. ” Petty (2009: 103) Utilising different learning strategies to enable learner to be actively learning for themselves links into the Humanist approach to learning allowing learners to be “ Actively involved in making meaning rather than just being given information. Scales (2008: 71) With First Aid being such a practical subject this makes it easy to use active learning activities such as group work, watching a DVD or presentation, practising a practical skill, role plays, sharing their own experiences and carrying out research and presenting the information to the rest of the group. During the planning stage of a lesson I plan the use of these different strategies remembering that is it paramount that the strategies will enable the learners to achieve the learning outcome. It is pointless if the learners are busy if the outcome is not going to be met.

Going back to my past experiences and the amount of lecturing that was used has certainly had an effect in the way in which I use that learning strategy. “ The lecture is the primrose path to intellectual sloth” (Jonson 1994: 126) Knowing how little I got from the lecturing I now limit the amount of lecturing I do as a teacher. Now I try to use other strategies such as

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learners sharing own knowledge and past experiences, allowing learner to research topics for them selves and even peer to peer teaching. Working in a small team of teachers, all attending trainer forums allows us to share ideas and thoughts; this is an excellent opportunity to share experiences with other teachers who use different learning strategies with different learners. This is where we can reflect on past learning experiences and evaluate them.

As ideas are generated about improving the courses future these can be implemented quickly due to a number of factors. Firstly with only having a small team who always attend these forums, this allows us to bring new ideas and changes in instantly. If a decision needs to be made as regards to purchasing new teaching resources these decisions can be made there and then as I have the final say, so there is no need to wait for approval. This shows that having an organisation which is small and has a very reflective outlook, always wanting to strive for better, does have a massive positive impact on the learning that is taking place.

Evaluating a learning experience is always important Everyone thinks; it is our nature to do so. But much of our thinking, left to its self, is biased, distorted, partorted, partial, uninformed or down-right prejudiced. Yet the quality of our life and that of what we produce, make, or build depends precisely on the quality of our thoughts. Shoddy thinking is costly, both in money and life. Excellent in thought, however must be systematically cultivated.

" www. criticalthinking. org Evaluating needs to be done by both parties; the learner needs to evaluate the learning experience as well as the teachers. All

learners are asked to complete an evaluation sheet at the conclusion of the course and this information is then collated and forms are key performance indicators. One area that I could improve is allowing the learners to complete these once they have had time to reflect on the whole experience; normally these are completed just before they leave the course and tend to be completed in a rush.

Allowing the learners to reflect and post the forms back might show a more complete picture in their feedback. An area for improvement within the organisation is it to record the teacher's own evaluation after the course. This would show how we adapt the courses to the needs of the individuals and show how effective the teacher found it. Currently the teachers evaluate each of their courses but none are recorded or kept on file which makes it hard to reflect and look back on past experiences. After reflecting on my past teaching practice I feel that I need to ensure that any personal stories I tell have a meaning and a value, specific to the learning outcome. The learners are not there to hear about my experiences nor to be lectured to.