

CHAPTER 1 HOW PEOPLE LEARN



“There is no end to education. It is not that you read a book, pass an examination, and finish with education. The whole of life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die, is a process of learning”.

JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI

Introduction

Do you understand what learning is and how important it can be to having a good lifestyle?

Learning is not just developing a memory bank of facts which can be regurgitated as and when needed. Learning is far more complex than that. Often people think of learning as something that is done at school, and perhaps something that ends after we leave school.

- Learning is something which happens throughout your entire life.
- Abundant learning can help make you feel happier, more content and like a more capable, confident person.

- Learning improves your ability to understand and solve problems. These are skills which you can apply to tasks and events in every corner of your life.

Learning far more than the formal education system. Let us be clear on this. Going to school and passing exams does not necessarily mean you are a good learner. Passing exams may simply mean you are good at regurgitating factual information. It all depends upon what the exam is and how it is being marked.

Different countries and cultures may have very different standardised education systems. Education systems can sometimes be biased by political or belief systems; or limited by the economic conditions of a country. In some countries, some people may not have access to education. People in economically disadvantaged families do not always have access to education; therefore we must acknowledge how the socioeconomic conditions of parents and families may dictate the education which is available to children and young people. Career status and employer attitudes may also impact on education, as it can affect ongoing adult education.

A good education system (or course) can enhance learning; and a poor one can restrict learning. Some education systems control the quality and direction of learning in positive ways, and others may tend to control learning in negative ways; building up biases and limiting a person's capacities in one way or another.

Learning is a natural characteristic found in all human beings though; and even

when controlled or suppressed; everyone will learn new things constantly throughout life. Learning cannot be avoided.

This book assumes that your goal is to optimise your learning.

To live independently and successfully we require knowledge. Even for the most basic things, we need to *know how to do something - boiling a kettle, making a sandwich, crossing the road, brushing our teeth. We all acquire necessary general knowledge in our younger years. We use this knowledge in our daily lives, and build on it to develop new skills and understanding. Learning is ongoing.*

*“Learning is growth,
growth is learning”*

ROSEMARY DAVIES

**Learning becomes knowledge
if and when it is remembered.**

**Success in anything you do in
your work, personal or leisure
time is dependent upon:**

the knowledge you have acquired
your ability to use that knowledge.

The same can be said for our learning in career situations. Whatever we wish to do with our daily life and work, we require knowledge. This might be knowledge of the neurological science in order to become a brain surgeon, knowledge of how plumbing systems or electricity works to become a qualified tradesperson, or knowledge of how children grow and develop to work in child psychology, for example.

Gaining Knowledge

There are three main ways of gaining knowledge.

1. through academic learning (school, college, university),
2. through observation and
3. through personal experience.

Putting that knowledge into useful practice is how we develop our ability to use that knowledge.

For example, you may go to college and learn about child development - how children learn, think, play and so on. You may then work with children to gain more experience and knowledge of children's development through your academic knowledge and your practical work. You may also learn about children through your own children's behaviour, the behaviour of children you know, or your observations of children. Learning is a complex process, with knowledge and experience gained from many different sources. Previously held views and formed ideas may adjust and alter as new information comes along from another resource.

The amount of academic learning, observation and experience will vary depending on what you are trying to learn. For example, if you are learning how to make a sandwich, there is probably more observation and experience required. If you are learning how to put electrical wiring in a house, you will require some academic learning, then observation and then experience. The ratio of the different ways of gaining knowledge in learning will vary.

How Do People Learn?

By understanding ourselves and how we learn best, we can make the most suitable decisions about what we should study. Some of us will find academic studying easier than others, some of us will find observation or experiential learning more beneficial than others. So it is important to consider how we learn, which methods of learning come easiest to us and which prove to be the most effective methods.

Beware of mismatching the wrong course with what you really want to learn.

Beware of understanding the methods of teaching you will encounter – do those teaching styles suit your learning needs?

Choose study which offers flexibility – this allows you to modify your approach to learning if you need to.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation in Learning

We will talk more about motivation later in the course, but Extrinsic Motivation is when we are motivated to do something for an external reward. For example, we learn our times tables to get a star from the teacher. Or we work hard in a course to get a certificate. Intrinsic Motivation is when we learn for our own personal reasons, because we are interested in something, because we find it enjoyable, because it is an area of study we want to know more about. Intrinsic motivation is, therefore, more important when we are encouraging people to learn. If a student only learns course material

to pass an exam, it is likely that they may forget that information shortly afterwards. But if someone wants to pass the exam, but also is interested in the topic they are studying and wants to know more, they are likely to recall that information afterwards, because it is important to them.

Muscle Memory In Education

When we learn to swim, or ride a bike or use a particular piece of equipment, it tends to become part of our muscle memory. Muscle memory is a form of procedural memory. We do the actions over and over again until it becomes second nature and we can do it without really thinking about it. This is why we are likely to be able to do things, like riding a bike, years later as we have retained the memory of performing the actions over and over again.

Repeating something over and over again is, therefore, an important way of learning, particularly when it is a physical task.

But when we are learning information, repetition can help us to remember something, but to remember it even better, we need to be intrinsically motivated to learn it.

Long term success in learning and education comes from strong, deep learning that is sustained through life; but we cannot fast track learning if we want the student to maintain their learning in the long term.

One Size Never Suits All

Well established and known research has shown that people learn in different

ways and therefore we can 'classify' people as different types based on their learning style. We can also define different learning styles and different intelligences.

Some important researchers, psychologists and theorists in the field of learning include Carl Jung (1923). Isabel Briggs Myer developed ways of classifying people into different 'types'. Their work formed what is known as the Myers-Briggs Types Indicator Assessment which is a psychometric questionnaire which can measure people's perceptions and how we apply these to our decision making processes.

Later in the 20th century others researchers and psychologists include David Kolb, Peter Honey, Alan Mumford, Bernice McCarthy, Leo Vygotsky, B.F. (Burrhus, Frederic) Skinner, Jean Piaget, Howard Gardner, Erik Erickson, Abraham Maslow and Edward de Bono further developed ideas about how different types of people learn in different ways.

