

LEARNING TO LEARN OR HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE LEARNER

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ABSTRACT. The paper is an attempt at making an overview of some traditional, but mainly some innovative approaches to language learning and more precisely of how to be an effective learner.

New ideas and insights concerning learning and mind-oriented matters are transpiring in the domains of language learning as well as other fields of science and business.

I would like to touch upon a few of these novel ideas developed by some outstanding authors. The paper is based mainly on the brilliant book "Power up your mind" by Bill Lucas. The following ideas are highlighted and expanded upon:

- What does being an effective learner mean? Are learners aware of the learning processes taking place in their heads? Are they conscious of the way they learn and acquire knowledge?
- Learning is learnable: key factors for *being* an effective learner.
- Multiple intelligences – what is this and does it contribute to becoming a better learner?

Last but not least the paper would like to connect with and emphasize on the motto laid out in Brussels, namely the idea of life-long learning and development and its primary importance for the learner of the 21st century.

ДА СЕ УЧИМ ДА УЧИМ ИЛИ КАК ДА СМЕ ЕФЕКТИВНИ УЧАЩИ СЕ

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РЕЗЮМЕ. Тази разработка е опит да се направи преглед на някои традиционни и новаторски подходи към ученето на езици и по-специално как да учим ефективно.

Нови прозрения свързани с ученето и ума се появяват в области, занимаващи се както с изучаването на езици, така и в науката и бизнеса.

В тази статия бих желала да се спра на нови и оригинални идеи, предлагани от изтъкнати автори в тази област. Разгледаните подходи и начини се базират главно на брилянтната книга на Бил Лукас, Използвай пълната мощ на ума си" (преводът е мой) ("Power up your mind"). В статията е фокусирано върху следните идеи:

- Какво означава да си ефективен учащ се? Разбират ли учащите се процесите, които се извършват в главите им? Осъзнават ли начина, по който учат и усвояват знанията?
- Човек може да се научи да учи: ключови фактори за ефективно учене.
- Многобройни интелигентности – какво е това и как допринася за това, да станем по-ефективни учащи се.

И на последно място, но не по важност, с тази статия бих желала да наблегна на мотото, издигнато от Брюксел, а именно идеята за учене и усъвършенстване през целия живот и нейната значимост за всеки учащ се на 21-ия век.

Introduction

In today's dynamic and highly stressful world we are flooded with information which makes everybody and especially learners feel overpowered, confused and totally disoriented about the information they need and more often than not about the way they have to handle it so that they extract the greatest benefit out of it.

It is of great significance for learners (be it high school or university students and everybody else who considers themselves learners) to have a clearer idea of how they could learn to swim in this turbulent sea of information; how to get oriented; how to learn, memorize and acquire knowledge efficiently; how to develop new skills and apply them effectively in their learning practice.

New ideas and insights concerning learning and mind-oriented matters are transpiring in the domains of language learning as well as other fields of science and business.

1. What is an effective learner or rather the prerequisites for turning into one?

Being an effective learner requires having a clear idea of the following:

- Being conscious of one's learning strengths.
- Being motivated and having self-confidence to succeed.
- Acknowledging the possibility of failure and having the stamina to learn through trial and error.
- Being responsible for one's own learning.
- Being aware of important conducive factors: the importance of water, nutrition, sleep and a positive environment for learning.
- Having the inner persuasion of one's own creative ability and applying it into practice.

- As far as the first condition above is concerned it also means being aware of one's own learning style or styles, of

one's strengths and weaknesses. Are you a kinesthetic, auditory or visual type of learner? Being the kinesthetic type entails learning best by doing things, by moving around, in other words by integrating movement in your learning process. The auditory type gives his/her preference to learning through listening. And the third, visual type of learner finds it the easiest when s/he can see, read things. Very often learners are a combination of the three, with one of the three styles being most marked. As for the strengths and weaknesses, good learners should take stock of their skills as well as habits concerning organization, time management, concentration etc. In addition, they should consider the time of learning – is s/he a morning, afternoon person or a night owl? Do they study best alone or with other people? Knowing how you learn best can be a tremendous advantage for the efficiency of the process.

- The second and third features above are closely intertwined. Having cogent motivation makes all the difference. It means that learners are ready to go through difficulties and not give up; they are self-confident, patient, tolerant of their ups and downs, determined to achieve their goal. Strong motivation nurtures the learner's stamina and ensures his/her success. The way I have stated it, motivation seems to be the most natural precondition a learner should be aware of. However, it is not that simple. More mature learners may feel motivated or are easier to motivate and this fact and condition alleviates the whole process of learning, making it goal-oriented and consistent. It is not the same with young and immature learners. Here comes the crucial role of the teacher - to supply his/her students with well-founded motivation for the things they are to study.
- For a learner to be effective, responsibility is of paramount importance. Lots of students take it for granted that it is their teacher's/ professor's duty to teach them everything. They look upon themselves as empty vessels which have to be filled with knowledge. This idea is outmoded and highly preposterous. It is both the teacher's and learner's responsibility in this very complicated process. Unless learners realize the significance of their conscious, active participation in this mutual exchange called teaching/learning, learning is doomed to failure or in the very least, to a partial, unsatisfactory, perfunctory understanding, which can easily be forgotten.
- The learning environment is extremely vital for the favorable outcome of a learning session. No matter how banal the above mentioned factors sound, they are indeed very essential for a normal learning process. The proverb "A healthy mind in a healthy body" illustrates the necessary and inevitable connection between a healthy body with its smoothly-running processes and a well-functioning brain. Giving one's body sufficient water is of utmost significance for one's overall well-being. So is healthy food, rich in vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. Unfortunately, nowadays children and young people become easy prey to the advertising industry, according to which junk food and fizzy drinks are of supreme taste and nutrition, they are simply irresistible. Indeed, our children find them irresistible and as a result we witness more and more young people, even young children, suffering from diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes etc. How can we expect a learner of ill-health to be capable of lasting

concentration and learning motivation? Furthermore, it has been proved that taking enough sleep ensures a more efficient and lasting learning – another norm lots of teenagers and young people unthinkingly disregard.

- Having inner persuasion is a condition interrelated with the second, third and fourth states above for motivation, long-lasting stamina and responsibility are the bricks, the stuff out of which inner persuasion is built and comes forth or vice versa. One may be strongly convinced in one's one ability and success, which determines the existence of the other prerequisites. Whichever way, it doesn't matter. What matters is that learners need to learn to reflect on their learning process and believe in their creative capacity. In order to foster this delicate state and belief in learners, teachers need to be really sensitive. Otherwise, the reverse result may be brought about, which can be detrimental to the learner. As Charles Browder says, "*A new idea is delicate. It can be killed by a sneer or a yawn; it can be stabbed to death by a quip and worried to death by a frown on the right man's brow.*"

2. Learning is learnable: key factors for being an effective learner.

More and more linguistic scientists are focusing their attention on learning as a conscious process on the part of the learner. Terms such as learner-centeredness, which has been around for quite some time, student-centered accountability (Douglas Reeves, 2004), and learner autonomy or independence are taking more clear shape. These have sprung up as a natural consequence of the dynamic essence of today's society and the new modes of learning (Internet or e-learning), which are already taking place. Another reason for their appearance is the urgent necessity for change in the educational system.

What is learning in this sense then? Learning is a process of discovering about learning, an awareness of how to become an effective learner. It takes more than just going to class and doing homework. According to Gail Ellis and B. Siclair (1997) learners need to be taught metacognitive strategies which involve learners in reflecting on the learning process, planning for learning, self-assessment and monitoring. *It is really a four-part cycle* (B.Lucas, 2001) :

preview>> class>> review>>study.

Reflecting upon what they have just learnt should become a habit of primary significance for learners. By integrating this habit into their learning process, learners can guarantee themselves a more lasting piece of knowledge. Developing reflecting habits can be very beneficial and will surely lead to success. Bill Lucas recommends different approaches to reflection in his book.

Some of them are:

- Keeping a diary
- Writing letters to yourself
- Making up newspaper headlines that encapsulate how well you feel something went
- Using a map mind to capture your thoughts.

The purpose of learning is to acquire knowledge. 'The relationship between memory and learning! "Learning is memory that sticks!" –Dr. Pierce Howard.

Relevant to learning as learnacy (Bill Lucas, 2001) is also the awareness and acquisition of information literacy. According to the final reports of UNESCO Training-the-Trainers, information literacy is defined as the ability to know when there is a need for information, to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively use that information for the issue or problem at hand. Here follows a list of INDIVIDUAL LEARNING SKILLS –an essential part of *information literacy*:

- Asking the right questions!
- Defining the task!
- Making predictions!
- Testing theories!
- Analyzing results!
- Problem solving!
- Making decisions!
- Brainstorming!
- Identifying likely sources!
- Locating individual sources!
- Selecting appropriate resources!
- Finding information within the resource!
- Skimming and scanning!
- Evaluating material – assessing the strengths and weaknesses of sources and resources!
- Note-making, precis and summary!
- Presenting data in a structured framework!
- Evaluation and review!
- Citing sources

Information literacy is a vital part of university-level education.

3. Multiple intelligences – what is this and does it contribute to becoming a better learner?

Matters concerning mind and brain, their functioning and application in education have been in the focus of researchers, psychologists and educationalists in the last two decades. The multiple intelligence theory is one of the comparatively new ideas which have provoked both approval and criticism. It was Howard Gardner, a prominent contemporary scholar in the field of psychology, cognition and the human brain, who first came up with this idea in his book *Frames of Mind. The theory of multiple intelligences, 1983*. He identified and introduced to us seven different kinds of intelligence in *Frames of Mind*.

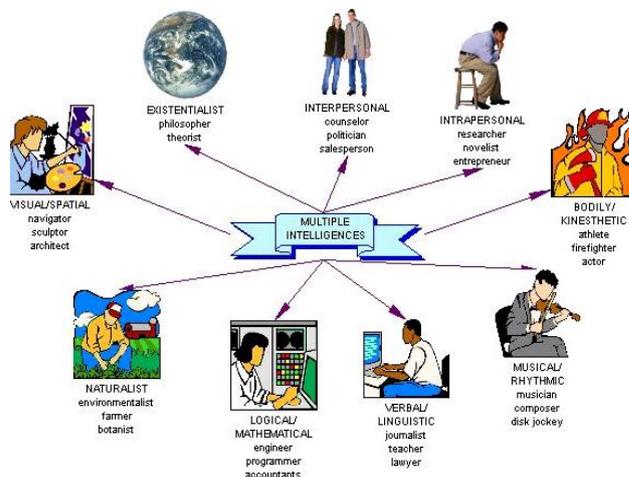
- Linguistic intelligence: a sensitivity to the meaning and order of words.
- Logical-mathematical intelligence: ability in mathematics and other complex logical systems.
- Musical intelligence: the ability to understand and create music. Musicians, composers and dancers show a heightened musical intelligence.
- Spatial intelligence: the ability to "think in pictures," to perceive the visual world accurately, and recreate (or alter) it in the mind or on paper. Spatial intelligence is highly developed in artists, architects, designers and sculptors.
- Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence: the ability to use one's body in a skilled way, for self-expression or toward a goal. Mimes, dancers, basketball players, and actors

are among those who display bodily-kinesthetic intelligence.

- Interpersonal intelligence: an ability to perceive and understand other individuals -- their moods, desires, and motivations. Political and religious leaders, skilled parents and teachers, and therapists use this intelligence.
- Intrapersonal intelligence: an understanding of one's own emotions. Some novelists and or counselors use their own experience to guide others.

Later Gardner thought of two more - Environmental and Existential.

Bill Lucas speaks of ten intelligences and defines them slightly differently. In his opinion, "If linguistic and mathematical intelligences were the key ones for the 20th century, there is a strong case that *emotional, social and spiritual intelligences will be critical in the 21st century*. To power up you mind fully it will be helpful for you to seek to develop all your intelligences and of course your ability to learn how to learn."



What are the implications for education and effective learners?

Bill Lucas again gives an answer to this question, "As we grow up we discover that we have these intelligences in different states of development. But they are not set in stone; they can be acquired to a considerable extent. To be fully creatively developed, you need to realize your potential in as many of your intelligences as possible. Remember that releasing your creativity is a key component of learning to learn, and therefore developing your natural intelligence."

Multiple-intelligence theory has stimulated teachers to find more ways of helping all students in their classes. It has made educators question their work and encouraged them to look beyond the narrow confines of the dominant discourses of skilling, curriculum, and testing.

As a conclusion I would like to offer one more quotation from Bill Lucas' brilliant book "Power up your mind", "No one can develop anyone else apart from himself. The door to development is locked from inside."

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