

Strategies for Enhancing Learning from Everyday Experience

This is an elaborated and rewritten version of material presented in Marsick and Watkins (1990:336 - 7) as 'Strategies for enhancing informal and incidental learning'

1. Investigate metaphors and images

Our images and metaphors represent the theories on which we base our thinking and action. They act as an ordering and reference system. To understand how our processing of information works towards development of our personal systems of knowledge, we need to understand this system and the contents of it. Access to this understanding is either through reflection or by more direct observation of our actions and reactions in relation to events and objects. With greater understanding of the image /metaphor system that we use, we can reject it, modify it or retain it with greater understanding.

2. Recognise assumptions that we have made about people or situations.

We have to make rapid assumptions about people and situations in order to manage in busy and everyday lives. These assumptions might not always be accurate but it is often easier to retain the original view despite evidence that it is not or is no longer appropriate. If, for example, a person is said to be difficult to get on with, to avoid cognitive dissonance, we may make assumptions about that person to justify the rumour, rather than judge her afresh. It is comfortable to have evidence that points a consistent direction. These assumptions can be the subject of reflection. We thus reframe our view.

3. Question and challenge familiar situations

When a situation is new or unfamiliar, we are more able to question and challenge it in order to understand it. Familiar situations are apt to evoke automatic judgements and unconsidered responses. A means of reframing assumptions and reactions is to see situations as if they are unfamiliar and to problematise them, asking naïve questions. One method of doing this is to describe the situation as if one were seeing it for the first time. It may be helpful to write about it in the present tense. Leave the writing for a day or two and then return to it and write down as many questions about it as you can think of (brainstorm for questions), not trying to answer them straight away – leaving it again for a day or two more. Another method is to work with another person who acts as a facilitator. You describe the event while the other simply listens. The other then asks questions, particularly naïve and simple questions. These two methods may be combined – so that the facilitator reads a written account and prepares questions that may be written or oral.

4. Create a situation for review and reflection

Counselling and therapy are means of reviewing and reflecting on present and past events and their relationship to the future. People tend only to 'go into' therapy and counselling from a state of being down or negative, rather than use such deliberate tactics in order to reconsider and rethink work or home events that are apparently normal. Mentoring, self help groups or learning

groups can be situations for the opportunities to learn to see things in a different and transformative manner.

5. Listen to the views of others

There is often a tendency to assume that others see events, people and organisations in the same way as we do. Engineering situations in which people can share attitudes enables the possibility of recognising that the range of view that can exist. Discussion of perceptions of an event that has experienced by several people can be a helpful manner of eliciting such sharing. A start for this work can be that everyone develops a concept map (Ch11)

6. Take a wider view

There is a tendency to focus on the day-to-day events. It is possible to view events at different levels of magnification. There is a tendency in thinking of an event easily to become caught up in the detail of small points. We could see this form of viewing as increased magnification. What we manage less well, is to see events in longer term contexts. Without this perspective, we cannot see the patterns and cycles of events, or monitor the flow of feelings. A method of working with this in reflective mode is to conceive of periods of time in which life (emotions / events / relationships – the personal aspects of life) have felt as if there is a common thread (e.g. a week, a month). Think back over that time and write / draw or in other ways, depict the characteristics of that period. Monitor every-so-often whether a period continues or there is a new period (based on Proff, 1975).