Make IT delightful!

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Introduction

Characterising tutors & trainers as digital immigrants is insulting and incorrect Our brains are capable of adaptation and change in far-reaching ways (Wikipedia 2007). After serious brain injury, people who have lost complete faculties have re-developed them using other areas of the cerebral cortex.

perhaps the real reason for young people's apparent capabilities with ICT are the many hours they have to explore, to take risks and use trial and error to discover how technologies work. Persistence, patience and optimism are more likely to be important than any other characteristic.

Older people have full time work, overtime, family and community commitments which leave little time for play, time which is precious and often used for the most immediately rewarding leisure activity - not trial and error with poorly designed technology.

For deep learning, the wisdom, problem-solving knowledge and soft-skills that older people have are more important. Teachers meta-knowledge of content, inquiry, critical thinking, reflection, learning processes, common misconceptions, communication, assessment, moral support and team work are their key skills and bring huge value to learners.

Two works-in-progress reported at ALT-2006 showed:

- that teenage game-players had no clear advantage at higher education level;

- that middle-aged female health practitioners, although showing a a lack of experience with ICT, made up the gap within six months of engagement in training online.

Learning should be serious fun - and so must teaching

I have five reasons for believing serious fun matters:

1. Fun sounds like a trivial and ephemeral phenomenon, but its key characteristics lend serious strength to learning. Playfulness allows mistakes, encourages risk-taking, rewards taking part and is inherently fulfilling, Humour encourages heightened senses and engagement, increasing concentration and focus. Self-regulation is the norm in fun activities - your involvement in decisions is critical to enjoyment, even if the decision is to sit back and listen or watch. Most games put heavy responsibility in the hands of players and part of the fun is coming to terms with losing and winning. Creativity - making your work, inventing your characters, defining your own problems and exploring out-of-the-box ideas are undoubtedly central in fun activities.

2. Fun makes motivation easy, and our hunger for further fun is not easily fulfilled thus sustaining motivation for long periods.

3 Fulfilment brought about by activities is achieved through the completion of substantial undertakings - finishing an essay, re-planting the garden, playing in a concert - but if there is no fun, then such fulfilment is not as complete it should be.

4. Is it a human right to have fun? Does it also lead to effective learning? I believe that both are true.

5. A lot of attention is paid to the act of teaching, either face-to-face or online, but these are not the only areas of work for the tutor or trainer. Others include preparation and summative assessment - preparation of materials and design of learning environments can be creative and fulfilling, but assessment is often seen as a drudge. Assessors are invited to be objective robots, denying human relationship and seeking reliability. Collaborative working and holistic judgment may offer solutions to improve the process. (Teachers TV 2007)

Exhibition also offers a more delightful experience for learners and assessors, as the arts have known for some time.

Delight
John Heron describes different aspects of delight which reinforce the approach to playfulness: (Heron 1992)

Appreciation - a delight that springs from the love of aesthetic form:

"The emotions of a fulfilled imaginal sensibility are of a range and subtlety that outstrip the power of language to symbolize them. Hence they are conveyed by the non-discursive symbolism of drawing, painting, sculpture, music and dance."

Interest - a delight that springs from the love of knowledge:

"When the need to understand is realized, we experience interest, extending into curiosity and fascination, the passion for truth, excitement in intellectual discovery, pleasure in the clear communication of ideas."

Zest - a delight that springs from the love of action:

"the emotions involved in the fulfilment of free choice and effective action"

also including: "relish, gusto, exhilaration, achievement and work satisfaction"

Learning is individual, but also interpersonal, communal and societal

Learning can take place in a personal sphere, an interpersonal relationship, a communal group or in relation to wider society:

1. Individual learning discourse, as seen in the brands 'iMac', 'MySpace' and 'YouTube' reflect the cult of the individual. Reflective thought underlies this kind of learning, using one's own desktop computer or mobile, unconnected in the sense of a relationship with others. Activities include creating personal web space and publishing the movie personally liked and sometimes made. Reflecting on one's own self-expression can be a powerful force for learning - sometimes imagining the audience response, anticipating critique and re-expressing in a cycle of improvement well known to authors.

2. Interpersonal learning discourse is characterised in the use of Email, instant messenger, phone & SMS to communicate to another. This involves intentionally seeking another's approval, opinion or response. Safer than societal, but riskier than individual, best learning occurs when the other is a friend or colleague where a relationship of trust (and forgiveness) is already established (Hargreaves 1975). The critical friend, mentor, advocate, parent and teacher can all act in this role.

3. Communal learning discourse arises when ideas are shared amongst a group who are bound by purpose, respect and trust. The purpose offers solid context for learning. Respect and trust allow critical dialogue which challenges and supports in the same

message. The ethos is one of commitment to each other to enhance each other's learning in a semi-public context. Facilitation is a key concept and careful management of membership and rules to support trust essential. Knowledge can then be shared and mutual benefit obtained. These communal discourses suffer from being private and thus make much less impact in the eLearning world than they should.

The power of the communal approach is hypothesised to achieve depth in learning, a phenomenon noted by Leonie Ramondt and Carole Chapman when analysing the nature of the Talking Heads community in 2005 (Chapman, Ramomndt & Smiley 2005). Stronger community. as measured by increasingly 'communal' statements, was clearly linked to increasingly deep learning statements.

4. Societal learning discourse is the intentional seeking of a public response, perhaps through web sites, Facebook and blogs. Mechanisms for response from strangers are sought to test hypotheses, creativity and opinion. More courage, resilience and confidence for this kind of risk taking, but the value can be great as a diverse audience offers a range of responses.

The training of trainers & tutors should be delightful!

On the basis of the previous arguments, I claim that we should endeavour to make training of adults delightful through inter-disciplinary groups, inquiry-based learning, innovation in assessment and in online community:

1. Synthesising a range of disciplinary ideas has been a hallmark of educational development and collaboration between trainers & tutors with different perspectives can make learning more delightful.

2. An action-research, self directed methodology applied to learning increases the pleasure in learning as direct correlations are made between knowledge and practice. Standards are maintained by obliging learners to negotiate their action for improvement with tutors against published generic criteria and with practice against work-colleague's professional expertise.

3. Inviting learners to regularly produce pieces of assessment in a genre and media which fulfils their creative potential, matched by a 'stitching process' in which they tell the story of their learning journey making a claim to meeting learning criteria.

4. Directly addressing technology concepts at an appropriate level is essential in a Web 2.0 world and makes proper sense of the term 'personalise'. ICT is the highest form of tool known to human civilisation, which has been symbiotic with tools in its evolution since the stone age.

5. Online asynchronous community can fit people's lives, providing a convivial context for learning which is both pleasurable and challenging.

References

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