

Module 2 Topic 2 : Personal Learning Issues:

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Topic Focus:

This topic explores the issues which affect personal learning and the individuals capacity to improve performance. It includes a wide variety of challenges, such as preferred and/or personal learning styles, the impact of technology (access, the competence to use it, affordability, etc.), learning processes (classroom learning, team-based learning, mentoring, etc.) and individual study issues, taking responsibility of looking up and selecting relevant sources of knowledge. In so doing it examines the Geographical, Infra-structural and Financial Barriers which affect access to learning, focusing on the diversity of learning opportunities (e.g. the diversity of classes and courses within the different sectors of learning such as VET, University, NVQ's, Upper Secondary School, etc.), ICT Supported Learning-processes (i.e. Distance Learning Opportunities, "Round The Clock" and "On The Move" access to learning services including on-line learning);

It includes APEL – Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning and its role in bringing back reluctant learners into the classroom, as well as the barriers associated with a lack of basic skills, examining what those are in the 21st century.

Topic Objectives

☒ To foster individual understanding and recognition of his/her preferred learning-style, and how this understanding can help him or her to obtain more efficient and joyful learning-processes, with a higher outcome as a result...

☒ To give the individual insight into the diversity of learning opportunities at hand; how to make it financially possible to participate in learning on a continuous basis; how to find information on the content of each education, class or course and the jobopportunities following this; what to do to enlist a specific education, etc.

☒ To encourage the individual to overcome mental-geographical barriers, and a change of perspective on learning-opportunities not inside the immediate parameter of domestic location and upbringing.

☒ To give the individual insight into the financial support-systems, designed to give economic aid to the learner whenever he/she wishes to learn.

☒ To broaden the view on the value of learning, on one hand the political and the scholastic system to introduce new, improved and better methods in the validation and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning, on the other hand encourage the individual to take a renewed hard look at him-/herself, recognizing and celebrating resources that were before ignored as worth- and useless.

☒ To raise awareness of the importance of the development of self-confidence and self-esteem, as a necessary personal capacity for the learner to be able to be self-directed, is of the outmost importance with regard to the objective of this module, as a foundation of the development of the basic skills necessary in the Knowledge society.

Lesson 2.2.1 The Personal Learning Ladder

Objective: To understand the concept of a hierarchy of personal learning as the learner acquires new abilities and understandings

1. General discussion on the levels of personal learning. Divide into groups and ask them to think of words which describe an ascending ladder of learning levels starting from ignorance at the bottom rung to ultimate wisdom – how many rungs would it take and how would they describe each? Discuss in plenary.
2. Hand out copies of Toolbox item 1 and ask for comments. Ask what would be the characteristics of each rung and why do they become wider?
3. Distribute the descriptions of each stage after the diagram. Then divide the class into groups of 2 or more and ask them to read them, discuss them and then answer the questions. Ask them to be candid about their own levels.

Lesson 2.2.2 Multiple Intelligences and preferred learning styles

Lesson Focus:

There is a large body of research information on these topics and this lesson can only provide an introduction to the concept while recommending exercise to discover more. However the lesson does address the most current thought on how people learn and what their preferred learning style might be.

Lesson Objective

The major objective of this lesson is to identify multiple intelligences and to develop insights into how they affect peoples' learning styles.

Suggestions for Learning Leaders

1. Ask each class member to ask their neighbour to describe how they learn best. Discuss the responses in plenary.
2. Distribute toolbox item 3. Contrast the idea of multiple intelligences with the rather more limited concept of the IQ. Ask the class to give a mark out of three for the way in which they think they learn best. Divide the group into twos. Each member tells the other what the results of this exercise was and why they think they made the answers they did.
3. In plenary discuss the results of the exercise and ask which intelligence should be most fostered by education? How far do traditional educational institutions take multiple intelligences into account? Why?
4. This could be a homework exercise or, if the technology is at hand, done immediately. Initiate a web search for preferred learning styles and multiple intelligences. Ask each person to give a short presentation on what they have found.

Lesson 2.2.3: Stimulating Individual Learning in a Community

Lesson Focus:

This topic examines a Case Study of a religious community which wishes to improve the learning of its individual members. It is the precursor to a fuller lifelong learning action plan development dealt with in topic 5.

Lesson Objective:

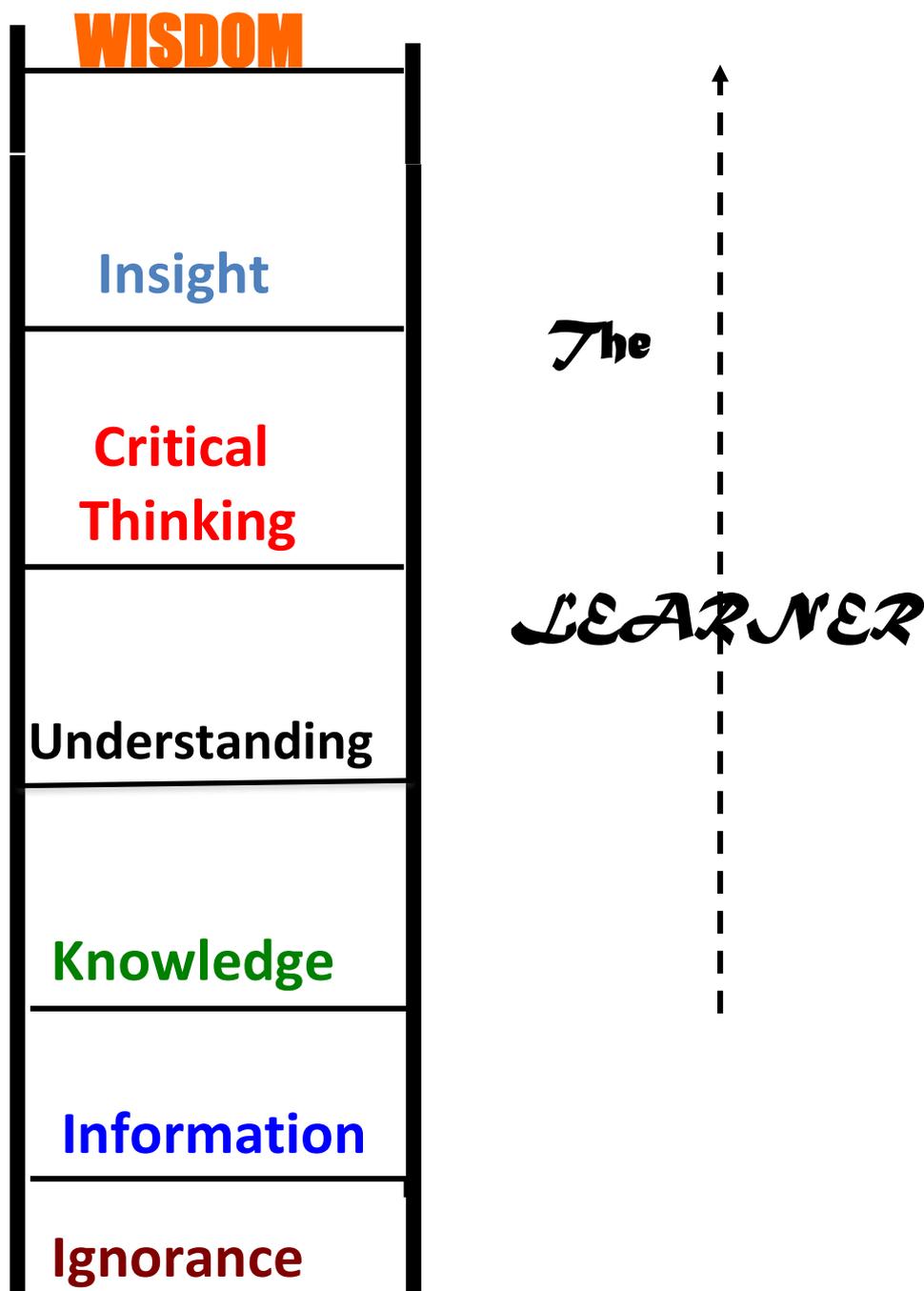
The major objective is to give information and insight about the way in which a community can stimulate learning among its individual members.

Suggestions for Learning Leaders

1. Ask the class what communities they belong to outside of the classroom. These could be religious bodies, sports clubs, pub communities, uniformed organisations etc. Ask what learning takes place in those communities, whether this is formal or informal.
2. Distribute the paper on the Jamat – toolbox item 4., and ask the group to read it.
3. Distribute toolbox item 5 and ask the group in pairs to answer the questions.
4. Bring together in plenary and discuss the results and their implications. And in particular how any community might become a learning community in this way. Point out that the Learning Requirements Audit tool and the Personal Learning Plan will be explored at a later date in the course and that the concept of the Learning Counsellor will also be dealt with.

Lesson 2.2.4 Constructing a Charter for Learners.

1. Ask the class what difficulties they had in their own childhood classroom learning situations and what would have to be done to improve the situation.
2. Divide the class into pairs. Distribute toolbox item 6 and ask people to complete the exercise below it
3. Invite them to add 3 more items for the charter
3. In Plenary discuss the results of this exercise



THE LEARNING LADDER

A Personal Voyage from Ignorance to Wisdom

The widening rungs confirm the widening difficulty of achieving the next stage but the progression is a logical one and constitutes a challenge for every learner to reach personal potential.

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Ignorance. The nothing. We embrace ignorance. At this level we accept everything with no filters, make no effort to verify and we don't care whether or not it's true. We exist and that is all that matters.

Information: the what - we seek and receive information. Still applying no filters – it could be true or false but the information we accept gives us an opinion irrespective of that.

Knowledge – still the what – we know things – facts - our address, our car make, our friends names etc – We may even know how things work But we still have not asked the question why – we just know and we base our opinions on the limits of what we think we know

Understanding – Now we want to know why – the rungs on the ladder are getting progressively wider. We put these pieces of knowledge together into a more coherent whole and form an opinion that satisfies us according to a certain level of acquired understanding. But we still have not verified whether or not the premises we accept are true or false.

Critical Thinking – Now here is where our understandings are tested – where we take steps to examine them and measure them against the reality. This is the realm of personal empirical research where we require a 95% certainty of the truth. Where we recognise the difference between reasoning and rationalising. Here is also where we adapt our opinions and beliefs to the perceived understandings, and extrapolate into the future by trying to forecast the consequences of our thoughts and actions based upon the results of our, and others', findings.

Insight – not a lot different from critical thinking but where we try to apply a deeper understanding to our researches, incorporate personal experiences and perhaps more spiritual and/or socio-cultural insights and try to work out how what we now regard as the truth fits into the wider scheme of things in the world as we see it. Sometimes accompanied by Eureka moments.

Wisdom – few reach this stage – it's the combination of all the above where we understand that we don't understand, we know that we don't know - and never will because the universe of learning is simply too large for the human mind to comprehend. And we would need to escape from the prison of our upbringing. Ironic perhaps but at least some of us tried to learn lifelong and we never give up trying.

In this rapidly developing world does anyone still believe that critical thinking skills are not essential in education?

Questions:

1. Where are you personally on this ladder in respect of your

- a) progress on this course**
- b) your own political opinions**
- c) Your relationships with your best friend**
- d) your attitude to life in general**
- e) your own personal opinion-making ability**
- f) at which level do you think your school took you to?**

Toolbox item 3

Howard Gardner identifies intelligences which often determine our preferred learning styles. They are:

Multiple intelligences (Howard Gardner)

Verbal/linguistic	The ability to communicate well –using words, listening, speaking, dialogue with others
Visual/Spatial	Ability to create and use images, drawings, solve puzzles, visualise events and recognize shapes
Logical/Mathematical	The ability to reason well, interpret facts, sequencing, ranking, patterning, distilling arguments
Musical/Rhythmic	A talent for melody, beat, classical music, singing, playing, composing
Bodily/kinaesthetic	All about activity and movement, running, jumping, touching, feeling, performing, active learning
Interpersonal	Ability to interact and communicate easily, exude charisma, socialise, empathise with others
Intra-personal	Ability for self-analysis and self-reflection, contemplating, meditating, setting personal goals, self directed learning
Naturalist	environmental awareness, recognizing flora and fauna etc and using this knowledge productively eg hunting, farming, biological science
Spiritual Intelligence (Zohar and Marshal)	the capacity to make meaning – the soul’s intelligence. Capacity to see life in wholes, not fragments, and to regenerate oneself. Ability to challenge rules and change behaviours
Emotional intelligence (Goleman)	Ability to understand one’s own emotions, to empathise with others and to behave appropriately, to seek out the mature option and build a personal philosophy around it

Toolbox Item 4

The Learning Community Project

(Paper in 'Jolli' Magazine June 2001)

The 21st century heralds a world in which both workplace demands and family and leisure habits are changing rapidly. The demand for new knowledge, new processes and new education is increasing, while the future remains more difficult than ever to predict. The global economy influences what happens at national level, and this in turn has its effect on local and family life.

The new emphasis for everyone, irrespective of age, circumstance or background, is on learning throughout, and for, life, and on the development of individual strategies to cope with both the explosion of information and the changing nature of living and working. Many words have been expended in articulating these lifelong learning concepts, but there has been little practical action at the level of the individual. This project was designed to remedy that situation.

Members of an Islamic religious community in France, Portugal and UK are acutely aware of the need to respond to this changing world, while retaining their faith as a firm anchor around which all facets of their personal life revolve. It has some 20000 members in UK, 6000 in France and 6000 in Portugal, many of them former victims of repression in other parts of the world. They have successfully adapted to the western ways of life and have maintained a very strong sense of community and self-help, meeting the world as it is with an open mind and a steadfast spirit. Their leaders are determined that the community should become a 'Learning Community'.

The Learning Community project was therefore launched as a pilot research project in the year 2000 to give all community members a means of responding to this new world of continuous learning - that is to make it into one of the foremost learning communities in the world through the development, and sharing, of their talents, skills, values and knowledge. All participants were volunteers, contributing a considerable amount of their own time and expense to the project.

The overall objective therefore was an ambitious one. It was to design, develop and apply the Lifelong Learning Tools by which willing learners could learn more effectively -from others and from each other - and also to engender the self-understanding and self-belief which would inspire those who are less committed to learning to appreciate its value and pleasures. In effect to develop an interactive and interacting community of learners in the Community.

Learning tools, successfully used in industry, were modified for community use in order to enable people both to take stock of their own learning requirements (Learning Requirements Audits) and to take action to satisfy them (Personal Learning Action Plans). Both these tools are carefully worded, encouraging participants to enter into considerable personal analysis of their learning history, needs, opinions, desires and intentions, culminating in the construction of a plan to identify mentors, available time, locations, learning methods, styles, priorities and topics.

The focus was on the development of rounded individuals and therefore covered personal development, leisure-time, family, the community as well as work and career. The process of analysis and self-reflection in the audit activates the (re)commitment to learning and the completion of the plan confirms the intention to honour that commitment. One part of the process was to develop a database of mentors, who would help others to learn while themselves learning, as an embryo support structure for later years. However in its first year the need was for more immediate strategies which would not only help implement the project in its first year, but would also grow wider community participation in Lifelong Learning.

The management system was the first pillar of that support. The project leaders in the 3 participating countries recruited people willing to act as 'Learning Counsellors', administrators of the tools to the project participants. Project Leaders and Project Managers initiated training for the counsellors in the use of the

tools and in techniques of counselling, at the four weekend meetings held in Lisbon, Paris and London (twice).

The management system was bolstered by the availability of a booklet explaining all facets of the project to Learning Counsellors and participants, this replacing the first question and answer sheets developed for the project.

Towards the end of the project's first year the first steps were taken to build a web-site which would enable more people to understand the processes and pave the way for a more electronic approach. All the words are now in place for this, and it is potentially another powerful support tool, but it has not yet been used as a delivery method. Each country chose different target groups. In Portugal ten third age people and ten people with further non-degree education participated, in France 10 unemployed people contrasted with 10 people with higher degrees, while in UK five groups of older women, unemployed, third age, people with special disabilities and the Council Leaders took part.

In the first three months the modified Learning Requirements Audit was initiated between Learning Counsellors and participants, who answered questions concerning their past experiences of, present participation in, and future plans for, learning. This was intended to unlock barriers to personal development in all aspects of life. It led, in the next 3 months to a completion of the Personal Learning Action Plan, in which participants were asked to write down a firm commitment to learning for the next year and a less firm one for subsequent years in 6 different areas of their life.

Self-analysis, self-reflection and self-motivation were features of both processes. Learning Counsellors underwent training sessions at two meetings. Evaluation involved every Learning Counsellor and Project Leader in considerable debate, the completion of a questionnaire requesting information, observations articulating anecdotal and case study evidence, SWOT analysis and personal opinions.

These were the initial findings

1. More than half those who started the process are now involved in Learning, taking a wide range of courses they would not otherwise have considered. There were good success stories among unemployed and lower qualified people who found a renewed commitment to learning.
2. New mentors and learning counsellors, who were not previously very active, have discovered a rewarding means of making a personal contribution to the community's activities, and making new friends.
3. There is a total commitment to the continuation of the project by those responsible for making the pilot work. Although many of them had not even heard of lifelong learning before project start, by its end the majority of them considered it to be crucial to the development of the community.
4. The Learning Requirements Audit was perceived to be useful for unlocking self-imposed barriers to the value of learning, often as a result of insensitive schools systems and teachers, but was overlong for some participants. Many people gained valuable insights into their personal situation, and a renewed determination to do something about it.
5. In general it was found that the more educated the participant and the narrower his/her ultimate focus (eg use only for career enhancement), the lower the need for a lengthy audit. Also, perhaps surprisingly, the more educated the participant, the more difficult was the process of self-analysis.
6. The Personal Learning Action Plan was more difficult to complete. There is considerable resistance to learning commitment particularly by some Third Age people (we're too old to learn), some well-established people (we don't want to learn), some unemployed people, as well as those with special needs (we can't learn) and some with non-degree qualifications (we don't need to learn). However this is offset by the successes of others who found renewed strength and motivation.

7. As would be expected, sensitive Learning Counsellors' were key to the success of the project. Since these are only part-time, non-professional, counsellors, there is a need to choose individuals carefully and to develop skills and knowledge quickly.
8. In an environment where values of community are already high there is a need for high level support from existing community structures, not only to increase awareness but also to deal with raised expectations. This may mean increasing internal commitment to the delivery of education within the Community, where it is competent to do so, particularly for the more vulnerable target groups
9. The time consumed by the project was high for all leaders and learning counsellors. That means harnessing the talents, skills and knowledge of many more people, a strategy which the Learning requirements Audit encourages.
10. Communication is very important. Every participating person should be fully familiar with the background, rationale, tools and modus operandum of lifelong learning. Results were less than anticipated where Counsellors were unable to devote sufficient time to understanding the significance of project processes.

Toolbox item 5

1	What do you understand by the term ‘a Learning Community’ in the context of this paper?
2	Why might the leaders of the Community want it to become a Learning Community
3	What would be the most difficult tasks of a Learning Counsellor?
4	Make a list of the 8 groups in the pilot test. Which would be the most difficult to stimulate?
5	What were the 3 aspects of a Personal Learning Audit?
6	Why should it take so long to complete a personal learning plan?
7	Why would this project switch people back into learning where others had failed?.
8	Why should the more highly educated find it difficult to analyse themselves?
9	Where there were resistances to learning in some groups, are the reasons given valid?
10	Name 4 Critical success factors?

Toolbox Item 6

A LEARNER'S CHARTER		A	B
	GOOD FOOD, GOOD HEALTH AND GOOD LEARNING ARE INTERDEPENDENT PARTS OF THE HUMAN BIO-SYSTEM		
1	ALL INDIVIDUALS HAVE THE RIGHT TO LEARN AND TO DEVELOP THEIR OWN POTENTIAL THROUGHOUT LIFE		
2	THE RIGHT TO LEARNING IS IRRESPECTIVE OF CREED, ETHNIC BACKGROUND, AGE, NATIONALITY OR GENDER		
3	THE LEARNER IS THE CUSTOMER WHOSE NEEDS TAKE FIRST PRIORITY		
4	AS FAR AS POSSIBLE, LEARNING SHOULD BE PROVIDED WHERE, WHEN AND HOW THE LEARNER DESIRES IT		
5	LEARNING SHOULD BE ACTIVELY PROMOTED AND ENCOURAGED FOR EVERY AGE		
6	INDIVIDUAL LEARNING STYLES SHOULD BE RECOGNISED AND CATERED FOR		
7	PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT TO EXPERT HELP		
8	LEARNERS SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO MODERN RESOURCES FOR LEARNING WHEREVER THEY MAY BE		
9	SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE SYSTEMS, INCLUDING ACCESS TO LEARNING COUNSELLORS, SHOULD BE IN PLACE AT ALL STAGES OF LEARNING		
10	AS FAR AS POSSIBLE, LEARNERS SHOULD HAVE OWNERSHIP OF, AND CONTROL OVER, THEIR OWN LEARNING		

In box A put a tick if this existed in your schooldays
 In box B mark your order of importance from 1 to 10