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PIDP 3100 - Foundations of Adult Education

When I read the section about the different settings of learning; formal, non formal and informal, it really gave me some insight into my own preference. When reading about the informal setting, as “the spontaneous, unstructured learning that goes on daily in the home and neighbourhood, behind the school and on the playing field, in the workplace, marketplace, library and museum, and through the various mass media” Coombs (1985 - pg.92), it made me relate to how enjoyable that type of learning is.

I think there is a big group of people who don’t identify as “learners”. When they think of going to a school, and sitting in a classroom to learn, that the idea bores them. They don’t see any joy in it. But if you were to ask them if they wanted to learn the new funnest board game, or how to shoot your bow and arrow, that many would agree to “learning” the task. I know for myself, above is exactly how I feel about learning. I want it to be enjoyable, and sitting in a class is not my idea of pleasant.

I teach students who have difficulties getting words from their minds onto paper. Even if my student with barriers to writing, have huge long paragraphs worth of thoughts, they just cannot get them on paper. So does being in a formal classroom setting help them, or would they be better with informal learning?

Just because you cannot write easily does not mean you do not like classrooms. Just think of young children who are learning to write, not being able to write doesn’t make the whole classroom experience worse for them, they just continue on. But I do like to think that after years of these settings they must grow tiresome. Like being stuck in 3rd grade learning to write, year, after year after year.

So when I see there is the informal learning setting, I think, gee, who doesn’t like that. Would students who have spent years in formal settings, that often felt like a repeat each year, enjoy learning in another setting. I feel that using another modality for learning where there is less perceived pressure, less of “the same”. Something where the expectation isn’t to sit down for long periods and write answers on papers.

So is there a way to make the formal classroom a little less formal? I understand that I cannot simply change the meanings of informal and formal. Those definitions are set in stone. Formal being in a classroom or institution whose primary source is to teach, and informal being other places you learn, like when watching a baseball game live, and learning the rules. But I do believe it’s important to keep in mind the mechanics behind what makes informal learning more enjoyable for many of us.

There is less perceived pressure to achieve a certain outcome in informal learning. Sure you want to be good at learning to ride a bicycle, and you could fall off your bike, so their are consequences to this informal learning, but there is such a great benefit to actually trying that it makes it worth it. The fact that the lesson is hopefully full of giggles, and small triumphs make the informal learning way more fun. But learning to ride a bicycle in the classroom, with slides and youtube videos is way less fun. You’re not using you body, or you senses smelling the air or feeling the wind. Your not giggling as much, your just sorta there…

But this is the thing, there are ways to make you scary classrooms a little less damp. A little less boring and a little less intimidating. You can mix variables in that make the classroom more casual by having great discussions about weekend plans and tying them into your lesson. Or by watching a students youtube video that they have picked out for the class. I could add walks into part of my lesson plan, or tell students, that we aren’t marking the tests. Anything that takes the pressure off the students, so they can just be as they are, as opposed to what they think is expected of them.

I think I have some revamping to do in my classroom. To make the lessons a little less formal, to make it a little more students led, to make the day more relaxing. I wonder how it will work?

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Eaton , Sarah E. (Feb 28 2012). *10 Characteristics of Informal Learning*

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