

Article Info

Received: 25 Jan 2017 | Revised Submission: 20 Feb 2017 | Accepted: 28 Mar 2017 | Available Online: 15 Jun 2017

Importance of Informal Learning over Formal Learning in 21st Century

Radhika Mahajan*

ABSTRACT

“Informal learning is enhanced when humans participate in interactive experiences”. – Allen (2004; Birchfield et al. 2008) .The unique learning needs of every learner, support the positive human relationships needed for effective learning. Learning environments are the structures, tools, and communities that inspire students and educators to attain the knowledge and skills the 21st century demands of us all. So far, we have considered how buildings, schedules, and technology all contribute to 21st century learning. Now we come to the most essential element of all: the “people network.” This is the community of students, educators, parents, business and civic leaders, and policymakers that constitute the human resources of an educational system. The flexible spaces that enable productive learning and shared work/play opportunities, the creative uses of time that promote continuous learning, the extensible technologies that support collaboration among the school community and the outside 22 world – all these systems are valuable only in so far as they effectively support the human connections on which The age-old connection between strong minds and strong bodies has always made good sense, but we now have the educational research to back it up. If we want our children to have sound and agile minds, we need to help them achieve sound and agile bodies. To educate the whole child, though, schools must devote themselves to more than the mind-body connection alone. They must attend to the emotional and social learning needs of children, as well as to more traditional objectives of academic achievement and physical education. Research and observation shows that human ware with its par aphelia is most important. Many of the successful organizations that we see around us today attribute their success to employees who are empowered to learn and innovate at great speeds. These are organizations that have buried their outlook about traditional styles of learning and development (L& amp;D) and embraced new strategies or models. They have realized that, with the traditional approach, it is impossible to achieve a high growth or efficiency because the way people learn has undergone a disruptive transformation...from formal ‘structured’ learning’ to informal ‘social learning’.” – The 70:20:10 L& amp;D Model for Developing a High-Citizens of the 21st century need to think critically and creatively, embrace diversity and ambiguity, and create as well as consume information. They need to be resourceful and self-reliant, while also skilled at collaboration and group process. They need to understand the many “languages” of modernity – such as mathematics, science, and technology – and be fluent in varied forms of communication – such as persuasion, presentation, and self- expression. “You can see an evident shift from formal curriculum-based learning to informal just-in- time learning, and this is just the beginning!” – Pooja Jaisingh

Keywords: *Informal Learning; Formal Education; High Performance.*

1.0 Introduction

We now accept the fact that learning is a lifelong process of keeping abreast of change. And the most pressing task is to teach people how to learn– Peter Drucker The term “learning environment” suggests place and space – a school, a classroom, a library. And indeed, much 21st century

learning takes place in physical locations like these. But in today’s interconnected and technology-driven world, a learning environment can be virtual, online, remote; in other words, it doesn’t have to be a place at all. Perhaps a better way to think of 21st century learning environments is as the support systems that organize the condition in which humans learn best – systems that accommodate .Experts say 21st century

*Department of Humanities, IITM, Janak Puri Delhi, India (E-mail: radhika.mahajan79@gmail.com)

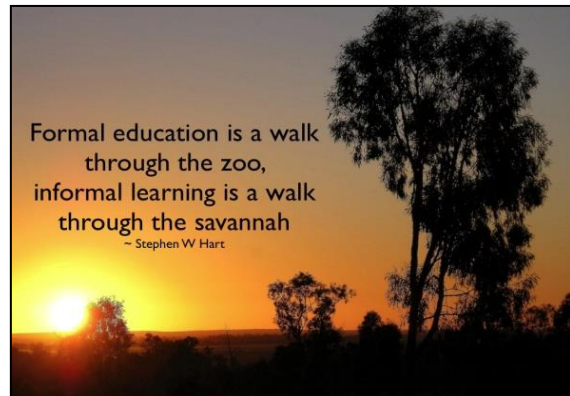
learning must take place in contexts that “promote interaction and a sense of community [that] enable formal and informal learning.” Informal learning means upgradation of human ware. Need to develop attitude through skill monitoring. . Many of the successful organizations that we see around us today attribute their success to employees who are empowered to learn and innovate at great speeds. These are organizations that have buried their outlook about traditional styles of learning and development (L&D) and embraced new strategies or models. They have realized that, with the traditional approach, it is impossible to achieve a high growth or efficiency because the way people learn has undergone a disruptive transformation...from formal ‘structured’ learning’ to informal ‘social learning’.”
 –The 70:20:10 L&D Model for Developing a High-Performing Workforce

The unique learning needs of every learner and support the positive human relationships needed for effective learning. Learning environments are the structures, tools, and communities that inspire students and educators to attain the knowledge and skills the 21st century demands of us all. So far, we have considered how buildings, schedules, and technology all contribute to 21st century learning. Now we come to the most essential of element of all: the “people network.” This is the community of students, educators, parents, business and civic leaders, and policymakers that constitute the human resources of an educational system.

The flexible spaces that enable productive learning and shared work/play opportunities, the creative uses of time that promote continuous learning, the extensible technologies that support collaboration among the school community and the outside 22 world – all these systems are valuable only in so far as they effectively support the human connections on which learning depends. Research and observation shows that human ware with all its par aphelia is the most important .If human ware lasts human being are devoid of informal learning, then they are robots.

The age-old connection between strong minds and strong bodies has always made good sense, but we now have the educational research to back it up. If we want our children to have sound and agile minds, we need to help them achieve sound and agile bodies. To educate the whole child, though, schools must devote themselves to more than the mind-body

connection alone. They must attend to the emotional and social learning needs of children, as well as to more traditional objectives of academic achievement and physical education. “You can see an evident shift from formal curriculum-based learning to informal just-in-time learning, and this is just the beginning!”
 – Pooja Jaisingh



Informal education is clearly something different from paying attention to the so-called ‘hidden curriculum’. The latter may be taken to mean those things which students learn, ‘because of the way in which the work of the school is planned and organized but which are not in themselves overtly included in the planning or even in the consciousness of those responsible for the school arrangements’. Such a concept need not be restricted to the school. The organization and planning of residential work, social work, youth work and community work also convey similarly powerful messages. Having recognized this, practitioners may then use the informal education approach in order to create an environment in which certain things enter the ‘overt curriculum’. However, they could equally use more formal means. Informal education has been an element of practice within casework, schooling, youth work, residential care and the Probation Service for some time. It has been an important part of the activity of community organizations. Yet it has rarely been given sustained attention, though this has changed somewhat in recent years. Formal Education corresponds to a systematic, organized education model, structured and administered according to a given set of laws and norms, presenting a rather rigid curriculum as regards objectives, content and methodology. It is characterized by a contiguous education process named, as Sarramonal remarks, “presential education”, which necessarily involves the

teacher, the students and the institution. It corresponds to the education process normally adopted by our schools and universities. Formal education institutions are administratively, physically and curricularly organized and require from students a minimum classroom attendance. There is a program that teachers and students alike must observe, involving intermediate and final assessments in order to advance students to the next learning stage. It confers degrees and diplomas pursuant to a quite strict set of regulations. The methodology is basically expositive, scarcely relating to the desired behavioral objectives - as a matter of fact, it is but seldom that such targets are operationally established. Assessments are made on a general basis, for administrative purposes and are infrequently used to improve the education process. Their character is, for the most part, punitive, obeying a mono-directional methodology that fails to stimulate students and to provide for their active participation in the process, though in most cases, failures are ascribed to them. The setting-up of a formal education system does not consider the students' standards, values and attitudes that are relevant to the education system which, generally, is not tested or assessed at the level of student acceptance, as well as for efficacy and efficiency. The same methodology - poor, ineffective, scarcely creative - is adopted, whether the universe contains 10, 50 or 200 students. Other institutional resources than the expositive method are seldom employed and, when they are employed, the basic learning principles are disregarded. The subjects are presented in isolated blocks, whether as to content or methodology. Thus, for instance, in the case of Physics, for techno-administrative reasons the subject is divided into theory, laboratory and exercises and, their adequate order and correlation is disregarded. In general, the objectives aimed at the personal growth of students are negligenced and, the basic principles of learning fail to be considered in the planning and the performance of education systems. It is not excessive to say that in the case of formal education, for the most part teachers pretend to teach; students pretend to learn; and, institutions pretend to be really catering to the interests of students and of the society. Thus, generally, formal education cannot disguise its aloofness from the real needs of the students and of the community.

Informal education is quite diverse from formal education and, particularly, from non-formal

education, although in certain cases it is capable of maintaining a close relationship with both. It does not correspond to an organized and systematic view of education; informal education does not necessarily include the objectives and subjects usually encompassed by the traditional curricula. It is aimed at students as much as at the public at large and imposes no obligations whatever their nature. There generally being no control over the performed activities, informal education does not of necessity regard the providing of degrees or diplomas; it merely supplements both formal and non-formal education. Informal education for instance comprises the following activities: (a)-visits to museums or to scientific and other fairs and exhibits, etc.; (b) - listening to radio broadcasting or watching TV programmes on educational or scientific themes; (c) - reading texts on sciences, education, technology, etc. in journals and magazines; (d) - participating in scientific contests, etc.; (e) attending lectures and conferences. There are many instances of situations/activities encompassed by informal education, from those that may take place in the students' homes - such as scientific or didactic games, manipulation of kits, experiments, reading sessions (biographies, scientific news, etc.) - to institutional activities - lectures in institutions, visiting museums, etc. It is easy to see that the higher the degree of systematization and organization involved in informal education activities, the nearer it will be to non-formal education. This is a relevant fact inasmuch as it suggests the possibility of transition from informal to non-formal. We must ponder that, considered by it, we cannot generally assert whether an educative action belongs to the formal, to the non-formal or to the informal universe. For instance, a visit to a Science Museum may be an informal education instance if arising from a personal and spontaneous decision by a student, as it is not directly related to his scholastic activities. However, if such a visit is part of an established curriculum, requiring from students a written report and including assessments by the teacher, or tutor, then it will probably be an activity associated to either the formal or to the non-formal education.

Citizens of the 21st century need to think critically and creatively, embrace diversity and ambiguity, and create as well as consume information. They need to be resourceful and self-reliant, while also skilled at collaboration and group

process. They need to understand the many “languages” of modernity – such as mathematics, science, and technology – and be fluent in varied forms of communication – such as persuasion, presentation, and self-expression. Advances in telecommunications and digital technologies can enable much of this learning, but it is just as important for policy makers to build on recent gains in our understanding of human learning. Research shows, time and time again, that tools are only as effective as the tool users. So along with sophisticated architectures of physical sites and technology infrastructures must come support for human growth and development for the adults as well as children that these architectures support.

We must re-design schools that reach far beyond the traditional classrooms many adults experienced when they were young. The learning environments of the 21st century must encompass a rich mix of media and devices, varied cultures, and virtual and real-life relationships. Policy must serve as the steering mechanism to guide the creation of learning environments that are both more expansive and more inclusive – spaces for learning that offer more people more access to more places and information while also allowing for close-knit social relationships among community members to flourish. Making all this happen is the task before us. It will not be easy, inexpensive, or quick. But it is essential. Organizations, like individuals, need both supports and challenges to thrive and grow. Educational policy has usually done a better job with the latter than the former. For schools today, the challenges already amply exist in the many accountabilities and responsibilities they face. Policy can, and must, do more to balance the support side, because the quality of student learning in any setting depends greatly on the quality of learning among the adults who care for them. Educators must be given access to the knowledge and tools that support professional and organizational learning. They must also be offered time and space and tools to foster the collegial conversations that foster professional norms of equity and excellence. They need strong and effective leadership – at all levels of the organization. They must have opportunities to share expertise and best practice with peers inside and outside their community.

Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever. – Mahatma Gandhi

Wisdom is not a product of schooling but of the lifelong attempt to acquire it. – Albert Einstein

References

- [1.] D Barton, M Hamilton. *Local Literacies: Reading and Writing in One Community*, London: Routledge, 1998.
- [2.] S Chaiklin, J Lave (eds.) *Understanding Practice: Perspectives on activity and context*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- [3.] F Coffield (ed.) *Speaking Truth to Power: Research and Policy on Lifelong Learning*, Bristol: Policy Press, 1999.
- [4.] Report on ESRC Learning Society research program. Cullen, J, Battersby, S, Foresti, M, Lyons, C, Stern, E, *Informal Learning and Widening Participation*. London: Tavistock Institute 2000.
- [5.] DfEE Research Report 191. Elsdon, K. with Reynolds, J, Stewart, S, *Voluntary Organisations: Citizenship, Learning and Change*, Leicester: NIACE, 1995.
- [6.] Eraut M, Alderton J, Cole G, Senker P. *Development of Knowledge and Skills in Employment: Final Report in The learning Society Programme*, University of Sussex: ESRC 1998.
- [7.] *Learning Society Research Programme*. Foley, G
- [8.] *Learning in Social Action: a contribution to understanding Informal Education*, Leicester: NIACE 1999.
- [9.] C Geertz. *Local Knowledge*. London: Fontana. Lanksheer, C, Knobel, M, Gee, J, P, Searle, C 1997, *Changing Literacies*. Buckingham: Open University Press 1983/1993.
- [10.] D Livingstone. *Researching Expanded Notions of Learning and Work and*

- Underemployment: Findings of the First Canadian Survey of Informal Learning Practices 1999.
- [11.] Proceedings of Researching Work and Learning Conference, University of Leeds, September 1999. McGivney, V *Informal Learning in the Community: A Trigger for Change and Development*, Leicester: NIACE 1999.
- [12.] J Merrifield, MB Bingman, D Hemphill, KP Bennett deMarais. *Life at the Margins: Literacy, Language and Technology in Everyday Life*, New York: Teachers College Press 1997.
- [13.] Mori Schools Survey, Children's Views on Learning, research study conducted for Campaign for Learning. Payne J, Forrester K. Will Adult Learning Ever be Popular?, SCUTREA, unpublished conference paper. Stamp, D (1998) 'Learning Ecologies' in *Training*, January, pp.32-38.
- [14.] E Wenger *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998.
- [15.] MDF Young. *Knowledge and Control: New Directions in the Sociology of Education*, London: 2000, 1971