

Revealing the Learner's Potential *The Grundtvig "Let Me Learn" project*

Mr Colin Calleja

Introduction

Me: Describe your experience at school.

Mark: I used to run away sometimes.

Me: Why do you think that school was not a place of learning for you?

Mark: I don't know but I am not stupid. Even if I do not know how to read and write, I know how to do other things.

Me: Do you mean that you found learning outside school easier?

Mark: Yes. Definitely.

Me: (on observing him send a message on his hi-tech mobile phone) For example, does the way that mobiles work interest you? Is it something you learnt how to operate easily?

Mark: Yes exactly. (Here he went on to say how he loves electronics and how easy he finds it to solve technical problems). For example, in my family I solve all technical problems, not even my brother who has done well at school can do the work I do.

I explained briefly that different persons have different learning patterns and this may have well been the reason why he did not do well in school because the teaching patterns did not tally with his way of learning.

Mark looked at me, smiled, nodded and said 'You will understand me. Are you going to be my teacher?'

An excerpt from an anecdote related by one of the participants

Over the past two years we have been working on a Grundtvig 1 project training Adult trainers in the Let Me Learn Process® (LML). This project departed from the idea that learning is an individual process that each and every learner continually goes through. The rationale of this project was the belief that educators can create a listening environment in which they can hear the voice of the adult learner, understand the learner and be a guide towards the learner's success. This project takes its inspiration from the assertion that all learners have the potential to learn to use their personal learning processes to enhance their lives.

This project focused on developing a training model, which provided all those working within the field of adult learning, training and life-long education with a curriculum to help adult learners develop strategies to succeed in their learning. This course highlighted the interactivity of each learner's mental processes explained by the Let Me Learn Process®, an advanced learning system (Johnston, 1996; Johnston, 1998; Calleja, 1998) and identified through the administration of the Learning Connections Inventory (LCI) (Johnston and Dainton 1994), an internationally validated instrument used to capture the degree to which each learner uses or avoids the four mental processes of Sequence, Precision, Technical Reasoning and Confluence.



At the meeting held in Rome at UoM's Link Campus. The author is third from left.

These tools (the theory, the instrumentation, and the curriculum) were delivered to trainers and adult learners with the purpose of creating learning environments which truly respect the diversity of the learners and their learning processes. Finally, this project sought to create an awareness and tolerance by adult educators of the impacts of the differences among learners and how these affect workplace and classroom tolerance and output.

What they say ...

The best way to capture the effectiveness of a process is through the voice of the participants themselves. During the course of their training, participants were asked to reflect on their growth and write short reflections in which they were to express how they saw themselves perform their work better. What follows are some excerpts from these reflective journals:

Jacqueline Micallef Grimaud is a teacher trainer at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) who reflected on how this training helped her to understand better candidates taking a vocational teacher training programme which she together with her colleagues were organizing.

"Within the Professional Development Centre, MCAST, Malta, we have 47 candidates (assistant lecturers) taking a Vocational Teacher Training Programme. This group is split up into three tutor groups: there are 15 candidates in my group. We exposed these candidates to a two-hour personal learning journey on one Monday during which they completed the LCI (Learning Connections Inventory). The inventories were validated by us during the week. The following Monday we took the candidates through the LML theory and a detailed description of the patterns.

Although their reactions were more or less expected, their enthusiasm for this theory and its application went beyond all expectations. In fact they are now applying the LCI, validated by us, to their students as part of their assignment on learning theories. This development could not have taken place if the team and I had not steeped ourselves in LML terminology garnered from readings and conversations, some of which we elaborated during meetings under the guidance of one of our tutors, Colin Calleja.

In observing my tutor group during their encounter with LML, I, once again, experienced that sense of elation, albeit vicariously, that I had felt during the initial training in Rome. I have come to terms with the idea that I myself have been empowered through my personal experience of LML but I have not yet fully accepted that I have been enabled to empower others endowing them with a feeling of self-worth and self-realization. I pray that I will do so with a deep sense of responsibility and all-enveloping humility."

Vesna Podgornik is a curriculum developer in the Slovenian Institute for Adult Learning (SIAE). In her reflection she expresses her understanding of the process and how she internalized it. She explains with some precise details how she intends to use it within the centre and in the training of counsellors and adult trainers.

"With the knowledge of the Let Me Learn Process® and the comprehension of its importance for the education in general (from the point of view of learning, teaching and guidance in the education of children, adolescents and adults) as well as with the knowledge and qualification for using LCI questionnaire, counsellors can help the adults within the education programmes to become more successful learners.

Through individual guidance consultation, the counsellor will make his/her clients with learning problems, looking for help in the guidance centre, familiar



At the opening of the meeting held in Città della Pieve

with LML process. On the basis of the results derived from doing the LCI questionnaire and the suitable counsellor's interpretation, clients will get to know their combination of learning patterns (which pattern they most often use, which one only occasionally when they need it and which pattern they avoid); they will also learn the characteristics of individual learning patterns, and above all, they will get to know themselves as learners. Furthermore, they will understand that people learn in very different ways, each of us in our own way. No combination of learning patterns is worse or better than the others. However, if there is a learning pattern that we avoid in our learning, we have to forge its use. Secondly, we have to tether the use of the patterns we use the most frequently. Then, if a pattern is used only as needed, we might need to intensify it. We have to develop special strategies to be able to use a certain learning pattern when it is necessary (needed). Thus, the adults in the process of education will develop their own learning strategies, which will help them to better succeed in their learning journey."

Mark Vesser Habibuw from the centre for the promotion of diversity (ECHO) in The Netherlands wrote the following anecdote after the second training session. Here he explains his experience with a simple task which through his better understanding of his learning processes he now can look back and learn how best to handle similar situations.

"Yes, I did it again....unbelievable, but true!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Knowing my patterns now, the one(s) I use first and the ones I avoid (especially the technical reasoning) I can now understand WHY I made such a terrible mistake. Shortly after our session in Rome, I had to give a three-day training seminar for managers.

On the third day of the seminar all simulations were to be recorded on tape. The management asked me to keep all the recordings after the training in order for them to take it home for some specific reason. Before taping, I got precise instructions from the webmaster about how to use the video camera, the sound, light etc. I wrote most of the instructions down on a small piece of paper knowing my lack of technical knowledge and affinity with it. Guess what ... on day three, the original video camera was replaced by another camera due to a mechanical failure. Without taking the time to read the new instructions, I started at a sort of 'at random' to tape the simulations. I hoped that luck would be with me that day whilst I knew what risk I took. By the end of the day, I only had one single simulation taped instead of the eight we had to do. I felt so annoyed because of the fact that I simply had not given myself the time to start a little later with the training in order to rehearse with the new video camera.

It has again all to do with my strong use of precision and sequence, 09.00 a.m. is 09.00 a.m. and shuffling the day's program is so difficult for me. To summarize, I have to tell myself in certain situations to be more flexible with my 'vast' training's repertoire, to allow myself to stretch my confluent pattern and take some risks."

Nicolette Camilleri, coordinator of the Literacy for those seeking Employment programme within the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC – Malta) expresses her enthusiasm as she used the inventory with her colleagues and realized how she can now understand better and in a more meaningful way those with whom she shares her working life.

"I did not realize what impact the first session had on me. I find myself trying to guess learning patterns of nearly all the persons I meet! Even though I have not yet had the opportunity to administer the LCI to my trainers and trainees, I have found myself trying to observe their learning patterns and more importantly, I have become more tolerant of their different ways of doing things. I have, however, administered the LCI to my immediate boss and my two colleagues, all three persons I work with on a day-to-day basis.

Boss: Has to approve ideas. He leads with his precision, thus wanting to know all the details. He seeks relevance due to his high score in technical reasoning and wants to have a clear plan with clear instructions (S:25 P:29 T:28 C:21). Our boss is inundated with our new ideas and keeps telling us to stick to original plans.

Myself: I lead with my sequence, I need a plan and to order my ideas but I also love entertaining new ideas (S:30 P:25 T:12 C:27).

Colleague A (We work on the same project) We always call for Colleague A each time we have a problem with the computer or anything else that would require reading the manual. Colleague A and myself never agree on the sequence of doing things. She tends to start a lot of projects before completing any of them. Often Colleague A does not read the instructions thoroughly and as a result does not understand the task completely (S:22 P:18 T:28 C:28).

Colleague B (my colleague with whom I share the room) Always insists that things should be done differently and avoids the norm (S:22 P:26 T:20 C:29).

This was such an eye-opener to us all. I was happy that all were interested to find out their learning patterns and we discussed them as we understood them. This exercise was great for all of us. We can now say that we have improved our working relationship and it was the first step to take to see the learning patterns in action around me all the time."

Comprehending the potential

Through these reflections and anecdotes one can see (albeit at the very beginning of their awareness and training) the impact this process had on these participants. So what is the real potential of this process? Where does it originate? And where is it being implemented?

The Let Me Learn process® aims to:

- (1) provide an accepting environment in which adult educators and counsellors grow in awareness of the learner's voice in which learners accept self as a capable learner and create meaningful communication;
- (2) provide a nurturing environment in which the learner's patterned learning processes are developed. This is hoped to be achieved through creating a peer awareness of unique learning processes, developing opportunities to work with other learners in a respectful learning environment and create successful partnerships;
- (3) enhance and accelerate professional development plans for individuals while helping to streamline and customize training programmes to suit an individual's or a team's learning needs. Finally,
- (4) provide a challenging environment in which learners exert independence and resourcefulness in negotiating learning experiences (Johnston, 1998) whilst building cohesion and reducing friction thus enhancing organizational morale and team satisfaction.

The above aims are not intended to create new structures within the organization, but to induce and support reorganization through self-organization. "This deep change," states Johnston (1998), "occurs only when those involved in it are highly committed to increasing their awareness of how they learn, act upon their knowledge, and take time to review with their peers their newly attained insights" (p.294). Such a process not only liberates learners but also helps create "a sense of optimism about organizational change, a sense that change is possible" (Osterman and Kottkamp, 1993, p.186).



At the London meeting

Leading the future

The Grundtvig Let Me Learn Project, which is jointly coordinated by the Let Me Learn – Malta Centre of the Faculty of Education and the European Office of the University of Malta has involved a number of European Countries and thus established the process in the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Italy, Holland and Spain. It included eleven organizations and adult learning institutions which have incorporated this process into their programmes and curriculum. The University of Malta, through its close collaboration for the past 10 years with Professor Christine Johnston from Rowan University, has succeeded in helping

these learning and training organizations to better serve their learners. This process has also caught the attention of a network of universities which have joined forces to bid for a Marie Curie 3.5 million Euros project in the field of Black Energy. The coordinators are asking the LML Centre to help them, in the words of the coordinator, "sharpen our awareness of these issues and to help to identify how ... (we can) better train young researchers. And the young researchers, once they realize how they learn best, can use this information to decide on their future career path."

In conclusion

The Let Me Learn process® hopes to continue supporting learners and learning organizations in identifying the barriers to success and set priorities resulting in increased student success measured in terms of both individual and team performance.

References:

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For further information on the Let Me Learn Process

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