

Styles of Learning

Priorities & challenges for the new millennium

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Priorities & challenges for the new millennium

Education in Australia in the last 50-100 years has been characterised by a style of learning in tune with the industrial era. In attempts to give all youth a comprehensive school education 'mass production', 'standardisation' and 'efficiency' were the operative terms and educational design seemed to be ruled by a factory model mentality.

Although this style of learning can claim significant achievements in terms of providing access to school education for the multitudes, it falls short of the mark in providing a style of learning that maximises learning for all. The rapidly changing nature of work in the emerging knowledge era, the development of new communication technologies over the past twenty years, and the development of understandings of how we learn and what supports effective learning, challenge us to develop a style of learning for the new millennium that is vastly different from the factory model. The emerging learning culture is one in which learning will:

- be lifelong
- involve learning to learn
- be learner directed
- be customised / personalised
- be collaborative / cooperative
- be in context
- transform an individual's perceptions and competencies through 'knowing directly' rather than 'knowing about'
- will occur at the point of need; learning will be 'just in time' rather than 'just in case'.

We have both the opportunity and the challenge at the beginning of this new millennium to develop styles of learning that are more suited to our natural style of learning.

From many years of researching what supports and enhances learning I believe that learning is maximised:

- in a personalised setting in which the human relationships serve to inspire, encourage and challenge the learner (*personalised*)
- by achieving genuine success and accomplishment (*customised; 'just in time'*)
- when it is driven by intrinsic motivation (*learner driven*)
- when it involves the learner constructing and reconstructing meaning from experience (*transformative; in context*)
- when learning involves authentic interactions with others, or others' knowledge, that engage with and enlarge the individual learner's experience (*collaborative/cooperative*)

- when a learner understands their own learning style and has developed strategies and approaches which access their full learning capacity rather than simply their learning preference (*learning to learn*)

If the opportunity so beautifully matches the natural laws of learning, wherein lies the challenge? The challenges lie in:

- recognising that 'standardisation' may be the number one enemy to 'raising standards'
- developing and implementing models of teaching and learning that are almost the antithesis of what most practising teachers themselves experienced as learners in formal educational settings
- providing adequate human resources to enable learning to be supported at a personalised level
- putting learning back into authentic contexts and back in touch with whole communities

Most importantly the challenge lies in developing a national mind set that sees education as a critical investment for the nation's future not simply for developing the intellectual capital of the nation but, just as importantly for developing the social capital of the nation.