**How hands on learning like doesn’t hinder the education of students.**

In this essay I will be exploring how a ‘hands on’ approach to education is a much more effective way of learning. I shall be comparing this more interactive approach to the classic approach of lectures and seminars where students would be taught using only visual and auditory aids. Throughout the essay I shall be comparing to how my own personal experiences have been effected by active learning. This academic year I have been involved in a couple of radio shows broadcast on Siren FM in Lincoln, Siren FM is a community radio station the broadcasts to the whole city of Lincoln. As a community station, the station is required to put out content to apply to almost everyone in its broadcast area. So the programming on the station can be quite vast. As students we were tasked with creating programmes to be broadcast once a week. There were a lot of shows that covered a range of topics. All this was in aid of our second year of further education.

Before I talk about learning, I must first look into the three main types of learning. The LearningRX website says that there are three main types of learning, visual, auditory and kinaesthetic. They say “Although most people use a combination of the three learning styles, they usually have a clear preference for one. Knowing and understanding the types of learning styles is important for students of any age.”(LearningRX, 2015 [online]) This is as important as it is relevant. Everyone has their own unique, specific way of learning, not everyone is the same. This then means that I am unable to generalise students, and that I can only truly speak for myself. Personally, I learn best through a mixture of visual and kinaesthetic aids. This means I learn best through watching and doing. I find it a lot easier to learning something from watching it being done and then practice doing it myself. Especially for practical tasks, my mind associates doing things in a particular method, like step by step instructions in my head. Not actually doing these steps physically can delay the learning process for me. Practically learning can help create some form of muscle memory. Not having this ‘muscle memory’ really can impede my learning process and cause it slow down, if not come to a halt.

I tend to find that lectures do not engage me and many other students enough. Lectures are good ways of getting a lot of information across to a lot of people in a short space of time. They are good for presenting theories and case studies etc, but when it comes to teaching something practical they can only be useful to a small extent. Donald Bligh says, “Enthusiasm, and motivation generally, cannot be given in presentations such as broadcasts and lectures.” (Bligh, D, 1998, p17) The point I believe he is making here reiterates my earlier point. That lectures and formal talks are generally good for information gathering, whereas more practical, hands-on tasks are better for physical engagement and enthusiasm. He goes on to say that “students were better motivated when asked to share decisions on the running of the course and when teaching methods required greater participation. Those who were more active were also prepared to accept more responsibility.” (p68) The accepting more responsibility, mentioned here, can directly reflect to us as students using I live, broadcasting radio station, as preparing and delivering a live radio show does involve a great deal of responsibility, as even though it is an academic course and an academic activity, mistakes can lead to potential legal repercussions. It can be the legal repercussions that are taught in lectures, but the practical ways to avoid them aren’t.

The world today has undeniably become a world made for interaction. Children these days are learning with the use of tablets and other touch screen devices. Schools are getting more and more equipped with interactive technology such as interactive white boards. My school was fitting them out back when I left, in 2008. Seven Years on, I can imagine that every classroom is now kitted out with one. This shows that as more technology has become available, teachers have grasped at the new opportunities to promote and increase active learning. “In fact, an increasing wealth of evidence confirms how active engagement significantly impacts student learning, understanding, and critical thinking” (Lumpkin, A, Achen, R. and Dodd, R, 2015, p121) this states how important active engagement is. Even from young children, all the way up to adulthood, I believe we learn a lot faster and easier when we are engaged more actively. As adults we can grow to learn and become accustom to such technologies with practice and persistence. You could say that we learn through experience, through actively and physically doing tasks and objectives. Boud says “While experience may be the foundation of learning, it does not necessarily lead to it: there needs to be active engagement with it. Working with our experience is one of the key ways to learning; it is an activity which we may do alone or with others, it does not normally involve any intervention by someone in a teaching role. The ways in which we can do this are limited only by the range of examples available to us and to our imagination.” (Boud, D, 1993, p9) This statement suggests that a key way of learning is through active engagement. It also closely agrees with the previous statement from Lumpkin, Achen and Dodd. They both highly approve of active engagement. After looking at both of the mentioned statements, I would completely agree. I have been shown multiple times how to use the desk in the radio studio at Siren FM, but I am still shrouded in doubt when it comes to actually using it as I haven’t properly used it on my own before. It is something that if I were going live on air, I would end up panicking and making mistakes due to lack of practice before hand. If I had used it before going live, for a substantial amount of time, I will probably increase both my confidence as well as my competence. Schank, Berman, and Macpherson say “It makes more sense to teach students how to perform useful tasks. There is only one effective way to teach someone how to do anything, and that is to let them do it.” (Schank, Berman, and Macpherson. 2013. p164). This backs up my own personal experiences very well. Allowing someone to actually practically do a physical task can only be the best way in teaching them how to do it.

Another point for active learning, would be learning in groups. When you are in a group with multiple people, there are bound to be some things that some people do know and some things that other people don’t. Working in groups provides excellent opportunities for co-operative learning. Where one person in the group can help teach someone else in the group which could, in turn, lead to them getting taught something by someone else in the group. Having a good, co-operative group is essential for active and accelerated learning. “Working in pairs and small groups during class was designed to challenge students’ understanding of content, help them review important concepts and apply new concepts learned, and provide active, change-of-pace learning opportunities” (Lumpkin, A., Achen, R. and Dodd, R, 2015, p128) In short, a chiselled down version of this statement says that group work was designed to provide new kinds of active learning opportunities. I would agree with this statement as I have found working in groups on this course has definitely increased the value and efficiency of my education. I have been able to learn from other members of my group, I have also learned to determine who would be good group members to work with and who benefit my learning potential also. However, having a group that does not work well together can be both good and bad. Both for a similar reason. It is bad because you could end up doing a lot of the work yourself, which is very time and energy consuming. On the other hand, it is good because you are doing most of the work yourself. This means that you are absorbing the whole experience and gaining more out of the activity than if the experience was shared.

There is a specific value in different people, some people are good at taking charge, some are good at creating ideas, and others can be good at keeping a team working pro-actively together. Belbin “Use Team Roles to help build high-performing teams, maximize working relationships, and to enable people to learn about themselves.” Engage and develop the talent that is already around you.” (Belbin, 2014, [online]) What Belbin do here is an interesting way in which to discover who you can work best with and also who you could learn best from. As group work is a vital part of active learning, this is an area that you cannot dismiss. Smith and Yates from the university college of Birmingham conducted some research into the importance of team roles and whether or not they are effective. “We sought to investigate whether knowledge of team role theory could be used as a means to support HE students in academic group work.” (Smith, G and Yates, P, March 2011 [online]) after conducting their research they found that “students began to question themselves and review their behaviour in previous group work settings. They recognized that, although group work is not always perfect, there are advantages.” (Smith, G and Yates, P, May 2011 [online]) The results from their research show that students become more aware of their personal working habits within groups and also say that there are advantages in knowing their personal team role. They also mention here that group work is not always perfect, but what is? I still happen to find that group work is far more beneficial to me than working alone. It also prepares us for working in groups once education is over. As we can determine what is the best way to approach a situation, and forward our career.

In conclusion to this essay, I have confirmed that I personally learn best through visual and kinaesthetic aids. Learning through doing is also a very effective way of teaching, especially on courses that involve practical participation. Allowing yourself to learn whilst doing can be vital in times of urgency or importance. You can’t teach yourself to drive a car by watching videos on YouTube. “People who are good at “knowledge games” like trivial pursuit and Jeopordy are considered smart. But, life requires us to *do,* more than it requires us to *know,* in order to function.” (Schank, Berman, and Macpherson. 2013. p164). I have also learned that working in groups is an excellent way to get yourself some hands on experience. Having people in your group that can teach things to you or even someone you can teach yourself can incredibly increase the learning experience, Dilworth and Willis say that the number one lesson from action learning is that “People learn best from and with each other.” (Dilworth and Willis, 2003, p. 6) I completely agree with this statement as I always learn better and participate more when I am in a good, hard working group. Having other people depend on me for tasks allows me to work harder so that I don’t let the team down.

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