

Do we really learn something every day?

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I take my own and others' learning seriously, asking people who say 'you learn something every day' what the 30 or 31 things they learned last month were, not once getting a credible, specific daily summary. So, during the (29 day) month of February I took my own medicine, setting myself the task of noting what I learned each day. Having kept a hand written learning log of over a million words since 1987, I felt this would not be too tough – well it was. The month was a learning-rich, and challenging, resulting in 40 pages of posts covering each day of February that can be found at my website [here](#).

Statistically I wrote up 156 specific work-related learning experiences, together with 22 pages of ongoing reading notes during February totaling around 24,000 words. Some of these incidents, reflections and experiences had 'I am a learning experience worth writing up' written on them in bright neon lights. Many others, took deliberate and often deep reflection – I was not finding this as straightforward as I thought, and there were many days that seemed sparse in terms of learning to be had. I believe that we do indeed learn more than one thing every day, but that this is not always obvious; may be mistakenly attributed; is not consciously identified nor reflected upon, and most importantly, is 'no more' than knowledge acquisition, not real learning at all!

I will explain the last comment: Learning for me is an embedded, long term change in behaviour, prompted by an experience. Thus, we show that we learned to drive – by driving. Have we learned to drive having watched videos, read some stuff, and maybe spent many hours gaming? The point is that a lot of what I was telling myself I was 'learning' was not prompting new behaviours, certainly not long term, and although such knowledge could turn into learning it hadn't done yet. I am not intellectualising here, this is seriously at the heart of what we 'professional' learning and development people do, and the month of deliberate reflection and noting highlighted how much more knowledge I feel we impart than learning we trigger.

Thinking new thoughts is not learning, knowing something new, then forgetting it soon after, as real life sweeps it away from conscious thought is not learning. Real learning takes more effort to apply and turn into long term changed behaviours than in my opinion is often enough recognised.

A month of such considered reflection made me worry that so much 'training' is in effect, instruction, resulting in little or no applied learning. I tried hard to find evidence of learning that showed I had used past new knowledge, and became aware that a lot of this learning was apparently insignificant, unexciting, incremental movements in capability, not 'wow look what I can do now' experiences. Much of what I learn I concluded is reinforcing, confirming and sustaining my existing abilities. This may cause me (and you?) to disregard the value of these seemingly insignificant, incremental movements in competence.

During February, as is my norm, I did not go on any courses, did not engage in 'training', and as is my long term habit, I was able to find daily learning from my real-world, everyday activity. This should not surprise anyone aware of the 70.20.10 model, or the vast body of knowledge that shows beyond doubt that we learn most from what we do,

not sitting on a chair, with others, none of whom have had their needs assessed or individually considered. Our different, real lives provide a constant flow of potential learning incidents and experiences, of that I am certain.

I found, during February 2020 and for 32 previous Februaries, that the richest, most learner-specific development is generated not from the mouths of 'experts' who do not know our specific needs, contexts or circumstances, but the work we do, and the lives we lead. I asked myself questions such as 'what am I learning from this?', or 'how can I use this?' each day. We can be our own best coach if we learn how to see, value and use the limitless learning content within the work we do; from the people with whom we interact, and our normal, everyday, activities.

In summary, the exercise of identifying, capturing and reflecting on my perceptions of learning from the month was hugely worthwhile. The hour and a bit per day this needed, was easily found, and equates to cigarette breaks, or coffee whilst talking about football; moaning about colleagues, or other typical and less in my view worthy uses of valuable time. If you feel your personal and professional development is a priority, then yes, you really can learn something every day.

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