

What Helps Us to Learn?



What helps us emotionally and practically to be 'available' to learn? And what doesn't help? We all have different ways of learning, or we may need some extra help at different times of the day. Some learning needs may be emotional and some needs may be practical, as illustrated in the quotes below.

Being singled out

"Everyone knew at school what group we were in. Because we had this A, B, C, D gradings, everyone knew we were the dunce group, the slow learners, and school for me was painful, because kids can be cruel and going through school I ended up fighting a lot because I was teased a lot about being a slow learner. The other strong memory of school is the teachers asking me to read out loud. And I remember the book was Tom Sawyer and it was - to read it out to the school. And I got a panic attack, because in my head all the teacher was saying was, 'Now, Clenton, read out your paragraph, read out to the class,' and it just made me so anxious"

Clenton (born 1964) <http://bit.ly/12vKjTv>

Lack of support

"At that school they never used sign language, it was an oral, lip reading education. One thing I absolutely hated about that school was having to wear the headsets. Back then we also had to wear radio aids that hung around our necks. If you tried to sign, you'd get caught up in it. I didn't like it at all. The teachers didn't sign at all, we had to lip read everything. It was frustrating!"

Philip (born 1959) <http://bit.ly/12vL1Qw>

"I didn't like when you had to copy off the blackboard because they were so fast, you'd start off writing and then by the time you got to where you want, they've rubbed it all off and then they're doing the next. I thought 'why don't they give you a chance to catch up?'"

Elliot (born 1969) <http://bit.ly/1dzGfGb>

Lack of expectations

"I did learn to read, I learned to write and I knew all the basics in maths, and really that is it. I learnt a lot about the dinosaurs. The art department was bigger than any other class, 'cause they all expected us to draw because it would keep us happy. A lot of basket weaving went on. And what else? Just days and weeks and months and years of complete unadulterated hours of boredom"

Jane (born 1959) <http://bit.ly/188hgE3>

Feeling understood

"And the teacher I had was a black woman called Francis, I loved her because she was the only black teacher I'd ever had and she was so pretty, she had really short hair, really tall. We would make models, 'cause she was mainly a Science teacher. And I just remember working with my hands, 'cause little did I know this would help bring my hands and fingers and feeling back, we would make models of ears, noses and she would from that teach me how the ear works and what this was called and that was called. It was amazing, 'cause I didn't think too much of Science but I did enjoy doing Science with her and I just remember her saying, 'Well we'll do this model,' and it was obviously of a white ear because that's what they show and she's like, 'this doesn't have to be a white ear, we can paint it brown. Let's paint it brown 'cause your ear is brown and we'll paint it brown,' and it just, I don't know, I really, really liked her"

Joanne (born 1984) <http://bit.ly/16Vjz22>

Feeling valued

"Suddenly, at fourteen, it was brought to my attention that I had some ability in art. I had no idea, and I was set an exercise, and in the six weeks of drawing this still life, I discovered that I could draw, and that I enjoyed it, so that changed my life completely. I think it was a combination of somebody seeing that I had talent, paying attention to it, giving me virtually one-to-one tuition for six weeks, and me being able to do it, and him giving me loads of praise - it just did the trick. I don't remember getting much praise, so things like 'well done' didn't happen, whereas in this art exercise, I was getting lots of that: recognition"

Deborah (born 1949) <http://bit.ly/14L24Md>

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Ideas for Discussion and Activities

Different Ways of Learning

Discussion: What's your favourite lesson / subject?

Play Joanne and Deborah's clips. Discuss with the class their favourite lessons. Why is it their favourite? Is it the subject or, like Joanne, perhaps the teacher, or the way that the subject is taught?

Writing activity: Ask the class to describe a lesson or activity where they did really well, or felt they learned a lot. What happened? What helped?

Learning Styles: Ask the class to identify their own preferred ways of learning - Access a 'Learning Styles Quiz' for children here:

<http://www.schoolfamily.com/school-family-articles/article/836-learning-styles-quiz>

Play Elliot's clip. Ask the class to think about what might have helped Elliot's learning. Do they think school is different now?

Sign Language

Activity: This is a simple activity to help children learn about and practice communicating with each other using British Sign Language. Show short two minute clip here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPRHENBO5ag>

Ask the children to look at the signs and practice them together in pairs: 'My name is...' Then they can pick out the letters for their own name (using the finger spelling alphabet) and put them together.

Download or print out the fingerspelling alphabet here:

<http://www.british-sign.co.uk/british-sign-language-bsl/free-fingerspelling-chart/>

Discussion questions: How easy was that to do? Did you have to think hard to remember it all? Was there a lot of noise while people were signing, or did they do it quietly?

Play Philip's clip. Ask the class to think about what might have helped Philip's learning. Do they think school is different now?

Sticks and Stones

Activity: This activity explores how words can be hurtful and hinder or help learning.

Play Clenton's clip to the class. Write up the following words on the white board, or a photocopied sheet. Ask the children to draw 'stones' around the negative words and discuss in small groups how it would make them feel if they were said about them.

Trying Don't panic Hurry up Well done Get a move on Stupid Full marks Noisy
Sloppy Magic Backward Untidy Neat Take your time Do it again Lazy Clever

Further discussion: What about the positive words? How would these make you feel? Is there a downside to receiving the positive words? What might have helped Clenton's learning. Do they think school is different now?

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Other Resources

british-sign.co.uk
Type in a word to get a finger spelling version to printout. Also has a finger spelling game.

Curriculum Areas

PSHE
Citizenship
History
Literacy
IT
SEAL Outcomes