

I'd Like To Learn... Please Stop Teaching Me!

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THE AIM OF WHAT FOLLOWS is to help golfers gain insights into a question that may be the eternal question: How does one move from not knowing to knowing?

On November 28, 1919, at the request of *The London Times*, Albert Einstein wrote an article on his theory of relativity and said, "In order to grasp its nature, one needs first of all to become acquainted with the principles on which it is based." (p228, *Ideas and Opinions*).

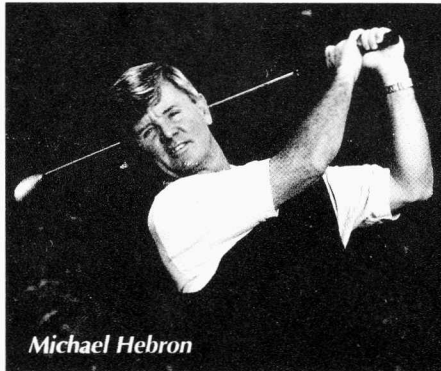
To gain relevant insights into the nature of learning, one needs to first become aware of its principals.

What our ability to learn is based on and the teaching decisions that should result are important topics.

Studies at Columbia University Teachers College have demonstrated the quality of learning and teaching that students experience will influence their future employment opportunities, living conditions, physical and mental well being, and their pace of progress in sports and other endeavors. It's the principles of learning that must be at the heart of any lesson plan (for any subject) not just accurate information. Sound studies show that only after problem-solving skills are enhanced, does a student's performance potential improve. A master of anything was first a master of learning.

I find it's more than interesting that the term "teach" is not used in *Webster's Dictionary* definitions of either learning or education. What is the genesis of learning? What develops mankind's natural potential for learning?

The view that is being put forward here is: Information that's geared for helping golfers, is not as valuable as information that's geared for helping golfers help themselves. This view is supported by respected research, and hopefully readers will recognize what cognitive science has; the influence and value that personal experience (self-organization, self-discovery, self-development) has on learning that lasts.



TEACHING By TEACHERS, MAYBE NOT!

The findings of Dr. Sue Berryman and Dr. Thomas Bailey (who I have spent time with)-and others from Columbia University Teachers College-are published in their book, *The Double Helix of Education and the Economy*. It is pointed out that "too often all schools, elementary, pre-college, college, and business training (I would add golf instruction)

fail to capitalize on what we now know about how people best learn."

Their research went on to say, "A powerful resource, cognitive science has revealed that most schooling is poorly organized for learning." (Cognitive science studies about how our brain solves problems, processes information, concentrates, plans, perceives, multitasks or how the brain learns and retains information and skills). To paraphrase the popular Bon Jovi song, "You give love a bad name," science would say some approaches to learning are giving schools and instruction programs bad names.

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Columbia University Teachers College listed five poor assumptions about learning and teaching and one was, "Learners are vessels or passive receivers of wisdom, into which knowledge is poured, with teachers in control of the learning." (Poor assumption.) Learning that lasts is the result of an active process that is personal in nature.

Teachers College research went on to say, "Putting a teacher in charge of learning will undercut a student's ability to develop several important cognitive skills including strategic planning, evaluation, monitoring and goal setting." Active learning (self-discovery) vs. passive learning (following how-to directions), will be discussed

later. Following "how to" directions from a well-meaning friend is similar to going out to dinner instead of staying home and learning for yourself. It is surprising what can be overlooked about mankind's ability to learn when teachers, coaches, parents or business training programs are seen as the main source of answers for the problem to be solved.

The committee on Learning Research and Educational Practices points out, "teacher assisted environments that guide, motivate and support self-discovery learning are more effective than teacher-centered environments. Learning skills and education do not come from teachers." The National Research Council (January 2002, How People Learn), "The goal of education is better conceived as helping students develop the intellectual tools and learning strategies needed to acquire the knowledge that allows people to think productively. Approaches to education should be geared for developing curiosity, imagination, and problem solving skills" (not for passively following directions).

The Committee on Development in the Science of Learning points out: "New approaches for learning are now coming into focus and lead to very different (1)

design of curriculum, (2) teaching, and (3) assessment of progress, than those often found in many schools today. The revolution in the study of the mind that has occurred in the last three decades has important implications for education in the future." Mark Van Doren, "Teaching is really the act of assisting discovery."

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Dr. Harold Kalawn, University of Chicago. "Our ability to make progress is hard-wired or genetically encoded into our brain, but the level of learning and developing depends entirely on the environment people are exposed to, this is absolute," (learning developing environments are different than teaching fixing environments). Science would say our brain is a sense-making, problem-solving organ, that does not have to try to learn, it just can and does in a safe learning environment, void of criticisms and corrections from others! *(continued)*

Making progress at an acceptable pace is the aim of every student, but that goal is often polarized in teaching fixing environments that offer up constant corrections and how-to directions to students. Brad Gilbert, who has won more than \$5 million and twenty tennis tournaments and once ranked No.4 in the world, was asked by Andre Agassi to be his coach and moved him from number 32 to number one in the world within one year. Andre said, "Brad built my confidence and made me believe I could beat anyone."

Patrick McEnroe said, "Brad Gilbert has the ability to keep players improving. I once had a coach who, after every match, talked about what I did wrong. Brad is the opposite—he focuses on what the player is doing right."

After Brad started coaching Andy Roddick, he became number one in the world, winning the U.S. Open at age 21. Of Gilbert's coaching style, Roddick said,

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"There is no negativity, only relentless positive reinforcement." Brad Gilbert is an example of a coach who provides a safe-learning environment where players develop the kind of learning that lasts.

There are individuals of all ages (children to adults), in a wide range of learning environments (schools, business, sports) who are having a difficult time learning. Steven Parker, author of *How the Mind Works*, director of the Center of Cognitive Neuroscience at M.I.T. points out, "The brain's special status comes from a special thing the brain does which makes us see, think, feel, choose and act."

Note: Mankind is designed for success not failure. Mankind comes into the world, (and is conceived) with the ability to simultaneously be a perfect self-learner and a perfect self-teacher (*i.e.*, After we learn we have lost our balance, we then teach ourselves to regain balance). The brain is designed to first learn then teach (adjust), and many golf tips from well-meaning friends and those found in a wide range of media sources, are trying to teach with the hope golfers will then learn. Science would say mankind is designed to learn by doing, observing the outcome, and adjusting as we see fit, based on our past personal experiences.

Active learning approaches are grounded in self-discovery, self-organization, and self-development. Active learners do, observe the outcome, then adjust based on their own past experiences. In a learning developing environment, all prior putts, chips, pitches, sand shots, half and full swings influence the shot we are about to

play. The size and speed of the swing, the alignment of body parts and the alignment of the golf club's shaft, head and face, for the shot at hand, should all be influenced by our past experiences, not by "how to" directions from well-meaning friends or tips from the media.

By focusing on what you want to do, our brain learns the "how to" from the trial and feedback of doing, observing, and adjusting in a safe learning environment. There is no failure in a safe learning environment, only usable feedback for future reference. While you may be able to help a roommate get through medical school, we could not teach him to be a doctor. Only first-hand experience could accomplish that.

Many golfers are spending time trying to fix their golf games, and are not investing time learning by doing, observing, and adjusting as they see fit, based on past experiences. I have found when golfers realize there are only five possible golf club alignments through impact; (the clubhead is either behind or in front of the golfer's hands; the club shaft is either swinging down too high, too low, or just right, and the clubface is either pointing in the same direction as the swing's path or it's not), learning that lasts is the result. In active learning environments, where golfers are playing with a variety of shaft, face and club head alignments, they gain deeper and richer insights into the cause of different ball flights.

During what science would call passive learning, golfers are following directions without the opportunity to self-organize, self-discover, or self-develop their approach to playing golf.

Note: Golfers should capitalize on their natural zeal to learn and focus on what to do (positive thoughts) and avoid trying to fix poor habits. To experience a positive pace of progress, golfers may also find they receive a greater return on investment of their time by using general, in-the-ball-park concepts, rather than in exact models. 0

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