Positive and Negative Learning Experiences

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Throughout life we learn in many different ways. Some of this learning takes place within a formal education system, and some through trainings that we participate in where we work. All of us have had some very positive learning experiences, and some that were negative. This paper offers an account of both a positive learning experience and a negative learning experience. In each example the learning environment is examined as are the instructors intended outcomes, and instructional strategies. Finally the factors that made one experience positive and one negative are discussed.

Positive Learning Experience

As I think back over my educational journey I reflect on those instances when I walked away with an intense satisfaction with what I had learned. The most memorable and positive learning experience took place over two years. I was enrolled in the School of Conscious Living in Cincinnati, Ohio. The program was designed to give students an in-depth knowledge of the Enneagram personality typing system and to certify each student as an instructor of the system and a Life Coach. The schools founder, Dr. Deborah Ooten, facilitated each session and created an environment that was not only conducive to learning the material, but also conducive to personal growth.

Learning Environment

The class consisted of eight students and was facilitated by Dr. Ooten, a clinical psychologist and an intern who has already graduated from the program. The class room was configured in a living room setting with couches and a couple of recliners. On the first day of class Dr. Ooten gave us the ground rules. We were expected to be respectful to each other. We were to share honestly when asked and to be tolerant of others opinions, ideas, and talents. If we

had a problem with another student we were to work with that person to resolve the conflict and not let problems fester. The class was also encouraged to do the same with Dr. Ooten. This was to be a safe place where we could learn about why people think, feel, and behave in different ways. Each class had the possibility of becoming very personal and very intense so safety was a must as was confidentiality.

Instructor's Intended Outcome

The intended outcome for the program was to develop an in-depth knowledge of the Enneagram Personality System and to be able to use that knowledge to improve communication, the giving and receiving of feedback, and conflict resolution. Through a deep understanding of the nine personality types of the Enneagram one would be able to "speak to the listening of another" (D. Ooten, personal communication, February 12, 2008). By elucidating the motivation behind the individuals thinking, feelings, and behavior one would be able to achieve a higher degree of emotional intelligence and therefore be able to be more successful in all areas of life.

Instructional Strategies

Dr. Ooten taught the Enneagram through the lens of the narrative tradition. The primary learning strategies lecture using PowerPoint, videos that illustrated the different Enneagram types, small group exercises. Every few months she would host something she called panel day. Panel day consisted of nine panels. Each panel represented one of the nine personality types. The people on each panel would share with the class their insights into themselves regarding their Enneagram type. This gave the students a chance to learn about the different personality types in a narrative way. Students were also given a chance to ask panel members questions. This was a great way to illustrate the things we had been learning in class.

Negative Learning Experience

Most of the learning experiences that I have had have been positive. That being said there is one experience that was extremely negative and will stay with me for a very long time. This was a training session being conducted by the newly appointed Corporate Career Service Director where I work. By the end of the training it was clear that this person had no business training anyone.

Learning Environment

The training took place in a classroom at one of our campuses. We were all seated at desks and the temperature in the room was comfortable. At the beginning of the training we were encouraged to ask questions, offer input, ideas, and to relate our experience. We all started the training feeling very comfortable and looking forward to the day. The director started the training and within a very short amount of time one of the participants had a question and raised her hand. The director quickly told her to put her hand down and told her we would be given a chance to ask questions later. At that point we all started writing down our questions as what was being taught was not making much sense to us. After about two hours of listening to the director drone one and flip through PowerPoint slides the same person raised her hand and asked when we would be able to ask questions. The director told us that when he was done we would be able to ask our questions. When the training was completed the director offered the opportunity to ask questions. No one raised their hands and no questions were asked.

While the physical environment was comfortable the psychological environment was not conducive to learning.

Instructor's Intended Outcome

The instructor's intended outcome was to provide those in attendance with tools that would be helpful when skill marketing students to prospective employers. While there was probably good information presented the message was obscured by the demeanor of the director who was doing the training. I personally did not walk away from the training having learned anything new. The conversations that took place after the training was completed made it clear that all the participants had shut down and had learned nothing.

Instructional Strategies

The only instructional strategy that the instructor used was lecture. There was no positive interaction between the instructor and the class. There were no exercises used and no chance for individuals in the class to share any of their experience, knowledge, or insights into what was being presented.

Factor Analysis

When comparing the positive and negative experience it is clear that psychological safety is vital to learning. In the positive example students were allowed to interact and the rules of respect and confidentiality made for a very conducive learning environment. The disrespect shown to the class in the negative example shut down the students resulting in little if any learning. Dr. Ooten set the tone of the class and then followed through with the creation of a safe environment in which to explore the subject and glean much knowledge. The Director also set a tone. The tone set in his case created an environment that felt psychologically unsafe.

Conclusion

Albert Einstein once said "I never teach my pupils; I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn" (Callahan, 2011). This is something that every teacher,

facilitator, or trainer should keep in mind. The greatest gift any of us can give to our students is to create an environment that is safe, hospitable, and conducive to learning. We must use learning strategies that address the diverse needs of our student. We must always strive to create for our students a positive learning experience. We do not teach; we facilitate, guide and conduct the learning process. That is our job.

References

Callahan, D. (2011). 50 Quotes about Learning. Retrieved from http://learnstreaming.com/50-quotes-about-learning/