Chapter 5
The 'Pleasure Principle' in Blended Learning Approaches

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ABSTRACT

Online technologies were met with initial enthusiasm in the UK following the publication of the Dearing Report (1997). However, this excitement soon became subdued due to disappointing outcomes and unfulfilled expectations regarding the online programmes. Considering the importance that the online component has on a blended learning programme, this chapter argues that the challenge in higher education is to get learners to want to engage as opposed to have to engage and therefore a sense of enjoyment should be added to the blend along with a sound pedagogy and an efficient technology. This chapter endeavours to discern some underlying grounded theory based on classic psychology that might underpin the efficient design of a blended learning programme and offers pragmatic considerations that might help to achieve it.

"What we learn with pleasure we never forget"
Alfred Mercier (1816-1894).

INTRODUCTION

The lecture hall has existed for 800 years (Laurillard, 2002). Despite the ubiquitous criticism of this mode of delivery, it would be naive to declare that these traditional didactic pedagogies were wholly ineffective when one considers the mathematical and scientific wonders that have emerged from this pedagogical approach throughout history. However, there is acknowledgement that although this mass instructionism has proved economically efficient for academic institutions it poses critical problems in terms of the student experience and the learning process (Bach, Haynes, & Lewis-Smith, 2007; Chin, 2004; Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Huxham, 2005; Laurillard, 2002; McVay-Lynch, 2002; Sawyer, 2006; Young, Robinson, & Alberts, 2009). Many students struggle with their degree of self-motivational potency needed to conquer

the effects of the prolonged verbal inculcations in the lecture hall: "*The news that one-quarter of students at universities in the United Kingdom are dissatisfied with their teaching, and that 27 percent are falling asleep in lectures should be a wake-up call to vice chancellors*" (The Independent, Thursday September 9th, 2004). In many cases, students neither enjoy the experience nor, if they capitulate to the banality, learn much either. "*If we could re-invent teaching again, would we start with the lecture*?" (Chin, 2004, p. 2). The number of UK university students who fail to complete their degree is typically around 20% (The Guardian, 2008) and a more recent report revealed that only 4,000 students in England achieved a diploma award out of 11,000 enrolments ("Ofsted study," 2010). Unsatisfactory student experiences, poor learning outcomes, course withdrawals and student drop-offs remain major challenges to higher education. Clearly, something is wrong with higher education (HE) as it struggles to negotiate a pathway out of an educational *cul-de-sac*. Are we wrongly focusing on education when we should be focusing on more fundamental aspects such as the student experience, and indeed, learning itself?

Holt (1982) controversially argued that almost all children fail. He suggested that the schooling system stymies natural learning processes and leaves children feeling anxious, bored and confused. Children will learn well when left alone providing that that there is sufficient stimulation in the play environment. Nurseries would seem to be ideal, but the formalised classroom where children are often told to sit and listen rather than be free to play might be impeding the natural learning process and it is possible that at times, perhaps the children could learn more in the schoolyard. Starting school at an earlier age might actually be exacerbating this perceived problem: "*There is evidence that by starting school earlier, our children are not better off than those children who are starting later*" (Lawson, 2007). If Holt's hypothesis holds merit, could a similarly negative situation be happing in the highly formalised

environment of adult education? Admittedly, it is difficult to instigate change in the vast educational arena, especially within the bureaucratic and traditionalistic domain of higher education, but we can change its internal fabric. A common theme that appears both in the 'Independent' newspaper article and in Holt's conjecture is that first, the educator perceives what is to be learned and how it is to be realised and second, this instructionist pedagogy is not generally attractive to the learner. Even if we assume that the bored learner strives to pay attention, how effective is this learning anyway and what impact does it have on the overall learner experience? Young et al. (2009) found that the level of banality can be attenuated when the content is inspiring. If educators were to focus on make learning wholly enjoyable, a phenomenon that we can all relate to during our childhood years, what impact might this have on educational programmes? This is the challenge that drives the argument in this chapter.

Introduction of E-Learning Technologies and Initial Disappointment

The advances in information and communication technologies since the turn of the millennium has revolutionised social culture and generated an impetus in exploring the prospects that this might have on education. Enthusiasm for an online option in delivering education was partly driven by the unique advantages that the innovation offers especially for adult learners constrained by domestic, vocational, geographical or disability burdens that undermined typical opportunities to engage in formal learning programmes. Furthermore, it was envisaged that an online presence might augment the traditional face-to-face teaching programme in its own right in a blended learning package. The Dearing Report (1997) accelerated the interest in technological options in education. However, online learning suffered during the early years and many felt that the promise that this online

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