

LEARNING TO LEARN

In the perspective of “life long learning” and non-formal education (Erasmus+ / ESC). **Learning to learn** ...Is one of the 8 key competences in the educational projects of EU.

But, what does it mean "to learn"?
HOW do you learn?

Apart from breathing.... learning is most likely the most common activity humans do. Yet most of us can not easily answer the question.... how do I learn?

The classical answer on how to learn is; through formal education: to go to school, or to read a book e t c.

But humans learn all the time; in formally and non formally.
In formally referring to the intake and processing of information that happens all the time - by just existing in the world. Perceiving things through our senses.

Non formally in a more hands on way, trial and error situations. Doing things together. Alternative educational methods. Organized but more holistic, using more senses.

Motivated to remember

In a sense, the core of learning is about remembering things. Names of places, names of things. The relationship between things. How things work. e t c

So how can you remember things better?

Be interested in it and thus motivated to (try to) remember it.

If the learning situation is emotionally charged, by your motivation, your curiosity. Then you are actively engaging with the information.

Example: You see a car being repaired, the wheel being replaced. You are not just standing there waiting for the car to be functional again. You are

looking at the activity trying to understand HOW one changes a wheel. Observing the details and the relationship between; hands, tools and wheel and the process, in what order things are being done. Our motivation may be that we want to save money and next time do the job ourselves.

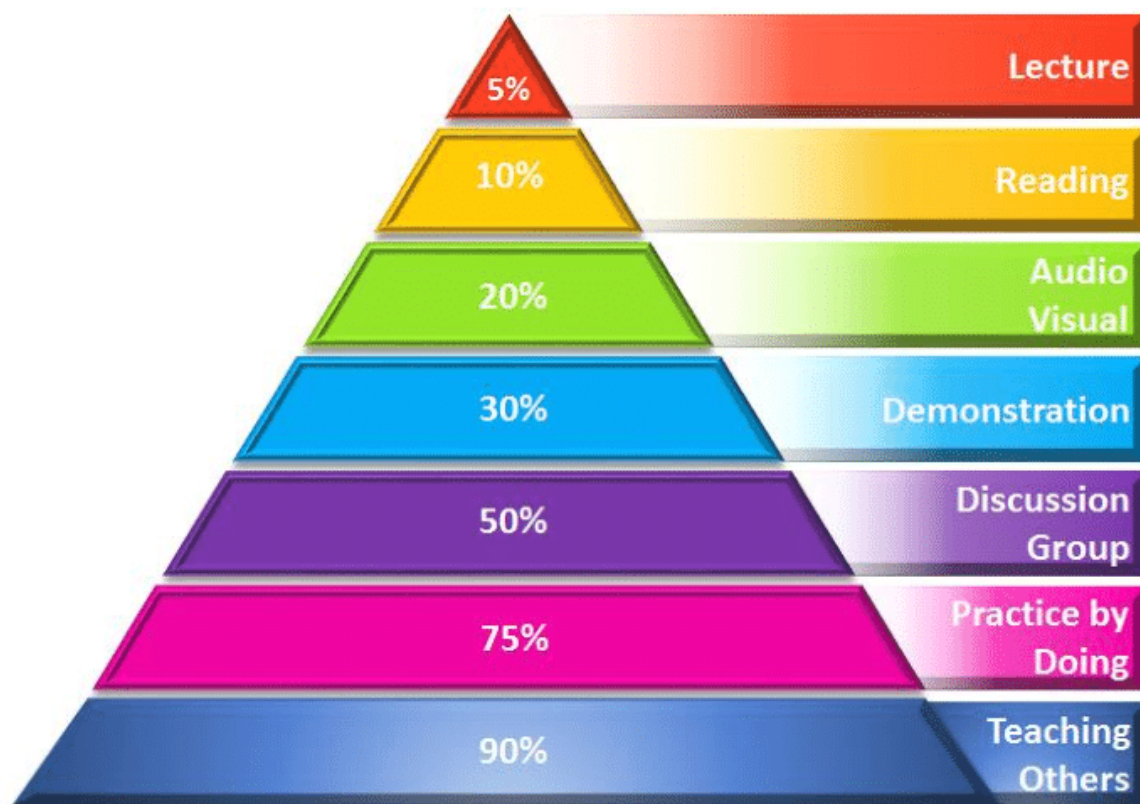
The skill of remembering

Remembering is not as much repeating something as RECALLING something.

This means: instead of reading a text 3 times, it is better to read it ONCE and then try to recall what you read, maybe tell someone about the content of the text. And maybe do that once or twice more.

That is how the brain functions. Neurons create new pathways in your brain.

In the case of changing the wheel, maybe close your eyes and imagine (recalling) doing the movements yourself.



The learning pyramid

This image is a classical description about; learning strategies.

At HFA we try to do this when starting a new work with volunteers:

Tell the aim of the activity. What the preferred goal is.

Then explain roughly how it is going to be done and by who.

Then explain the exact task, maybe draw, definitely demonstrate, let the participant try, correct, add information, try again (practice). Set (or give) a personal goal, maybe an area of responsibility.

As a learner you should use as many senses and aspects as possible.

Write it down

Say it out loud

Draw it

Talk about it - repeat it

Recall it from memory

Discuss it with others

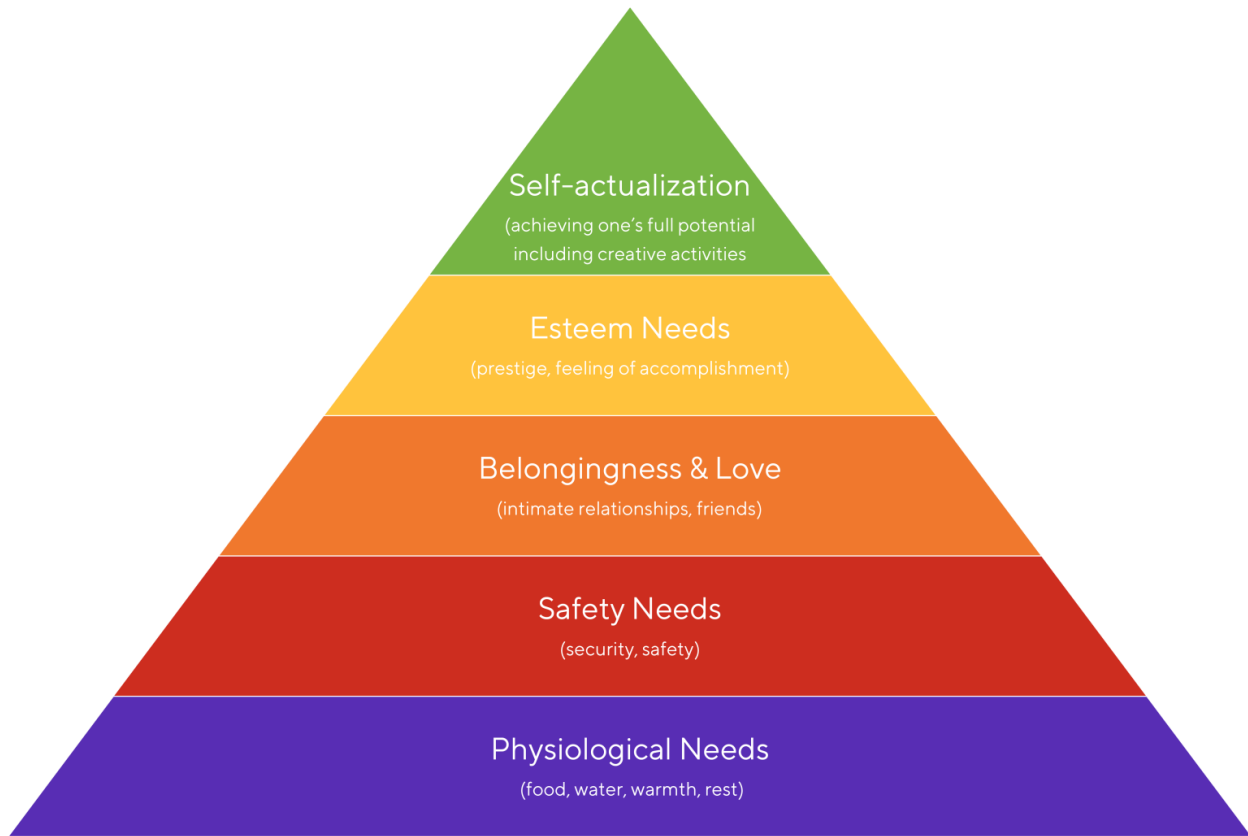
Self coach yourself

The ultimate learning (remembering and understanding) is always when you are teaching someone else the information/concept/process e t c. If each student aspires to be a teacher - that is the best. When you can teach someone else something - then you really (should) know it.

So for this to happen there has to be motivation. Maybe the teacher inspires (by giving the WHY we are learning this) or the student themselves finds motivation.

On the topic of asking

Think before you ask - asking is often a lazy escape - better think first and guess the answer, have a hypothesis, a proposition for what the answer could be. This makes your mind more involved.



How to motivate yourself

Reasons for motivation can often be found in the scientist Maslow's description of human needs. Your needs.

If our survival depends on learning something - we will learn it, most likely.

If a certain skill will make it more likely for us to have sex or higher social status, we will be VERY motivated to learn it.

Learning things is about becoming more competent. Life is long and there are many future situations that you can not predict - all skills will be useful. Sooner or later. It gives you agency and self esteem.

Different activities relate to different motivational needs. At HFA many of our activities are geared towards: community and wellbeing. This can be found in the Maslows needs.

Our practical work (building and gardening) teaches how one on a DIY

basis can address one's basic physical needs. Other activities in the soft skill areas touch the layers of self esteem and self actualization (competence and empowerment)

What is a competence

They come in different expressions:

Skills - things you can DO.

Knowledge - Things you KNOW

Attitudes - well... things like personal traits; curiosity, motivation, work ethics, respect, being skeptical, open minded, patient, confident, faith in yourself e t c

Without the right (useful) attitude - other competences are not so applicable.

The three competences are sometimes referred to as: the hand - the head - and the heart. (Images makes it easier to remember)

“Competence is HOW to apply skills and knowledge... using attitude being able to transfer this ability between different situations”

There are generic competences working behind other skills and competences.

The learning situation

It makes sense to be in a calm, safe environment and not under stress. Yet there are powerful learning situations where you are challenged and stressed (positively). You have to be outside your comfort zone to learn.

Strong emotions can make you remember things better. Negative as well as positive. An extreme way of remembering things is if there was strong anxiety that led to a trauma and it is burnt into your memory. Not advisable to look for.

A more positive way would be that the learning experience was very intense and engaging, demanding you to engage.

Learning and identity

Learning is about changing. When you change - your identity changes. Often it means that you must let go of old knowledge (prejudices) and acquire new ones, thus, becoming a new identity. Letting go of a new identity, acknowledging that the old identity was not good enough, he/she was wrong. Our egos seldom want to do that. Thus learning is hard. We must be open to question ourselves. It is not as much as learning, as it is to relearn.

Competence increases your 'identity capital', the main components of which are 'self-esteem, self-efficacy and a sense of purpose or direction in life'. There are more options available.

Learning to learn

Is a competence that includes:

- Growth orientation. A want for change (Attitude)
- Being aware that you are learning (Attitude)
- Understanding that there is a method to learning. So called learning strategies. (Knowledge)

Attitudes:

- Critical curiosity demonstrates learner's desire to find out new things;
- A desire of Meaning-making of the world/society
- Self confidence, discipline, relationship to failure (mastering; fear of failure)
- An attitude to compare "the new" with your previous experience.
- Being Deductive (observing as many facts as possible, organizing them by rational thinking into meaningful structures/concepts - basically guessing)
- Creativity; Think outside your own bias and box. Using rules in different contexts.
- Seeing your individual role in the group of learners and how you could interact.

How to master learning

- Strategies in learning; Summary;

Repeating, recalling, taking notes, asking (for second opinions), observing others work, dare to guess. Visualize the learning situation (yes close your eyes). Trial and error. Use as many senses as possible. Use both quantity and quality in your approach to new skills. Actively search for motivation (reasons for learning). Find some enthusiasm, Set up goals. Make a plan. Support the educator to be their best. Look for agency and co-creative situations. Evaluate along the way. Know the difference between internal and external motivation. Self coach yourself (talk to yourself), accept feedback from reality (the result/quality of your work) (and from people). You are motivated to learn if it poses the right level of challenge to you (if it is too easy you become bored, if too hard you may give up), problem solving is “fun” for the brain. As soon as possible look for real work - that is meaningful.

Look at others, look how others solved it, look at the finished product, try to imagine how they did it - don't wait for instructions or the manual - engage creatively.

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References

Personal leadership experience among our leaders/educators

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Ernest Hilgard, Richard C. Atkinson, and Rita L. Atkinson, who wrote Atkinson & Hilgard's Introduction to Psychology