

### *Critical Learning Incident*

The critical learning incident that I wish to address is not at university or college but at my place of work. It happened the year before as well, but it occurred again due to new changes implemented at work and also I was not at work during the year until now. The learning incident that occurred is learning to use the new computer system at work. The year before was the same however I was rarely using the system so there wasn't much to learn, also the system from last year has changed. This year I have been given more responsibilities and authority in using the new system, which is different from the year before. Normally it is expected that you learn from a book on how to use the system, but like majority of the staff at work, it was much easier to learn by observing others. The learning incident is not just one incident but a series of incidents; this is because my manager started to give me more responsibility and authority in which came more learning on using the new system to do things such as; till lifts, returns, exchanges and cashing up. I noticed that I preferred learning by watching others than by reading from a book, as I tried at first to learn from the book but it was of no use.

The reason as to why this incident is significant to me is that it finally shows that I like to learn things practically. Whatever it is I am learning about, whether it be at work or learning about teaching, the best way for me to learn is practically.

Practically, meaning by watching and observing someone else do it, then do it myself.

This method has always worked for me but I have never noticed it before. I always choose to learn things practically, but until I undertook a module at university called 'Adult Learners and Learning' I never noticed it in the manner which I have now,

which is that I have a specific way of learning things, which is basically learning by observation. I have learnt many things from using this method; obviously I have learnt to use the new system at work with all the techniques given to me. In addition I have used this method in teaching and that by observing other teachers I have acquired new skills and methods that have given me more preparation in becoming a teacher.

There have been many theorists that have observed learning styles. Obviously, the theories that have relevance to this particular incident will be looked at. Firstly one of the obvious theories that can be said to have any significance and relevance to this incident would be the 'Observational Theory'. Observational learning, also called social learning theory, occurs when an observer's behaviour changes after viewing the behaviour of a model. An observer's behaviour can be affected by the positive or negative consequences-called vicarious reinforcement or vicarious punishment of a model's behaviour.<sup>1</sup> Many examples of myself observing a colleague's behaviour and my behaviour changing because of the observation tends to occur when dealing with customers who wish to have a refund or an exchange. As I watched many times over at my colleagues who were dealing with customers wanting a refund or an exchange, I realised a 'patterned' behavioural change towards the customers, as I learnt from experienced colleagues on how the best to deal with customers regarding certain issues with their products. For example, I learnt that no matter what the situation is, never raise your voice with the customers and always explain to them in a calm manner and then majority of the time they will listen. This I have learnt by 'observational learning' which was very important for me because dealing with customers is one of the utmost priorities when working in a retail outlet.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.funderstanding.com/observational\\_learning.cfm](http://www.funderstanding.com/observational_learning.cfm)

The social learning theory was devised by Bandura, emphasises the importance of observing and modeling the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. Bandura (1977) states: "Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action."<sup>2</sup>

Bandura believed that observational learning, (which can also be known as imitation or modelling) has four component processes that influence the observer's behaviour following exposure to models. These components include: attention; retention; motor reproduction; and motivation.<sup>3</sup> The first step known as 'attention' means; in order for an individual to learn anything, he or she must pay attention to the features of the modelled behaviour. Many factors contribute to the amount of attention one pays to the modelled activities, such as the characteristics of both the observer and the person being observed and competing stimuli. The second step known as 'retention' means if an individual is to be influenced by observing behaviours he or she needs to remember the activities that were modelled at one time or another. Imagery and language aid in this process of retaining information. Humans store the behaviours they observe in the form of mental images or verbal descriptions, and are then able to recall the image or description later to reproduce the activity with their own behaviour. 'Reproduction' involves converting symbolic representations into appropriate actions. Behavioural reproduction is accomplished by organizing one's own responses in accordance with the modelled pattern. A person's ability to

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<sup>2</sup> <http://tip.psychology.org/bandura.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.criminology.fsu.edu/crimtheory/bandura.htm>

reproduce behaviour improves with practice. The final step; 'motivation' means to imitate behaviour, the person must have some motivating factor behind it, such as incentives that a person envisions. These imagined incentives act as reinforcers. Negative reinforcers discourage the continuation of the modelled activity. These four steps can be applied to observational learning, however many times I have used observational learning, but I may have use them without noticing the four processes involved.

Another theorist who can help explain learning styles in accordance with my incident is John Dewey. As with any job you are constantly learning new things by 'doing'. Dewey along with others devised the theory of 'learning by doing'. Dewey often stated that "Education is life-not a mere preparation for an unknown kind of future living... The whole of life is learning; therefore education can have no ending. This new venture is called adult education; not because it is confined to adults but because adulthood, maturity defines it limits."<sup>4</sup> As when your observe colleagues in handling certain issues at work, you tend to imitate what they did, however not always in exactly the same way, thus leading to mistakes or indifferent outcomes. From this, I learn that from doing something in a certain manner; a certain outcome is drawn (even though this is different for each individual). For example, I may behave in a slightly different manner than another colleague of mine whom both of us are dealing with the same situation and have the same consequences. However, because each individual is unique, you learn that it is sometimes necessary for a person to learn to apply things in his/her own way rather than follow exactly from someone else.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.nvc.vt.edu/alhrd/Theorists/Dewey.htm>

There aren't a lot of theories that can be used to explain my critical incident. As previously mentioned, I did not know of my 'certain way of learning' until I undertook the module 'Adult Learners and Learning', before this I did not think of any theoretical assumption regarding my learning style in any field that I am associated with (whether it is at university or at work). Now that I have not only understood my way of learning but also wrote a critical account on it, I feel that I understand myself better. I can now reflect on my learning with enthusiasm knowing that I understand the way I learn things and this can only help me learn more and make my learning more efficient.

To conclude, the critical incident was related to my place of work. Learning of new skills and techniques were the core of my critical incident. Theories such as observational learning/social learning theory by Bandura and Dewey's 'learning by doing' were both looked at in relation to my learning incident. Fortunately for me, because of the fact that I now understand the way I learn in different surroundings, this can only help me further towards my goals. This incident in conjunction with the critical incident report has changed the way I approach certain learning situations as I now have the knowledge of my certain learning style to apprehend certain situations, with this I can learn more quickly and efficiently, benefiting me and those around me.

#### Reference

Cox, E., *Psychology for A Level*, Oxford University Press, 2001

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