

KAREN FOLEY: Welcome back to the Student Hub Live Faculty of Well-being, Education, and Language Studies Freshers Event. Gosh, we've covered an awful lot today. We've been having some wonderful interdisciplinary discussions about some very topical things.

Now, it wouldn't be a freshers week without some contribution about learning. So I'm joined by Sam Austin and Kieran McCartney. Karen's hopped off the hot desk. And we're going to talk about learning to learn, so learning styles.

Now Sam's a staff tutor and lecturer in English language and applied linguistics. And her research focuses on second language acquisitions and teaching. And she has a background in English for academic purposes and academic skills development. And when Kieran's not on our hot desk, he is a staff tutor. And he is very passionate about sports more than anything else, aren't you, Kieran?

KIERAN MCCARTNEY (Staff Tutor WELS): [INAUDIBLE] love sport.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, well, I'm never doing a love sport in my book. So there's been research on how people learn. And we've got some widgets we'd like you to fill in here, some polls. What's your preferred learning style? So let us know.

And also, what do you think are three characteristics of successful learners? Remember the word cloud, need three things in. So fill those up and get them looking good for us if you could. So Kieran, tell us a bit about the research. What do we know about how people learn?

KIERAN MCCARTNEY: That's actually really interesting. There's some studies done in the 1970s and 1980s. And one that stuck out to me was how people learn in different environments. And a really interesting one where they took deep sea divers. And what they did was they had three groups of deep sea divers.

And they took 10 of the divers. And they put them on land. So two groups-- sorry, not three. 10 of the divers and put them on land. And then 10 of the divers and put them in the water. And they give them both the same lessons on different welding techniques.

And then what they did with them was they got all the divers, the two groups of 10, and put them in the bottom of the water and conducted an assessment on welding. And as you'd expect, but as everyone suspected, but perhaps not known before, those who had actually learned under the water done better on the assessment than those who were taught above land.

Now, the importance of that is that the mental states, how you learn something, where you learn it, and your emotions of that time have a big impact on how you replicate your learning into an assessment. And so when we talk about learning styles, no one has one particular learning style. But one thing is we have multiple learning styles. And that's affected by where you study, how you study, the mood that you're in, even the types of things that you're reading.

So being aware of that, particularly in an age where we learn on mobile phones and we learn with tablet devices on the go, you could be in the bus. Or you could be in a bar or a restaurant. It's important to be aware of that and that your mood can change as you transition around.

KAREN FOLEY: So there are various things that will affect learning styles and also, I guess, different ways of learning different things. I've heard some students will be talking about studying multiple modules. And some students say, well, I'll learn about this subject in this particular way but this subject in another way.

Fluidity seems to be really important here. Sam, I wonder if I can come to you and talk about some of the characteristics of successful learners. What makes learning go well?

SAM AUSTEN (Staff Tutor and Lecturer, English Language and Applied Linguistics): Yeah, well, so characteristics of a successful learner is underpinning constructivist learning theory's would. Well, they broadly encompassed three areas really. And these are people-- the most successful learners are the people who actively engage with their learning and that they lead their own learning. So they're interested, and they take a really proactive attitude to what they're doing.

And this also leads on to one of the second characteristics, which is actually the ability to question. So successful learners question what they're learning. They question the information they're given. And they also question themselves.

And they ask themselves, well, you know-- and so they reflect on their own ideas and think, well, why is this important? What do I need to know more about this? And they reflect on their own learning processes as well and ask well, how am I learning?

And what's the best way for me to learn? So and then, the final thing, really, successful learners also they learn. And they know how to apply their knowledge. And that really means thinking about what they're learning in relation to the real world.

So all the time think, well, OK, so this is the information. But what does that actually mean about the real world, about the way I live, or about what I do or about what I observe, or my experience? And obviously, add to that being determined, rising to a challenge, and everything that you'd expect really being motivated to succeed.

KAREN FOLEY: So some of those things seem quite simple to do. Other things, like I guess, some of those challenging questions, they can be learned. And colleagues in the library are often providing frameworks. And you may meet these in your module materials.

They might say, well, question it from these perspectives. Think about these particular things. What's the provenance?

What's the relevance, the timeliness, et cetera? So it might be that there are frameworks or ways in which you can try and interrogate a piece of evidence and think about the value that that really has here as well. One of the things I wanted to talk about is many students say that when they start learning, it changes the way that they think. So I wanted to reflect on that.

But before we do, we'd ask students at home about some of the characteristics of good learners. So let's see if there are some things we might want to pick up on here as well. We first got the preferred learning style.

So let's see how people like to learn first. We could see that right now our live audience say that 56 percent are visual learners. So that's really important. But 19 percent are auditory.

One of the things I love about OU materials is that they are so multi-modal. It's very rare that you will just be engaging with one source. And I think that the translation from many other universities mean that you're either just getting lectures or just getting printable here. You have a nice combination of things that do offer you some variety in terms of how you're learning. Kieran, do you want to feed briefly in on that poll and then we'll look at some of the characteristics?

KIERAN MCCARTNEY: Yeah, I mean, talk about how people learn, it's an interesting way of looking at it. You mentioned there about perceptions and things like that. If you can imagine, this is because people learn differently in different environments.

Imagine you had a pair of glasses and you could tint them pink. All of a sudden the world would sort of appear a little bit pink. But if you changed the tint to blue, it would appear blue.

And sometimes how we learn is a perception on how we look at things. And that's quite important just to be aware of. And how you learn as well, it will change on different environments. So you might absorb words quite well one day of the week, and then reading something else, you need an image in order for it to sink in. So try different methods.

KAREN FOLEY: Just reflecting on one of the things you were saying right at the start of the session, Kieran, when we were saying we're talking about cognitive reframing. And I know for some students they might think, oh, the statistics. I don't like the statistics.

Or they might be fearful of one particular thing. And sometimes reframing things can make you a lot more amenable to actually learning what it is because very often, it's not quite as horrific as you originally thought it may be.

KIERAN MCCARTNEY: Yep, absolutely.

KAREN FOLEY: Sam, let's take a look at the word cloud. We've got characteristics for successful learners. So here we go.

Characteristics of successful learners-- organised here, right at the beginning, determined, disciplined, willing, consistent, motivated, enthusiasm. Sam, are there some points you'd like to pick up on here? There's so many wonderful words.

SAM AUSTEN: Yeah, I mean, I think that's fantastic. And the one thing that jumped out at me was actually open minded. And that's-- I can see that's come up twice there. And I think that's so important.

We have to take an open-minded approach to everything we learn. And that's all about those questions that I was talking about asking. And so really be open to new ideas, to everything that your modules will do for you.

KAREN FOLEY: We had a wonderful talk, Sam, before the session about language. And it really inspired me. Actually I wondered if you could share with people at home. We were talking about how learning languages can change the way your brain functions. When you learn different terms, it can evoke different things in you. And I hadn't actually thought about things that way. It changed something in the way I thought for sure.

SAM AUSTEN: Yeah, no, well, when you learn a second language, it can actually change the way you see the world. And an example of this would be is if you ask anybody who speaks a second or third language or a fourth language fluently, they'll tell you that there are and there are things that they can say in one language that they really can't say in another. And that's because those concepts, those ideas, which are expressed in one language and not actually expressed in the other language and so aren't so immediately available to you as a person.

So when you learn a new language, you actually learn a new way of seeing the world. And you get a sort of a cognitive flexibility, which can actually have an impact on your life, which is non-linguistic. And there's some research to show that second language learners or bilinguals actually managed to solve non-linguistic problems very effectively.

And they believe that this is a result of their bilingualism and also bilingualism as a way of warding off dementia, for example. So I would say that there are lifelong benefits to learning a second language. And yes, it really does change the way you experience and the way you see the world around you.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant, and we're going to be talking about that a little bit later on in today's programme also. But Kieran, I wonder if we could end with your SEAL example of effort over skill?

KIERAN MCCARTNEY: Oh, yeah, that's an interesting one. I don't know if everyone should have heard this before. The US Navy SEALs, which are a special forces military unit. And it's a story I heard.

I'm not sure if it's true. But it's a really good one. And apparently one of the tasks they first give these SEALs is they have to obviously be able to swim. So they put them in a group of SEALs into a swimming pool and give them a bucket of rocks and told them to swim to the far end. And they noticed that one recruit wasn't swimming.

He sank to the bottom and carried the rocks. And he'd come up for a breath and go down and carry rocks again. And eventually did it so often that he passed out. And they had to go and rescue him and resuscitate him.

And when they resuscitated him and brought him around, they said to well, the instruction was really clear. Swim with the bucket of rocks to the end of the pool. Why did you not do that?

And the guy says, I don't know how to swim. But I really, really want to be a Navy SEAL. And the instructors just went, well, no problem. We can teach you how to swim. But the most important thing is that you have the attitude that you want to learn.

And I would say that for any learners at Open University. Don't worry about if you're afraid of learning content as long as you have the attitude that you want to win, that you want to learn. Those skills will come naturally afterwards.

KAREN FOLEY: That's absolutely wonderful, Kieran. And what a fine note to end on. And your hot desk place has been taken over by the lovely Jo. Jo, is everyone at home OK?

JO: Yes, yeah, everybody's doing great. We've got some great discussions going on about learning and just finding out who learns in different ways. But there's been some great tips being shared, as well, as far as post-it notes and highlighters.

And then I dare to suggest maybe people have been out and bought some new stationery. So we entered into a bit of discussion about what was useful. But yes, it really helped for discussions.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant, that's wonderful. I've got some Student Hub Live stationery coming. So I'm hoping that we can share that round at future Student Hub Live events.

So don't forget. If you've enjoyed today's programme, we've got many other opportunities to connect with our wonderful colleagues at the Open University. You can go to our student hub live website and subscribe to our mailing list and be the first to find out when we've got new events. We normally publish them about three weeks before. And we have a packed calendar throughout the academic year to get you through your studies and keep you happy and on the straight and narrow.

Right, we're going to have another little break now. This is going to be a slightly longer break. We're going to show you some campus tours. And then we will be back live very soon.

So this is your opportunity for a quick cuppa, stretch your legs, et cetera. Thank you so much for engaging in the chat. We've still got plenty more to come. So do stay tuned with us, if you possibly can. I'll see you very soon.

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