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ED 593

Learning to Learn Midterm

### The Puzzle Pieces of Learning

In trying to determine what my topic for the mid-term would be, I kept looking for things that I was good at such as math, bowling, softball, or cooking. I was holding a myth that in order to learn something well enough to teach it to someone else, I had to be great at performing the task. Since I was not satisfied with where my search had taken me, I decided to broaden my area of interest. According to Roger Von Oech's book (1986), A Kick in the Seat of the Pants, I had entered the explorer phase of the creative process. Von Oech says that wandering off the beaten path is a sign of exploring one's creative options (p. 25). I began to explore options beyond the ones that I had previously dealt with. In looking for a paper topic, I was searching for a specific talent, I was too focused—I was experiencing tunnel vision in my search.

In the explorer phase, Von Oech (1986) says that in generating new ideas, one needs to look in other fields (p.28). After exhausting my possible fields, I began to broaden by horizons. In looking at a picture on my desk, I noticed the frame, which is not normally something I would pay attention to. Then I broadened my perspective from just that particular frame to all the other frames on my desk. After thinking about all the frames, I realized that I had been taught how to make the first frame, but all the others came from what I had learned in making the first frame. According to Von Oech, I was overlooking the obvious. He suggests that when looking for ideas, to look at what resources we have in front of us (Von Oech, 1986, p. 35). All the times I had sat at my desk trying to determine an idea, one was sitting right in front of me, starring me in the face. Once I started to relate that first frame to all the others, I was doing what Von Oech (1986) would refer to as taking in the whole picture (p. 37). All the frames were a result of creativity branching from the first frame. In not looking for an idea, I stumbled upon one. According to Von Oech, I began to slip into the artist phase and started to play around with

various paper topics such as bowling, the copier machine, and frames. I had begun to take a look at the thought process behind some of my ideas. I made a decision to work with the picture frame idea.

According to Von Oech, I had now taken on the position of judge. In executing my decision to pursue the picture frame idea, I had entered into the Warrior phase of Von Oech's Creative Process.

### Background

Now that I have been discussing the topic of my learning exploration, picture frames, I should inform the reader as to what I am talking about. These picture frames are not the ones that can be bought in the store, but are created out of odds and ends that are lying around the house. The first picture frame which I learned to make was out of old magazines and a shoebox.

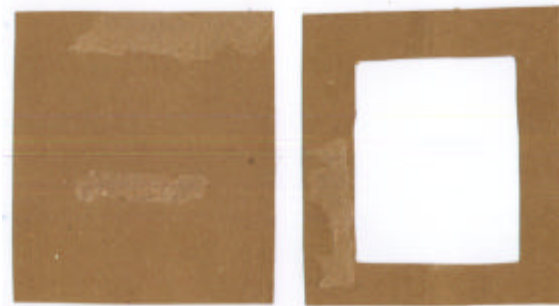


Making a frame such as this does not require a degree in art or artistic ability, but simply a desire and willingness to let your mind explore new ideas.

### First learning experience

I first saw this style of frame in a friend's dorm room and asked her how she made it. She proceeded to tell me that all she did was take an old box, some old magazines (specifically ones with lots of color pictures), scissors, a pencil, and glue. Then she said I should cut two rectangles of the same size from the

cardboard box, and take one of them and cut out a smaller rectangle so my picture could be seen through it.



First, she said to tear out magazine pages with colorful pictures and roll them up around my pencil and seal the roll of paper with some glue. Secondly, I was to wait a minute or two and slide the pencil out of the rolled paper. This should be done with a variety of pages. After the rolls have dried, I was to take half of them and cut them to the length of the cardboard frame and then cut the other pieces to fit in the remaining space. Next, I was to glue them all to the cardboard with the rectangle cut out of the middle of it. This piece was then glued on three sides to the full rectangle piece of cardboard. Finally a small rectangle was cut to glue on the back to act as a stand. Once dry, the frame was ready for pictures to be placed in it.

### Learning by experience

It was now time for me to learn how to make a frame, which I had only been told how to make, not shown. I am a hands-on-learner and I like to have visual material to relate to verbal information. In the instructions regarding this picture frame, I was given verbal material, but no visual. First, I gathered all of the material I needed and then I began my adventure. I soon found out that choosing random magazine pages was not as simple as I thought it would be. According to Learning Conversations by Harri-Augstein and Thomas, I had brought into this learning experience a personal meaning about selecting pictures – it would be quick and easy. According to Harri-Augstein I had brought a personal myth into

this learning situation (1991, p. 10). My myth was that I would just pull pages out of the magazine and go. Well, I was wrong. I began looking for pages with a variety of colors on them. I was trying to imagine what certain pages would look like together. I was still in Von Oech's explorer stage, only now I was looking at the big picture—how everything matches up together in the end.

Now came the task of rolling the pieces of magazine. I had my mechanical pencil and began to roll. Soon I realized that this would not form a nice smooth roll of paper. I used the first notion of pencil that came to me – the pencil I used everyday, my mechanical pencil. By looking beyond the obvious, I expanded my horizons and realized that what I needed was a generic wooden pencil. In looking for the ideal pencil to use I had an objective in mind. I knew I wanted the pencil to have a uniform shape so that I could roll the paper on it evenly.

I was now ready to proceed to the next stage of my adventure and roll paper around the pencil. I rolled the first one super tight and then glued the edge as I had been instructed to do. Pulling the pencil out of the paper roll was a different story. It did not come out as easy as I anticipated. Because of my experience with the first roll, I decided not to roll the second one as tight. Thus, I learned that if I loosened my grip a little bit, it would be easier to pull the pencil out. Eventually I finished rolling the pieces of paper and was ready to proceed further with my learning experience.

Now came time for me to make a decision as to how I would arrange my rolls of paper. After trying various arrangements, I found one that I liked, and glued them into place. Then I attached the back and the stand up piece. My first learning experience with making picture frames was finished, but not over. Later I would explore a variety of other frame possibilities.

## Expanding My Horizons

In making more picture frames, I began to break the traditional mode of my learning experience with the picture frame. I was now entering the artist phase of learning. I was creating picture frames different from the “traditional frame”. First I only stepped a little bit past the boundaries; I used a different shape frame, but still the same concept. Next I decided to try and use a circular frame instead of a rectangular frame.



According to Roger Von Oech’s (1990) book, A Whack on the Side of the Head, I was challenging the rules (p. 57). I was challenging the rules of the original picture frame. This in itself posed new learning conversations. Knowledge learned in making my first frame would have to be adapted to a new situation. I would have to modify my learning style to my surroundings – a circle instead of a square.

After that slight wandering from the path, I then began to take larger steps away from my original path, but my original path was still in sight. According to Von Oech’s (1986) A Kick in the Seat of the Pants, I still had my objective in mind – a picture frame. I began to take clear plastic frames instead of cardboard and used buttons instead of magazines.



I also modified my type of glue. No longer did I use Elmers glue, but I learned from other projects that a hot glue gun allows pieces to stick to the surface faster.

Later I veered from the path in a different direction. I had a puzzle that was missing pieces, so I used the pieces to make a frame.



In taking puzzle pieces to form my frame, higher-order thinking skills were used. In the puzzle frame, random pieces were not chosen. I looked for certain colors to match the picture I was making the frame for. Then when I placed the pieces on the frame, they were not just placed randomly, but they were placed with a pattern in mind. I placed all the blue colored pieces in the back and then I formed a second layer with the yellow pieces on top.

This summer I also veered from the path. While I was at Daytona Beach, I took a picture of my sisters and me and thought it would be neat for me to make a frame out of shells from the beach. When I got home, I entered the judge phase and executed this idea.

The other day while I was in the craft store, I veered off the beaten path again. I was looking at the sale table, and since I had been thinking about picture frames, these wooden letters and numbers popped out at me. I thought I could paint them and place them in a pattern to make another frame. According to Von Oech's (1986), A Kick in The Seat of The Pants, I entered the artist phase with this idea, but had not yet entered the judge or warrior phase, where I would execute my idea. Even though all of these ideas wandered off the traditional path, they still made it to the final destination – a picture frame. Each idea had it's own way of achieving the final goal – a picture frame.

### Learning Involved

In expanding my horizons, I was using my higher-order thinking skill and expanding my depth of knowledge. In making the rectangular frame, I was using shallow knowledge. The concepts I was using were superficial; I was only using what had been told to me. I was using just the facts. In making the circular frame, button frame, and the puzzle piece frame, I was going deeper with my knowledge. The key concept of building a frame was still there, but the specifics were gone. In constructing these frames, I was using my higher-order thinking skills. In making the circular frame, I could no longer simply glue the pieces on, but I had to pinch the ends before I would glue them on. I would now have to hold the pieces in place so that I would get these straight pieces to form a circle.

In this process of learning to make picture frames, I broke a variety of myths about learning. By branching away from my rectangular frames, I was breaking the rule that there is only one right answer. Some people may have seen the rectangular frame and thought that was the only option, but I went further

and decided to break that traditional thought. I also broke Von Oech's mental lock of "that's not logical" by creating different frames. In breaking this lock, I was challenging the traditional notion of a picture frame and was connecting it with things people might consider junk.

### Teaching my sister

After making a variety of these frames, I had my first opportunity to teach someone how to make one. My sister saw one of my frames and wanted to know how to make one. Specifically, she wanted to know how to make either the circular or rectangular frame. I could have told her how and just let her jump right into it as I had done, but I do not approach teaching in that manner. I feel that main points, such as how to roll the paper and what pencil should be used, should not be left ambiguous. I felt that areas such as creating a pattern and choosing pages should be left ambiguous so she can determine those herself. I could not simply tell her how to do it; I had to show her. In telling her the steps involved, I took a piece of paper and showed her how to do it. For example, when describing to her how to roll a sheet of magazine paper, I also showed her how. This having to provide visual information along with verbal probably comes from the fact that I am an extraverted person. Learning styles associated with extraversion are learning in action and learning by activity. This demonstration would also come from the fact that I am a sensing person, and people who are sensors generally prefer hands-on experiences.

Reflecting upon what is being learned and how it is being learned can help both the learner and the teacher. By re-applying the concept of picture frame, I was able to generate a variety of different ideas. I was able to learn that the way information is first presented to you is not the only way you have to use it. In explaining to my sister how to make the circular frame, I really had to put into my mindset what I was doing in each step so that important steps would not be left ambiguous. It required me to think about the individual steps involved in making the frame. Teaching her made me more aware of the intricate detail behind making one of the frames.

Watching my sister make the rectangular frame was also a learning experience. I had given her the tools I felt were necessary for her to embark on this learning adventure. I soon realized that it was difficult for me not to say something to her when she was not proceeding with certain steps the way I did. For example, when she was gluing on her pieces to the cardboard frame, she did not glue all the pieces on in one section first, but she started with the outside of the frame and worked her way in. I found it difficult for me not to say to her, “Erin you need to do it this way,” but that was the way she interpreted making the frame. In the end her frame turned out just as good as mine, which was done differently. We each had different approaches to the same problem, but we still arrived at our final results. This made me realize that in teaching someone a specific task, you need to give him or her the necessary information and let them learn their own way. It is difficult not to impose our ideas upon others, but in teaching others, we need to let them explore the situation themselves.

### Self-Evaluation

Throughout the process of creating this paper, I began to notice the subtleties of my learning process. I realized that often I take previous knowledge and apply it to a current situation. Not until I looked at all my picture frames as a whole unit did I realize that they were not each separate individual units. I realized that they were all unique, but yet they all had some common thread. In learning, I often relate material to previous knowledge. The puzzle piece frame and the magazine frame would appear to have nothing in common, but the underlying concepts of forming a design for each was the same. The thought process of rearranging the pieces until I had one that I liked was still the same, but the outcome was different. I also learned that learning does not always occur when you want it to. When I first made the rectangular picture frame, I did not have the intention of learning something, I just wanted to make something I liked. This is the way learning goes, many times we do not even realize we are learning until we go back and reflect upon the situation.

My project differed from my other ideas because it is not what I would consider a typical paper topic; it did not fit the general mode. I took an “extra-curricular” activity and made it an academic project. So many times the two are considered to be totally separate from each other.

Throughout this project, I became more aware of how learning plays a part in our everyday life. Learning is not just something that can be turned off or on – it just happens. We are learning all the time and so often we do not realize it. From my experiences this type of learning is what really sticks in a persons memory. When we sit down to “learn” something such as math, we are forcing ourselves to do something that occurs naturally. This type of learning does not have a lasting impact on us as much as unintentional learning does.

In doing this project, I realized that learning could not be forced nor taught. In helping others learn one needs to be aware of different learning styles. By teaching my sister how to make a frame, I quickly realized that we had different ways of approaching the same situation. In teaching, one needs to be aware of this fact and not force their ideas onto the learner. In facilitating learning, we need to not force our ways of learning upon them, but give them the tools needed to promote the learning process, but not a step-by step guide. I gave my sister the tools I felt were necessary to make a frame and did not force my ways of learning upon her. Learning is an individualized process and there is not a correct way to learn; in helping others learn, we need to be aware of this fact. Learning is like putting a puzzle together: first you must be given the pieces, but the rest is up to you.

## References

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