

THE SCIENCE BEHIND LEARNING: HUMAN INTERACTIONS

DISCOVER THE LATEST SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH ON LEARNING AND HOW IT WILL CHANGE CORPORATE TRAINING (FOR THE BETTER)



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WHY?

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A new agile world, where Collaboration drives organic productivity and innovation

HOW?

Empower the real Leaders

Rely on Trainers & Experts to drive your Learning Strategy

WHAT?

Deliver Engagement Set new heights within the Learning industry





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360LEARNING SUPPORTS MORE **THAN 1,200** ORGANIZATIONS IN THEIR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

















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INTRODUCTION

The quest to determine how people learn best has been pursued for centuries. Researchers, psychologists, neuroscientists, and teachers have dedicated countless hours to understanding how the human brain absorbs information in order to adapt and improve learning structures. And at last, it appears we have an answer: the latest research from neuroscientists has proven that the key to learning is human interaction.

But in today's digital world, incorporating human-to-human exchanges is increasingly difficult. Afterall, we are transitioning into a society run by technology. Working remotely is now a standard among professionals, and the rise of mobile has lead to a massive digitalization of the business world. In one word: the way we work has evolved.



98% OF ALL COMPANIES PLAN TO USE ELEARNING BY 2020.

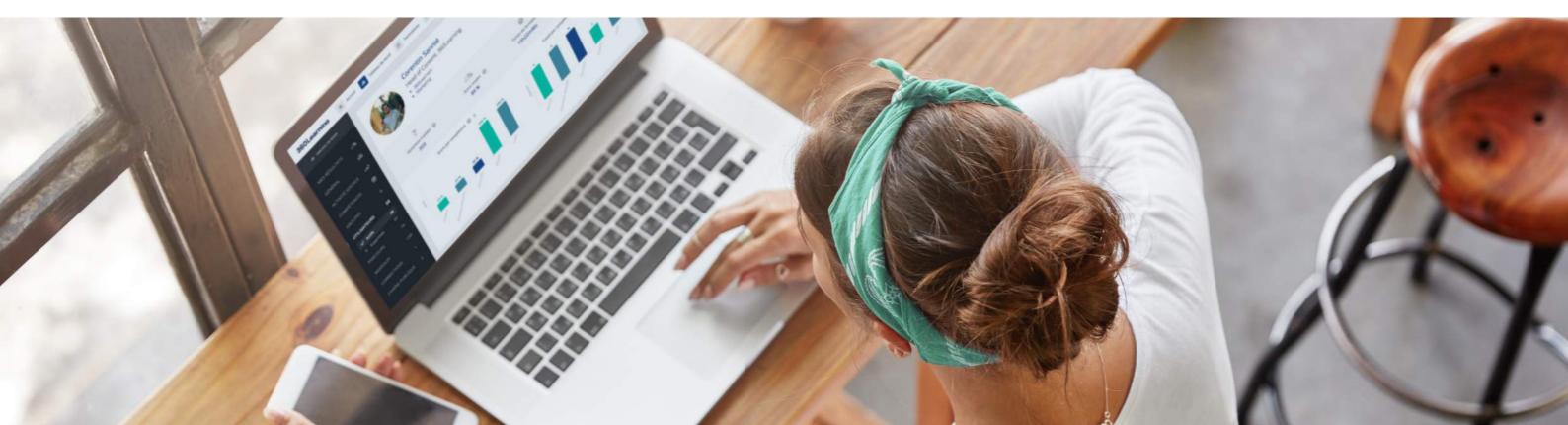
Small Business Trends, 2017

And so must the way we learn. When it comes to corporate learning, digital is the new norm: 98% of all companies plan to use eLearning in 2020¹. With business cycles moving faster than ever before, shifting to a technology-driven business model has become necessary in order to stay agile. Different methods? Yes. But the main challenge remains unchanged: engaging learners to achieve business goals.

Online courses, virtual learning, education at a distance... they give the impression of being impersonal, don't they? Let's not forget, so much of the initial appeal to eLearning revolved around the fact that you could participate in a class without physically interacting with anyone. And while eLearning makes room for opportunities that aren't possible with traditional face to face learning, can learning in a virtual setting be more effective?

Absolutely, when done correctly. Much of the online learning that exists today is built around solo work and passive courses with little human interaction, which we know to be ineffective and leads to low engagement rates. But by using the latest neuroscientific data on learning, eLearning can transition into a powerful business tool that enriches and engages learners like never before.

¹ Small Business Trends. 98 percent of all companies plan to use eLearning by 2020. https://smallbiztrends.com/2017/12/2018-e-learning-trends.html.



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WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT TO TAKE AWAY FROM THIS EBOOK

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- Learn about Active Learning & Metacognition: How learners can learn faster (and better) by becoming constructors of their own learning
- Discover how mirror neurons play a central role in the learning process, and how this could positively impact your role as a trainer
- Master the practice of incorporating human interaction within your courses, and learn how it can significantly impact your learning KPI's

The studies we will cover in this ebook range from research conducted by neuro physicists to the world renowned educational researcher Sugata Mitra. Each study examines a different component of learning, from understanding the complexities of the human brain to uncovering the pieces of human behavior that make us learn on a psychological level. As we dive into the research, we will explore the very things that enable us to absorb information, and uncover how these phenomenons can be applied in your training programs.



ACTIVE LEARNING DECREASES LEARNER FAILURE RATES

Have you ever taken a class that was so engaging it didn't feel like work? The professor asked intriguing questions and let the discussion flow organically. You worked through problems as a team and constructed your own understanding of the topics as you went. You may have even found yourself discussing it outside of class with friends. It all just clicked for you.

This isn't a coincidence.

This is an example of active learning.



Active Learning is a process where the student is involved in actively constructing his own understanding of the subject, often through group interactions and applied thinking.

And this method of learning has been scientifically proven to increase a student's engagement, comprehension, and retention of material.

HOW BIG OF A DIFFERENCE DOES ACTIVE LEARNING MAKE?

In a recent study conducted by researchers from the University of Washington, active learning was proven to positively affect a student's academic performance. And more surprisingly, they found that the absence of active learning can actually hurt a student's chances of academic success.²

The study which was published by one of the world's most cited multidisciplinary scientific journals, PNAS, was first conceptualized in response to a decline in students earning degrees in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines.

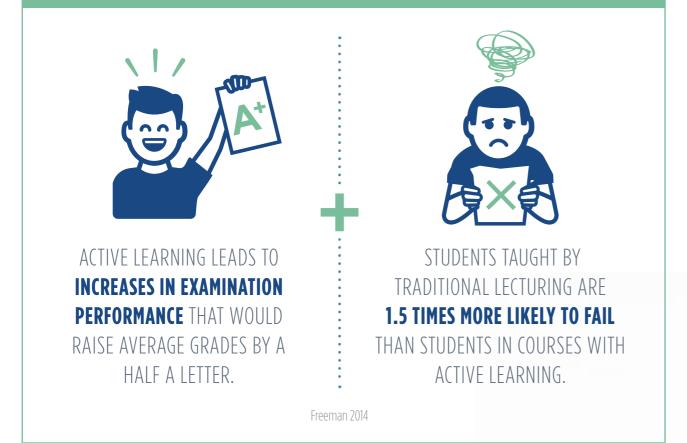
You see, the number of U.S. students entering college with a concentration within STEM fields is low to begin with at less than 40%, but of the ones that do, only 20% end up graduating with a STEM degree. Attempting to understand what could possibly be causing such a small number of degree achievements, the researchers examined the learning environments used in STEM courses and hoped to answer the following question: Which is better for student performance, lecture based learning or student focused active learning?

The team meta-analyzed 225 existing studies that tested student performance in classes with active learning versus traditional lecturing, using two different types of measures in their analysis: exam performance and failure rates.

² Freeman S, Eddy SL, McDonough M, Smith MK, Jordt H, Wenderoth MP. Active learning increases student performance in science, engineering, and mathematics. PNAS. http://www.pnas.org/content/111/23/8410. Published June 10, 2014. Accessed August 23, 2018.







This is an important conclusion as it confirms what we've been told our whole lives: actively participating in the learning process causes the student to invest more and retain the information more effectively. But these results do more than just confirm a theory we already suspected; they open the door to an entirely new discussion altogether.

What Freeman and his team found could be the catalyst that leads to abandoning lecture based learning altogether, as this is the first study to prove that passive learning is proven to **increase a students chances of failing**. This analysis may pave the way for a new era of learning.

WHAT IS THE KEY TO ACTIVE LEARNING?

In order to unravel active learning we must first understand why it works in the first place. What makes active learning so much more effective than passive learning? What does it have that lecturing does not? It all comes down to one thing: human interaction.

In active learning the student is forced to discern and practice what he is learning *as he's learning it* - something that can only be achieved through human interaction. This is not a process that can be internalized.

Activities that involve collaboration and sharing of ideas among students promote a deeper level of thought and create meaning for the learner.³ Online exercises that foster human interaction such as peer discussion, team problem solving, and group tutorials, allow the learner to apply the material learned while simultaneously gauging his level of comprehension through peer validation and feedback.

Implementing human interactions within learning fosters better motivation, stronger retention and comprehension, and above all, it creates a human connection - a key cognitive function which is vital in learning.

3 Conrad R, Donaldson J. Engaging the Online Learner: Activities and Resources for Creative Instruction. San Francisco, California: John Wiley & Sons, Inc; 2004.





MIRROR NEURON STUDY UNVEILS HOW THE HUMAN BRAIN LEARNS

From their very first day on earth babies learn by interacting with other human beings. It takes no more than a few minutes to teach a baby how to smile, stick her tongue out, wave her hand in the air - simply by showing. Observing and replicating behavior in this way is the most basic form of learning, and it applies to the way we learn as adults, too.

Have you ever felt the intense, cringeworthy secondhand embarrassment of a comedian being booed off stage, as if you were the one being heckled? Or have you ever witnessed someone bump their elbow on something and immediately felt yourself tense up and say "ouch!" in solidarity with them? These aren't coincidences.

It's the reason why when someone smiles at us we can't help but return the gesture, or why they say yawning is contagious. These instances of empathizing with someone simply by observing a behavior is made possible by mirror neurons.

WHAT ARE MIRROR NEURONS?

In order to understand mirror neurons, let's first examine the study⁴ that lead to their discovery. In the 1990's, Italian neurophysiologist Giacomo Rizzolatti and his team conducted a series of experiments to study the neurons that control motor movements in macaque monkeys.

In each experiment, a monkey would perform an action with his hand or mouth, like reaching for a piece of food, and the team would record the corresponding neuron activity. What was surprising, though, is that **the same neurons that fired when** performing the activity would also fire when the monkeys observed someone else performing the same activity.

This means that our brains are able to adopt the behavior of the person we are looking at and respond as if we are the ones doing the action - which is truly astonishing when you think about the impact these neurons might have had on mankind and the way we have evolved as a civilization.



4 Rizzolatti G, Fabbri-Destro M. The Mirror Neuron System. Handbook of Neuroscience for the Behavioral Sciences. 2009. doi:10.1002/9780470478509.neubb001017.



MIRROR NEURONS IN ELEARNING

The basis of human comprehension stems from observing, comprehending, and imitating, as proven by the discovery of mirror neurons. But how do we take what we know about mirror neurons and apply it to learning in today's digital world? After all, the way we learn today is much different than 500, 50, or even 10 years ago. Could mirror neurons still play a role today?

Absolutely. While it's true that online learning is the future of education, a virtual environment does not need to mean an environment without human interaction. The mirror neuron process is just as relevant in an online setting and this is why it's so important to foster human interactions within eLearning.

The internet itself was designed to be a web, connecting people to one another - and eLearning should be viewed in the same light. Learning courses should aim to replicate the same human interactions that happen in face-to-face settings, and yet many of them have completely ignored this.

For example, many of today's eLearning solutions, despite adopting a forward thinking concept to begin with, are modelled using noninteractive, boring formats. Traditional SCORM modules are designed to be passive, with the learner clicking through slides and following outdated cartoon "guides".

Education online has replicated the 'sage on a stage approach' which has already proven itself to be ineffective. Furthermore, when human interaction is removed from learning, the brain is denied its most basic instinct: to observe, form a conclusion, and replicate.

THE KEY TO STIMULATING YOUR LEARNERS

It's unclear how long exactly the mirror neuron system has been established, but one thing is for sure: the neurons in our brain that adopt the action of others have played a key role in shaping human beings today. And as sure as humans will continue to evolve, mirror neurons will continue to differentiate us as intelligent beings.

Knowing that mirror neurons play a role in human learning, incorporating human interactions allows you to create a learning setting where students learn from each other as they go, stimulating comprehension. Actions like peer feedback or interactive quizzes will inspire students to discern meaning from the courses more efficiently, creating an enhanced learning experience. Since it is clear that these special neurons promote learning, it is certain that their presence in online trainings will boost learning achievements and transfer of knowledge. Whether in the real world or online, the same rules applies: to learn we need to interact.



THE COGNITIVE **NEUROSCIENCE BEHIND** THE STUDENT-TEACHER **INTERACTION**

It takes two to tango, and this is especially true when it comes to learning: transfer of knowledge is a two-player game, a symbiotic relationship between teacher and student.

And one of the most effective ways to ensure both parties are actively engaged in the education process is to teach by **asking questions**.

Recent scientific research examining question-asking as a teaching method has proven that not only does interactive dialogue increase knowledge gain in learning settings, but it also increases the level of engagement for the teacher.

And since the two go hand in hand, a more engaged teacher equals a more engaged student.

HOW DOES ASKING QUESTIONS EFFECT ENGAGEMENT?

Asking questions might just sound like another method to add to your playbook, but it has a much bigger effect than we ever imagined. Science has proven that by asking questions while teaching, there is a significant increase in brain activity in both the student and the teacher - which is the neuroscientific way of saying "increased engagement".

To further solidify this notion, let's take a look at a scientific study that proves that student-teacher dialogue leads to greater knowledge transfer and comprehension. In the study called **The Cognitive Neuroscience of the Teacher-Student Interaction**⁵, scientists Antonio Battro and team sought to uncover the implications of the "teaching brain" in order to re-conceptualize how we understand the process of teaching as an interaction.

To do this, they had 17 pairs of subjects read an educational dialogue that involves the teacher asking questions of the student and used near-infrared spectroscopy devices to measure brain activity. What they found was that whenever a teacher had high brain activity during the discussion, the student also showed higher than normal brain activity. And the opposite was true for students who had lower than normal brain activity, as the teacher in these duos also exhibited lower than normal brain activity.

⁵ Battro AM, Calero CI, Goldin AP, et al. The Cognitive Neuroscience of the Teacher-Student Interaction. Mind, Brain, and Education. 2013;7(3):177-181. doi:10.1111/ mbe.12025.





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RESULTS FROM THE COGNITIVE NEUROSCIENCE OF THE TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTION STUDY



THE RESULTS DEMONSTRATED A STRONG POSITIVE CORRELATION IN ACTIVITY **BETWEEN THE STUDENTS AND THE TEACHERS** IN EFFICIENT EDUCATIONAL DIALOGUES

(IN WHICH THE STUDENT TRANSFERRED THE KNOWLEDGE).

THESE FINDINGS INDICATED THAT WHENEVER A STUDENT SHOWED GREATER ACTIVITY (COMPARED TO THE AVERAGE OF THE STUDENT POPULATION) THE TEACHER ALSO SHOWED GREATER LEVELS OF ACTIVITY (RELATIVE TO THE AVERAGE OF THE TEACHER POPULATION).

These findings prove that asking questions of your student generates higher brain activity. And interestingly, when the teacher is more engaged in the conversation, so is the student. Teachers who use active discussion with students are proven to be more effective because the teacher feels more motivated, the student learns and retains more, and the content of the courses improves thanks to the numerous feedbacks and exchanges happening in the class.

What we can take from this is that asking questions will not only result in an overall more effective learning process, but the teacher's level of engagement will be infectious for the student. Talk about a win-win!

HOW DO WE MANIFEST TRAINER ENGAGEMENT?

It should come as no surprise that an engaged teacher is a better teacher, as the same rules apply regardless of your position: when you are interested and feel connected to what you are doing, you will do it better, with more passion. But so rarely do we read articles discussing the importance of instructor engagement.

There unfortunately isn't a ton of data readily available on learner engagement or student-trainer interactions, which is why so much of the teaching advice we read is a bit abstract. But this study is different, because it gives us hard facts that cannot be ignored: there is a direct correlation between teacher engagement and student engagement, meaning when the teacher has higher brain activity, the student will follow.

So now we beg the question: how do we manifest teacher engagement? We know that active learning is significantly more effective than passive learning, and that mirror neurons play a star role in how we learn when interacting with each other, so incorporating active learning and human interactions are a smart way to begin increasing teacher engagement.

But taking it a step further than that, the answer lies right within the research method used in the study: asking questions is neurologically proven to increase teacher engagement, and it is this type of discussion that will be a game changer in your learning strategy.



HOW TO INCREASE TRAINER ENGAGEMENT IN ELEARNING COURSES

The positive impact of questions and feedback is undeniable, and neuroscience has proven that this method will lead to an increase in teacher engagement. But these dialogues can **only** happen if human interactions are present within the course, which is why it is imperative to include question-asking throughout your eLearning courses.

When transferring this method to your eLearning strategy the components for successful development need to include open conversation and dialogue, collaboration, and knowledge of subject. Creating an environment where the teacher feels empowered and engaged is the secret to improving learner engagement, as one will undoubtedly follow the other.

Trainers, just like students, learn best when motivated to learn and are actively engaged with other human beings. And the easiest way to begin improving your own engagement is by asking questions. As we said before, it takes two to tango!



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SUGATA MITRA'S GRANDMA CLOUD STUDIES REVOLUTIONIZE THE ROLE OF THE TRAINER

While some may argue that eLearning is less effective than traditional face-to-face instruction, recent experimental studies from Educational Researcher Sugata Mitra suggest otherwise. In fact, when the instructor is excelling in her role, remote learning is **more** effective!

Traditionally, an instructor acts as a lecturer: the sole voice of the classroom leading the less-informed through a series of speeches explaining the information, in a one-sided dialogue. But in today's world, we don't need instructors the same way we used to: we need them to curate conversations and foster human interactions.

And ironically, this style of instruction is the most effective way to drive learner engagement. Let's take a look.

WHAT MAKES SUGATA MITRA'S THEORY OF ONLINE LEARNING SO REVOLUTIONARY

Humans are hardwired to learn: it is in our DNA to constantly gain knowledge, improve, and flourish.

But how powerful is this instinct of ours? Is it powerful enough for a group of students, for example, to teach themselves a complex subject in another language? It sounds pretty unlikely but that is exactly what happened in the first of a series of experiments conducted by Education Researcher Sugata Mitra.

Known as the father of educational research for the 21st century, the work of Sugata Mitra provides the most revolutionary insights into learning available today. His **Hole in the Wall** and **Granny Cloud** experiments are the two most significant educational studies of the last decade and the conclusions he has drawn have gained the attention of scientists, educators, human behaviorists, and psychologists worldwide.



What differentiates Mitra is his belief that through human interaction, students can learn through technology effortlessly.

He challenges the notion that transfer of knowledge must be difficult, and much of his work is dedicated to making education opportunities available to students in rural parts of the world. But his findings have done more than prove that education can happen remotely: he has proven that it can be more effective and lead to lasting comprehension. The following two experiments will unveil how technology coupled with human interaction has defeated the odds for learning online.





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THE ONE THING THAT MAKES REMOTE LEARNING EFFECTIVE

In what he dubs the Hole in the Wall Experiment⁶, Mitra brought a computer with internet access to several rural countries around the world and left it for the local children to play with. In each location, the children managed to teach themselves how to use the computer within hours and were observed recording each other singing, sending emails, and playing games on websites they found on their own - all on a computer with the language set to "English", a language they did not know.

Pleased with how successful these experiments were going and happy to find that learners are able to succeed in unlikely circumstances, Mitra wanted to test the limits of this phenomenon. What he found in this next experiment is truly remarkable:



1 He set himself an impossible target: can Tamil speaking 12-year-old children in a South Indian village teach themselves biotechnology in English on their own? And he thought, I'll test them, they'll get a zero - I'll give the materials, I'll come back and test them - they get another zero, I'll go back and say, "Yes, we need teachers for certain things."⁷

2 He called upon 26 children and said to them "There's some really difficult stuff on this computer, I wouldn't be surprised if you didn't understand anything. It's all in English. I'm going now, good luck!" and he left.

3 When he returned two months later their scores had gone up from zero to 30% - an educational impossibility given the circumstances.

4 He found that not only had the students learned the complexities of DNA replication and genetic diseases, some of them had taken on the roles of instructor and would help the other students learn, all on their own accord.

- 6 Mitra S. Hole-in-the-Wall Beginnings. Hole-in-the-Wall Solution. http://www. hole-in-the-wall.com/Beginnings.html. Accessed August 23, 2018.
- 7 Mitra S. Kids can teach themselves. TED: Ideas worth spreading. https://www.ted.com/ talks/sugata_mitra_shows_how_kids_teach_themselves. Accessed August 23, 2018

·(5)- WHAT

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR LEARNING?

It means that learners are capable of much more than they are given credit for and the instructor has more powerful leverage when viewed as a facilitator, not an education-provider.

There may be times where you are tasked with leading a training on a topic that you yourself are not an expert in - and that's okay! While internal experts can shine within an organization by providing coveted resources and know-how, eLearning modules can be just as effective when lead by someone with baseline knowledge. The findings from this study show that the level of engagement of a course depends on how inspired and encouraged the learners are, *not* how knowledgeable the instructor is. When we view it in this way, the possibilities for effective learning engagement become vast and reachable.





It is our capacity to feel emotion that separates humans from other species. Many psychologists even go as far as arguing that every decision we make is driven by emotion on some level. And it makes sense - at our core, we all want the same things: to feel valued and important. So it should come as no surprise then that emotion is able to motivate us to do incredible things.

So what happens when you combine human emotion with learning?

Sugata Mitra had a hunch that encouragement and facilitation might help improve his student's scores, so he tried a second approach with the Biotechnology students. If you recall, their scores had gone from zero to 30 percent, but 30 percent is not a pass.

So I found that they had a friend, a young girl, that they played football with. And I asked that girl, "Would you teach them enough biotechnology to pass?" And she said, "How would I do that? I don't know the subject."

I said, "No, use the method of the grandmother. What you've got to do is stand behind them and admire them all the time. Just say to them, 'That's cool. That's fantastic. What is that? Can you do that again? Can you show me some more?'"

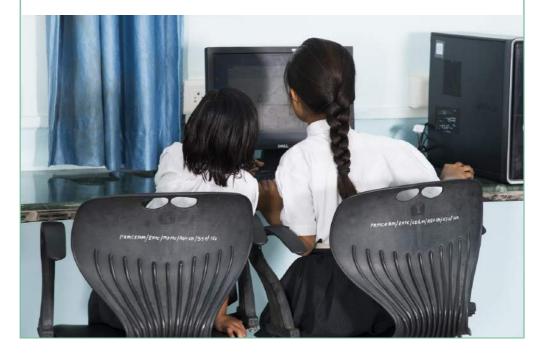
She did that for two months. The scores went up to 50, which is what the posh schools of New Delhi, with a trained biotechnology teacher were getting."

Their scores increased to 50% by simply having someone motivate them and ask probing questions, which tells us something pretty important about the human condition: since the desire to learn is inherent in each of us, the likelihood of engagement (and therefore, success) is dependent on how inspired we are. Positive reinforcement through human interaction has the power to quite literally lead learners to success. Knowing this information, reaching learning KPIs becomes much more attainable, doesn't it?

This revelation lead to what has become Mitra's most famous achievement: The Granny Cloud⁸.

SUGATA MITRA'S GRANNY CLOUD

In an attempt to test of the limits of online learning and the role human interactions play, Mitra created an online school where Grandmothers from the UK volunteer one hour a week in an online course with students from rural parts of the country. The role of the Granny's? To encourage the students in whatever they are learning, giving praise and making the students feel proud in their work. And just like in the previous example, these Granny's have zero previous knowledge on the subject matter - their effectiveness lies within their ability to encourage and stimulate conversation, not lecture information.



Why has this method been so effective? It all comes back to what we know about humans. Human emotion is a powerful motivator, and positive reinforcement is a tried and true way to stimulate behavior. And secondly, active learning and human interactions can drive learners to achieve results that would never be possible with a stagnant online learning course that lacks interaction.

The most significant part of this experiment was that the encouragement from the Granny instructors took place remotely, in online human interactions. This solidifies the effectiveness of online learning and can make a case for how elearning should become a staple in your learning strategy.



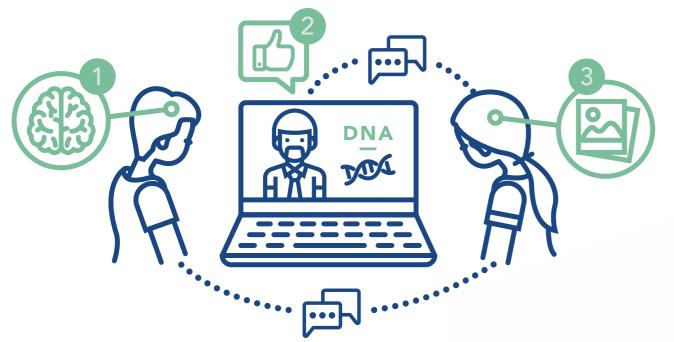
⁸ Mitra S. Granny Cloud. School in the Cloud. https://www.theschoolinthecloud.org/ people/the-granny-cloud/. Accessed August 23, 2018

WILL LEARNING IN THIS WAY LEAD TO ACTUAL RETENTION?

The findings from Mitra's education experiments were remarkable, but still we must ask the question: Does learning in this fashion work in the long term? Is any of this information actually retained? Surprisingly, **yes.**

Knowing that critics might ask the same question, Sugata Mitra tested the students again 2 months after the original assessment and found that their scores stayed the same, and in some cases actually improved.

How is this possible? Because the conversations that took place among the learners during the courses triggered a dozen different responses that make it more memorable.

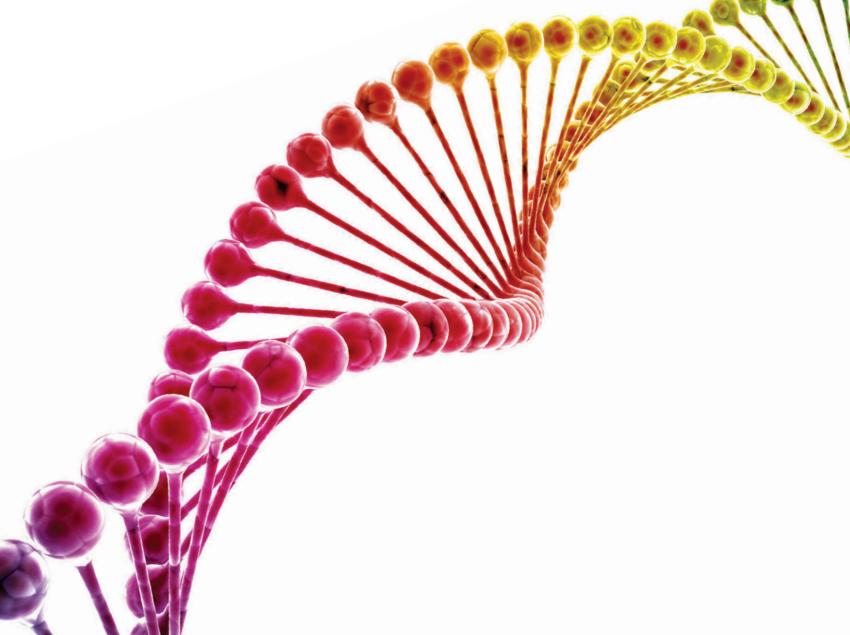


1 The memories from interacting with one another are more strong than the memories form simply reading the material. By learning actively and socially, the learning process became emotional. And the part of the brain that handles emotion, the amygdala, also handles memory, which is why strong emotional events are more easily remembered. (So if you've felt moved by the Granny Cloud studies, or shocked by the Hole in the Wall experiment, you will very likely remember these lines in a few weeks!) 2 The students felt a sense of **self importance and pride** when they found the correct answers, which triggered a positive emotional response, strengthening the memory.

By discussing with each other and their instructors online, the children were left with **visual photographic memories to recall on**. The learning process was a success as a direct result of the human interactions that took place, which tells us just how important these types of interactions are.

Sugra Mitra believes that education is a self-organizing system, where learning is an emergent phenomenon. In this light, **we can view learning as the result of humans coming together in an attempt to evolve, which means instructors can be celebrated as guides who stimulate the learning process.**

The future of learning seeks to embrace this fact, and it is for this reason that the trainer will play a starring role in the engagement of her learners. Mitra's research proves how important human interactions are to online learning, and using his findings, learning leaders can now be empowered to directly influence the success of their programs.





O5 CONCLUSION

With access to the latest research at our fingertips, and advancements in technology allowing for the more innovative studies in education, we've never had more information about how the human brain learns. As the world around us advances, education is beginning to take on a new form - from rigid classroom with set hours, to fluid blendedlearning environments, unbounded by time or place. And learning leaders must adapt.

With innovation comes opportunity, and the future has never been brighter for learning and development professionals. The instructors of tomorrow will encourage and curate conversations, by creating the setting and allowing the learners to interact, in remote settings. The role of instructor will become more engaging, as the job will be less administrative and more involved with the learning process. Trainings will become more interesting, and engagement rates will skyrocket. And the best part? When the role of the instructor shifts to community leader, there is no need to have one instructor per topic, since strong subject knowledge is not necessarily required. You can let experts within your own organization take the reins, which will cut down on costs for the training modules.

With the information from these studies available, the future of learning has never been brighter. And since we believe education is the answer to almost all the world's problems, we're happy to be a part of it, along with you.

At 360Learning, we know that Smart Human Interactions are the key to learning. And it is for this reason that our Learning Engagement Platform is built around fostering human interactions, allowing learners and trainers to engage with one another seamlessly. Interested in implementing human interactions to your corporate training strategy today? 360Learning offers free trial of our learning engagement platform!

For more information, visit: <u>https://en.360learning.com/signup</u>





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