

School of the 80s: Learning from Leisure, Experience, Vulnerability

by Dr. Jane Vella

I've been in school, one way or the other, on both sides of the desk for the past eighty years. I have never been in a school where my learning was so delightful, my appetite for it so voracious, my joy in it so deep – as this “School of the 80s.”



As I tried to understand why this is happening, I thought of three factors that go with my being 86 years old.

1. I have exquisite LEISURE
2. I have long EXPERIENCE to use as a base for new learning
3. I have new VULNERABILITY

Look forward to this decade, all you young'uns. You will be amazed!

LEISURE

I remember when [Julius Nyerere](#), first President of Tanzania, published the paper “[Education for Self-Reliance](#)” (published in 1967). The paper emphasized practicality, relevance and immediacy. “Teach them something they can use NOW,” Nyerere appealed to Tanzanian educators.

Sister Margaret Rose, the wise and saintly woman who was the Founder of [Marian University College](#) where I was teaching at the time, argued with her friend Julius: “Without enough leisure, the girls will not learn!”

Sixty years later, I see that in my life. *Learning and leisure are partners.*

A parallel invitation, from Father Robert of St Mark's Episcopal Church in Raleigh, NC is: “Put silence in.” Robert does that himself in the liturgy, before his sermon, and in conversation. “Put silence in.” Hmmm, silence in dialogue? Yes!

EXPERIENCE

I look back on the experience of my life with awe, thanks and praise. Every event – joyful, tragic, comic, sad – has the Grace of God in it. I can see that now and expect the next event to be so touched. That new appreciation of my experience makes it a useful base for new learning.

The [learning needs and resources assessment](#) (LNRA) and the first of the [4A model](#) for design learning tasks (Anchoring/inductive work) - moving from the particular context of

the learner to the general new skill, knowledge or attitude - both serve the use of past experience.

VULNERABILITY

I walk slowly. I tell friends: “Don’t walk behind me. I just may just slip into reverse!” I need help with some basic tasks around the house! I forget stuff! I am vulnerable.

So, I have to *ask for help* and that has evoked a *new* Jane. I like her! I respect my vulnerability as an exquisite gift which shows a human, needy old lady who trusts friends to respond. They do! Oh, my, they do!

Somehow this relates to my capacity for learning – I am not sure how, but it does. I see perspectives that are different from mine with new empathy, and awareness that I might just need such a new perspective at this point in my life.

Come and have a **leisurely** cup of tea on the back porch with the old **vulnerable** lady who has a store of stories for you from her rich **experience** and new learning!

How much LEISURE do you invite your learners to in your learning events?

How do you use what you know about your learners’ EXPERIENCE – past and present – to shape engaging, challenging, and relevant learning tasks?

How can you celebrate your own VULNERABILITY at any age, so you gladly ask for help?

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