



**Book Review: Ellen J. Langer, *The Power of Mindful Learning*.
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Ellen J. Langer (2016) in her book, *The Power of Mindful Learning*, spotlights the significance of learning mindfully through which multiple, creative, and flexible perspectives on learning is fulfilled. As Langer (2000) declares, it is in sharp contrast with mindless learning and overlearning. Forming mindsets, taken-for-granted beliefs about learning which are accepted and followed mindlessly in traditional approaches to learning, prevents the individual from being creative and active in the process of learning. It is worth noting that Langer's perspective on mindfulness or mindful learning should not be considered as a step-by-step procedure to be followed in order to gain desired output. Rather, as Campbell & Campbell (2009) put it, it is a lens through which all components, i.e. teaching approaches, textbook, teachers, learning styles, etc., dealing in educational realm get analyzed. The book includes seven chapters; each scratches a dimension in learning from mindful perspective.

Chapter One – When Practice Makes Perfect

The old saying “*practice makes perfect*” is seemingly rooted in behaviorist school of psychology. No need to mention that behaviorism made many contributions to learning (Schlinger Jr., 2008), but to Langer and Moldoneavu (2000) overreliance on repetition seems to trigger mindless learning instead, forming mindsets which in turn, as Hyland (2015) puts it, is a hindrance to discovery. In this chapter, Langer adds a third possibility to the traditional teaching approaches, i.e. lecturing or using direct experience. Her “sideway learning” approach involves creating a mindful state which helps the learners make distinctions, be creative, be able to look at information from different perspectives and make discoveries.

Chapter Two – Creative Distraction

In this chapter, the author makes a distinction between “paying attention” and “being mindful”. Many scholars, such as Robinson (1995) and Schmidt (2001), have repeatedly reemphasized the pivotal role of attention in learning. The generally accepted idea of paying attention as “holding a picture still in one’s mind” is challenged by the notion of “varying the picture” in order to learn more powerfully with less effort and frustration. The premise is that students should be led to vary aspects of what they are learning and look at things from a different perspective.

Chapter Three – The Myth of Delayed Gratification

This chapter explores the mindless attitude regarding educating in a course. Such utterances are common, for instance, “if we survive these courses, we’ll get our master’s degree and then we’ll have better lives”. Langer criticizes the aforementioned attitude and explores the thought-provoking question “Why do we think of learning and education as ‘work’?” in her point of departure.

The notion of work connotes pressure, deadlines, possibility of failure, and drudgery. From the mindful learning perspective, it is believed that, no real learning happens when the rewards, of any kind, outweigh the work. Langer asserts that the mindful engagement approach described here is to notice novel aspects of accomplishing a task to draw novel distinctions. Drawing distinctions is subjective by its nature; therefore, the internalization of the learning, here mindful learning, can proceed.

Chapter Four – 1066 What? Or the Hazards of Rote Memory

Throughout this chapter, Langer scratches the limitations of rote memory itself, and then its imposing limitations on the notion of creativity in learning. What she deems here to say is that rote learning, according to Houston (2007), has gained its own advocates regarding language learning, in L2 vocabulary learning particularly.

Langer proposes that a distinction between facts and ideas prevents the learners from memorizing any “closed packets of information” as facts with no meaningful relation to one’s life. Learners need to learn how to change their way of looking at things in order to relate any presented information to their own interest and life; to make the new information meaningful; to follow a mindful attitude.

Chapter Five – A New Look at Forgetting

Forgetting is an unwelcomed notion in learning information, knowledge, skill, etc. of any kind in any realm of study. Here in this chapter, Langer proposes a new dimension of forgetting that boosts the learning mechanisms rather than blocking it. Mindfulness, according to Langer, is living in the moment. Mindless memorization of prior knowledge which was applicable to its own situation reduces creativity. Mindful learning is sensitive to context and to the situation at present which may change the way in which we view/use the information we learned: hence forgetting can help us to do so better.

Chapter Six – Mindfulness and Intelligence

In this chapter, Langer prompts individuals to examine their own beliefs about intelligence and to see how their beliefs and assumptions affect their perceptions of self, of others, of personal control, and the education process itself. She proposes the alternative ability, i.e. mindfulness, to deal with the experiences; to look at it from different perspectives; to consider all pieces of information as novel; to attend to the context; and to create new ways of understanding. This meaning-construction process helps us deal with new information with more flexibility and openness to novelty.

From mindful perspective, Langer pinpoints that thinking is a process through which individuals in general, and learners in particular, sort, select, and assess the appropriate approach, technique, strategies and procedures in order to achieve the desired objective by applying them to any novel task. In other words, the larger our context of learning and the less learners are attached to a specific problem-solving strategy, the more flexible we witness learners get in thinking; in this regard, mindful learners move from one perspective to another.

Chapter Seven – The Illusion of Right Answers

In the final chapter, Langer deals with the usefulness of open-mindedness and the notion of uncertainty in producing novel ideas. It is worth noting that, according to Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, and Freedman (2006), what plays a pivotal role in enhancing creative thinking is uncertainty which makes learners to discover meaning, in general sense, without leaning any stone untouched. Sticking to mindsets eliminates any probability of looking for ways of getting to the desirable outcome based on the context. The emphasis in this chapter is on the learners' ability, which is idiosyncratic in nature, to view, assess, and draw conclusions on their own experiences, data, etc. from multiple perspectives.

In a nutshell, mindful learning sheds light on the notion of idiosyncrasy of learners in accomplishing a task. That is, it is odd to consider an absolute criteria and path to fulfill an objective. This seems to be the major theme of the book.

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