

Learning Brain Expo Report: Dr Rich Allen

Dynamic Training & Teaching

Rich Allen delivered a fantastic all day pre-conference session that left his audience inspired to integrate his advice and techniques into their teaching.

He modelled the principles of 'Humane' presentations and referenced the neuroscience that explained why the strategies worked – and why 'traditional' teaching methods, if over used, are largely ineffective.

The take home message (a useful Americanism.....) was a frame of nine Key Delivery Strategies that could serve as a personal checklist for teachers or a framework for lesson observations.

- Meaning - a reason, purpose and interest
- Tone - conversational?
- Movement - to change state
- Different - novelty to wake up the brain
- Choice - for the audience
- Talk - too much teacher talk, not enough audience talk?
- Pause - especially when the audience is looking at visuals
- Language - constantly positive or inducing stress?
- Partition - segments or chunking

A further useful reflection would be to consider on the audience/class experience. What's the audience doing when the teacher is talking (sitting?), showing a video (still sitting?)? We should essentially pay attention to the 'crest of the wave'.

"Much like waves in the ocean that build, peak, then come crashing down there are swells and crests, and tumbles in levels of engagement. When students' ability to draw useful learning from a given mode of instruction has been maximised, the crest of the wave has been reached. At this point it is in the best interest of both teacher and students to move to some alternative form of interactions, to engage in distinct change of pace that will recapture their focus and interest".

Rich demonstrated that the power of music to generate state change and, with the aid of a Bose Music dock and an iPod set up with appropriate play lists,

edited to key phrases in well known songs and controlled by remote, he inspired me to dash out and buy one.

He also demonstrated the untapped potential of our brains by describing memory techniques that enabled everyone in the room to remember 2 x 20 items in a matter of minutes: essentially by creating key peg boards and marking connections with trigger points and associated movements – it's easy when you know how!

A final 'take away message' for me was the power of positive communication. I was forced to reflect on a phrase I had used only last week with my class 'You have just two minutes left'. What effect does the 'just' have on students? The word frames the final two minutes as being stress filled, increasing anxiety and the release of damaging hormones. I could reframe the message as: 'You have plenty of time. Please make sure all your answers are written as clearly as possible during the final two minutes'. Same message, less stress, more effective learning.

In short, by demonstrating effective process skills, Rich made us feel smart. He's a definite choice for the LBE and I recommend we consider including him in the programme for 2009.

P W Rubery
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