

FINE POINT

Success First

Thinking Environment

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SUCCESS FIRST

Maryse asked this question: 'Why do you design your courses with lots of teaching and instruction up front so that people's first experience (of the Thinking Pair, for example) is successful? Why does it matter that their first experience is successful? Can't it be just as valuable for them to reflect afterwards on what was not successful?'

I think that the first experience of anything becomes the reference point for the second experience of it. If the first is negative, our second experience starts with a kind of wariness, a slight expectation that the second experience will be negative, too. We have nothing to build on, only something to destroy and replace.

So our minds during the second experience are fragmented. We try to focus on two things at once: the undoing of the first experience, and the creating of the second one. It is harder work. It takes more energy. Ease diminishes. And our fragmented attention can weaken the second try.

The first negative experience also carries an emotional charge that takes more than one subsequent experience to eradicate. Negative emotions give way slowly. And they easily bleed into

positive ones, perversely. (This is a survival trait, but by now long past its usefulness, I think.)

Also, if people can do it successfully, the first time, they don't have to undergo the self criticism/embarrassment of having gotten it wrong, especially in front of a group of people. They, on the contrary, have the self-boosting sense of their own competence. This feeds the next practice and the next. And energy that always accompanies success adds to their ability to do the practice well again.

So I find that the time and care it takes to set up the first experience so that everyone is as certain as possible to do it well, to internalise what a good Thinking Pair is, and how it is different from anything they are used to, pays for itself multiply. The time spent there leads to much less time spent on correction and resistance afterwards.

I guess this raises the ancient question, 'Do we learn more by venturing forth, stumbling and correcting the mistake; or by preventing the mistake in the first place if we can?'