

“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn” (Benjamin Franklin). Do you agree?

Yes. In other words, being told something is fleeting, being taught something is more memorable but learning something is unforgettable.

Benjamin Franklin’s words, rather tidily define the debates that have surrounded the theory and practice of teaching and is very often used as the motto for the theory of experiential learning. This is perfectly understandable, as although Franklin was self educated and an avid reader, he learnt through experience. A simple modern example of learning through experience is best demonstrated in learning to drive; yes there is theory; yes there is teaching; but you actually have to do it to learn.

It could be said that Franklin’s statement nicely sums up the modern teaching methods that are now actively employed to engage and encourage students and make learning more memorable. However, his words do say a little bit more and to appreciate this, we have to consider the contemporary context.

Franklin was a man of the Enlightenment; the age of reason and of empirical

investigation. To ‘involve’ suggests inclusion and participation and that was key to his time. The people of that age actively involved themselves and encouraged others in the attainment and betterment of knowledge.

Interestingly, although American, Franklin spent some time in England and actually visited Birmingham, as he was acquainted with certain members of The Lunar Society.

All from different backgrounds, like Franklin, they enjoyed and participated in a variety of the arts and sciences. They epitomised being involved to learn. When together, they recreated experiments that they had read about to see for themselves or demonstrated their own ideas to each other. Even when apart, they communicated their own inventive ideas and the discoveries of others. They offered their opinions and made suggestions on each other’s work. In essence, the members collaborated, debated and researched just as academic communities continue to do today.

Their involvement, not only with each other but also with associates such as Franklin, allowed them to learn about the world around them and to make their own contributions to the various arts and sciences. Theirs was not passive learning but involved learning.

When those seeking knowledge today, join in and contribute to debates; when they volunteer to try a new skill; when they write about their experiences or thoughts; when they visit a place that they have read about; when they attend or contribute to festivals and seminars; when they conduct an experiment to see for themselves; and when they watch a performance or compose one of their own, they are being involved. Their learning is enriched and far more memorable.

Perhaps agreeing with Franklin is fitting, in this the 250th Anniversary of The Lunar Society. As it all began in an age that is never forgotten because wherever there is involvement, the principles of that age are always being learnt.