

Learning Detective I: How you are smart. Everyone, including you, does something uniquely well that no one else does. Maybe you were rewarded for such talents in school, and maybe your strengths went unnoticed. That doesn't matter; what does is that you recognize your own strengths - no matter how trivial you think these might be, and how you bring your strengths forward to use now and also incorporate into a new 'I can learn' identity. Let's unpack this a little more and help you discover your genius.

First, identify and write down what you are good at. C'mon, don't hold back! If you draw pretty well, list 'draw;' if you fix stuff pretty well, list 'fix stuff'. If you tell jokes, or imagine fantasies, get angry or solve puzzles quickly, then list this. Don't judge your activities, just inventory them. Now, describe how you do this: Note all the details about this: timing, location and context (and to confirm, this is NOT a test but is for your own information. You don't need to share it with anyone).



Of course, whatever you're good at doing reflects your learning, so let's look at this more closely - let's 'inventory' your 'learn-scape.' Think about what you listed above. How, exactly, did you learn this skill? Watching someone? Trial and error? Both?? Now, identify what influences your learning and doing. If you are more productive at some times than others list why you think this is so: What conditions help or hinder your learning: is it your ability to concentrate or your emotional state? Is it the food you eat? How tired you are feeling? Thinking about past experiences (school, home, etc.)? Is your learning influenced by other things?

Learning is a complex activity. And to optimize your learning potential you must understand your own learning 'ecosystem' to amplify what helps you learn and reduce what hinders your learning. By the way,

experts say a little stress helps spark learning but too much stress blocks it.

Thinking about math and learning: Some of you have experienced some success at math. Others might say, "F*** math! I don't think in numbers and algebra or any of that crap!

You can rant about it but I don't believe you. I'm no math whiz myself but I've lived long enough to see that everyone learns and practices math in some ways. Maybe in school you didn't succeed in solving math word problems or algebra equations or geometry, but 'math' is much more than just these things or a course grade.

'Math thinking' is logical thinking: If this, then that. "If it's snowing and I wear shorts I'm going to get cold. So I'm going to wear jeans." It's solving puzzles, playing cards, shooting hoops, fixing a truck, and cooking.

Ever done any of those things? Okay, it's confirmed, you 'do' math. It's time to get beyond past judgments and how someone might have said to you, "you can't do math."



Your homework: I'm going to feed your brain and your soul in this column but you have work to do to get the full benefit of this. Your work is to think about what you're good at - your 'genius' as I mentioned above - and think about how you might apply your 'genius thinking' to other things you want to learn. Think about this! Write stuff down as it occurs to you. And you need to get clear on what you want to learn. Not what you're pissed off at or what doesn't work for you, but your learning goal(s). You can change this later but for right now, get clear on this. I'll have more to share in my next column.