One Person's Philosophy of Online Facilitation and Learning

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Albert Einstein is quoted as saying, "I never teach my pupils. I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn." (Einstein, n.d). I cannot predict Einstein's educational philosophy, however, 'providing conditions for learning' fits into my personal philosophy well. This philosophy has developed over twenty-two years of classroom and DL experience. Lately, I'm developing a more narrowed philosophy, focusing on the world of online learning and also considering how my philosophy has been strongly influenced by 50 years of living as an introvert in an extrovert-encouraged world. In this composition, I have attempted to connect my inner traits and personal experiences, to my philosophy of online facilitation and learning, by outlining my environment, my beliefs, and my identity.

I work in the Vancouver Island community of Port Alberni, as a DL teacher in the CHOICES program. I have worked with CHOICES since its inception in 2004, when we were servicing home-schooling students in a largely 'paper-based' program. Quite quickly, our program evolved and moved 'online', using Moodle as our platform. Now, we support a K-12 population, with the local high school making up a large part of our enrollments. Our DL school has continuous enrolment with a limited population base. As a result, while some courses can have over 50 individuals, others may only have 2 or 3 students enrolled at any one time. Very few students are ever in the same place, at the same time. This makes building an online community very challenging. It also makes quality teacher-student communication even more important, and that has influenced my philosophy for how online facilitation and learning can be most effective, for my students, at this time.

Major schools of learning have influenced the beliefs that support my philosophy. I nod 'yes' to behaviorists Pavlov and Skinner (Ally, 2008), agreeing that sometimes learners can be seen by their responses to outside stimuli. I'm fully on board with cognitive thinker, Ausubel (Ally, 2008), as I can visualize learners as information processors. I also appreciate the validity of the constructivists' theory that learners need to find "immediate application and personal meaning" (Ally, 2008). In addition, the sometimes-chaotic world of connectivism with its theory that acquisition of knowledge comes from people, "seeking inquiry to a common interest and providing feedback to another", (Kopp and Hill, 2008) is intriguing. By exploring my beliefs, I know that my philosophy requires me to keep considering all schools of learning, to keep adapting to the present situation, and to keep the individuality of my learner in mind.

Along with my beliefs, my philosophy must also take into account my identity. I know that I need to think before I talk, and my extrovert counterparts who find clarity in conversation sometimes overwhelm me. And, there is a part of me that is hugely uncomfortable with the public nature of private thoughts in our world of technology. Therefore, the question, 'Who am I in my work?' is influenced by these introvert qualities. However, we are shaped not only by whom we are, but also by what we have experienced. And so, I look back on those teachers who I remember as being the most effective. Almost exclusively, these individuals guided indirectly, offering clear and unobtrusive assistance. This style fits well with my inner self, and my philosophy. In the classroom, my lessons were short and focused, leaving plenty of time for student practice, one-on-one communication, feedback, and reflection. Now, online, my approach is similar. At its core, and at this time, my philosophy for online facilitation and

learning is to create online lessons that are chunked and engaging, allow for lots of practice and reflection, give constructive feedback often and consistently, and never forget that communication is vital

In conclusion, developing a philosophy of online facilitation and learning is a complex activity that results in a product that is not set in stone, but is able to adapt with the circumstances of the working environment and the growth of the individual. The American journalist, Sydney J. Harris said, "Information is giving out; communication is getting through" (Harris, n.d.). If I keep this in mind, as my philosophy continues to develop and evolve, I don't think I can get too far off course.

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