My Philosophy of Online Communication

and How it Relates to Online Learning

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**Introduction**

This paper serves to outline my philosophy regarding online communication as it relates to teaching. I will discuss what I believe learning should look like both online and off. I will look at who I think I am as an educator and how I feel I am perceived. Finally, I will explore the driving forces behind what motivates me as well as some examples of theory as it relates to my practice.

**My Beliefs**

I believe that learning is constructed by the learner through activities that are relevant to them. In my first years as a teacher I had the opportunity to watch a fellow teacher, Avi Luxenburg, speak to a group of Administrators. He spoke of this idea of ‘context’ and it struck a major cord around which I base many of my decisions to this day.

In my original paper I improperly referenced a fellow teacher and his views on ‘context’. I think it is important to come back to that instance when I first heard fellow teacher, and friend, Avi Luxenburg speak about the relevance of placing learning within a contextual environment as it has shaped, and continues to shape, many of the decisions I make when it comes to my lesson planning (Luxenburg).

He spoke of a student of his trying to solve a problem with the game programing with which he was engaged. In order to solve this problem he had to gain a better understanding of Cartesian Coordinate Grids. This student needed this piece of mathematical information in order to get further along in his journey. Few things in my career have had such an impact as did this revelation and concept of learning. One of the many reasons that I am in this program is to continue my pursuit of that Holy Grail of learning opportunities: the ability to make learning a necessity; a desire; a passion.

 In Karen Kear’s article *Online and Social Networking Communities,* there is a case study involving Canadian border crossing trainees. Though initially skeptical, the learners eventually concluded that this type of learning allowed them, ”to apply these skills in a contextually relevant setting.” (Kear, 2011, p.37)

This may mean that a student needs to learn about a coordinate grid in order to create the next level of his video game. It may also mean that a student gets sunburned because she did not put on enough sun lotion while on a field trip. I am not naive enough to think that all learning must have a personal consequence or benefit attached to it. I do think, however, that if we as educators want our information to ‘stick’, we need to think in terms of, “Why does the student need/want to know this? and “How will it help them in some present or future endeavor?”

It is these types of experiences that I believe online learning allows for. Using

technology we are able to put learners in situations that would otherwise be unavailable to us in the everyday classroom.

**My Identity**

One of the most powerful statements that I have encountered so far in this OLTD course comes from Salmon Kahn in his Ted Talk of 2011. He states plainly that, “I just want to be enjoying my time with my students.” (Khan, 2011) This concept, I believe, is what makes me a good teacher.

I do not say this easily or with any attempt at boasting. This opinion is derived from numerous students, as well as adults who have visited my classroom throughout the years. The number one statement that I receive from past students is, “You were yourself and you treated us as equals and with respect.” I strongly believe that this perception comes from me just trying to be who I am while I just happen to be teaching. I think many teachers get caught in a role that they think a teacher ‘should’ look and act like.

My ten-year-old daughter came home recently and said, “I like Madame. She is strict when she needs to be, but knows how to have fun with us as well.” I turned to her and said, “Ella, that is the best compliment I believe you could ever give a teacher.” It is what I strive for and it is how I believe many of my past students would describe me.

 **My Mission**

In a case study in an article by Meijer, Korthagen and Vasalos (2008, p.304), a women goes through the process of seeing how getting to know herself has an impact on her teaching. She,”starts to enhance her capacity for ‘professional reflection’ and the integration with effective professional behaviour.”

 For me personally, a huge revelation came when I was struggling in one of my practicums. I had been trying to “follow” an act. Meaning, my teacher was basically a stand-up comedian who was a great story teller. Upon reflection, following one failed lesson after another, I eventually realized that this was not who I was. It was the first time that I realized, “I had to be me”.

 This is still the case in my teaching today. I have recently reflected on the matter of who I am with different classes that I teach. When I am forced to be ‘Mean’, Mr. Ferneyhough with one class, I am far less relaxed, I have far less fun, and in turn the students of that class do not get the same level of enjoyment out of their learning.

My goal throughout this entire program, and perhaps with the help of this course, is to continue to find lessons, units, programs and strategies that help me be who I am and reflect the ‘core values’ that I have set for myself.

**Conclusion**

As I continue in my class to blur the lines between Face-to-Face and Online learning, I will be searching for the ways that best suit particular students’ needs. I have the benefit of seeing these kids on a day to day basis. This allows me to get to know them well enough to know what particular tool or style works best for them. In this journey, as I have mentioned above, I will be searching for methods that fit with my beliefs while remaining true to my style of teaching.

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