

Kris Sward – Assignment #1

My Philosophy of Online Facilitation and Learning

Having taken only three online courses and with absolutely no experience teaching online, my realm of knowledge to build a philosophy upon is limited. However, in reflecting for this paper I have had a chance to incorporate ideas from my readings as well as my experiences thus far to develop a starting point of what I feel online learning and communication should look like.

Beliefs

In previously articulating my own beliefs about teaching and learning in an online environment I learned that I lean towards constructivist and connectivist tendencies where the sources of information are varied and teachers and learners work through course content together, learning as they explore and forming understandings about the content in the process. I am drawn to connectivist theories because of my own personal attempts to implement technology use in the classroom. The accessibility of information is causing a shift in our thinking about what is important in education today. My constructivist ideals are based on a desire to build knowledge, relevance and perspective with my students through the activities that we undertake. I can also appreciate the principals of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle that has a continuous cycle of Active Experimentation, Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation and Abstract Conceptualization/Analysis (Kear, 2011). My aim in my classroom is to have students construct their own knowledge and meaning through guided experiences.

Identity

Through my experience in two vastly different courses in the fall I have developed some beliefs about what online learning should look like.

Effective communication and collaboration is a key component to any learning, but specifically applies in an online environment where teachers must work to build a sense of community and online 'presence' (Kear, 2011) through the use of communication tools. Inclusion of all students and support for their individual learning styles and needs requires a continuous and open stream of communication. Regardless of what tool that communication uses (email, social media), it needs to be respectful, positive and motivating for all learners.

In order to avoid having students drop the course, online courses must also be easy, not in terms of content, but in terms of accessing technology, researching information, working through activities, communicating with others and completing course objectives. Courses should be structured so that activities gradually get harder in order to build student confidence and ease them into the course without overwhelming them too much.

Engaging content is also key. What I struggle with as a learner is long lists of dry readings. What I want is multimedia – videos, hands on activities, building websites or using wikis to share and create knowledge. As a teacher, it is my job to provide the information students need in a dynamic and engaging way.

The course should also be broken into achievable chunks. I have to remember that my students are taking online courses for a reason, perhaps to fit school in around work, travel, recreational activities or personal health issues. In that case the structure of the course needs to fit within students already busy lives and have achievable ends each week. Otherwise students can easily get behind and feel overwhelmed and may be inclined to give up.

Finally, discussion forums should be regulated and kept succinct. Personally I like how we are limited in our posting for this course to 150 words. Though I am often guilty of being longwinded, this guideline requires me to get my point across quickly and efficiently.

Mission

So with all of this in mind, what inspires me as a teacher, specifically in terms of online communication? In completing this week's readings and assignment I have also been motivated to look ahead to my second assignment and I have many ideas which I am excited to implement. My seminar is not until the end of January (Too Much Information), but my partner and I have already started to develop a website that is separated into chunks that our 'students' will work through in a step by step process. Once they complete each section they will move through some guided reflection, questions and a culminating activity in order to cement their understandings and connect them to other areas of their learning. We aim to keep it short and sweet in order to not overwhelm our students while providing them with the information they need to 'complete' that section of our course.

Whether in this seminar activity or in my teaching career, what inspires me is the chance to share knowledge with others, watch as they incorporate information into their existing understandings and articulate where the new knowledge will be useful to them in their daily lives. Learning inspires me – and I'm ready to go!

References

Kear, K. (2011). *Online and social networking communities: A best practice guide for educators*. New York, NY: Routledge.