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Statement of Teaching Philosophy
(652 words)

For me, teaching is grounded in the creation, maintenance, and development of relationships. This statement springs from a basic disciplinary assumption that our knowledge is socially constructed. Such an assumption has, at least, two complex relational dimensions.

First, what one can say one knows is the result of interaction between oneself as a learner and others, which occurs in a context that is itself, in large part, shaped by the interactive behavior of people. If knowledge and its use are grounded in social interaction, then students and teachers working in a classroom (or via computer terminals or interactive video) must have opportunity to communicate with each other about the particular ideas, concepts, phenomena, or skills that are the subject of their interaction. Therefore, teaching requires 1) understanding of how instructors and learners communicate, and 2) skill in designing classroom communication systems that facilitate appropriate, effective relationships among learners (which includes the instructor!).

Second, my assumption shifts the guiding metaphor of the context of instruction from "broadcasting" to "networking." The banking model (Friere 1994) or dispensary model of instruction is built on "broadcasting" information to students who have little opportunity to interact with the instructor, other learners, or the content. As a result, the ideas, or information dispensed generally remains fragmented and of little use to the learner. What is necessary for learning to occur, which entails some kind of shift in the learner's repertory grid (Kelly 1963), is the recognition of or creation of meaningful connections between ideas or bits of information, i.e. "networking." I like Slatin's summary of the process of learning when he says, "If information is news of difference, then knowledge has to do with recognizing the implications of the news, with creating the patterns that connect the differences, but do not resolve or dissolve them." (1992, 34). Thus, the relationships between facts, ideas, or other bits of information provide the basis for knowledge in the increasingly dynamic and information rich environment in which we live.

I understand my job to be an assistant to, or facilitator of learners who are developing skills in creating knowledge from the mass of information with which they are faced both in the context of the classroom and in everyday life. Such an approach is both process and product oriented because neither has meaning apart from the other. That is the process of learning should lead to meaningful and concrete outcomes; the outcomes of learning should be consciously connected to the cognitive processes that brought about the outcomes. Process and product in the "learning space" (be it a face to face classroom, training room,

or virtual classroom) are related. In other words, teaching requires a broad understanding of the theoretical/conceptual content of the discipline (theory) in which one works, and knowledge of uses to which that knowledge can imaginatively be put (praxis).

So, teaching is about facilitating making connections between learners and learners, and the ideas with which they work. The outcomes of such an approach, I am finding, are that students report that they are learning important content as well as learning that they can be their own learning facilitators. Another outcome, I believe, is a lessening of a radical individual perspective on knowledge ("I possess more information than you, and am therefore better than you."), and a greater understanding that creating knowledge is an on-going, shared, collective experience. The impact of such a realization is the potential for an increased sense of community and civility. We are, after all, in this together!

References

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