

Professionals Against Improperly Labeling Active Learners

PAILAL Newsletter

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This issue focuses on helping the teacher to move away from the deliverer of knowledge in a passive environment, to one where all learners are actively engaged in the construction of their knowledge. In this day of accountability, we hear too often the complaints from teachers that they are not able to teach the way they would like to because of a need to prepare their students to be successful on a standardized examination that may have surfaced with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The reality is that too many teachers have not changed their teaching styles in years, perhaps even before any mandatory testing came about. For those educators willing to step up and become facilitators of learning, the following article can be used to guide their journey. Keep spreading the word that we need to stop trying to address poor behaviors in the classroom, and instead address the root cause of the disruptive behaviors. Many active learners may be acting out of boredom or from being lost. Recognizing the gift of the active learner and meeting them with actively challenging lessons will surely go a long way in creating the optimal learning environment.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

MOVING AWAY FROM TEACHING AND BECOMING A FACILITATOR OF LEARNING 1-6

Did You Know?

“The best professional development sessions are ones that are run with the same message they are sending. If you want teachers to lecture; then lecture. If you want them to develop an active and engaging classroom, let them experience it for themselves.”

—Timothy C. Clapper

MOVING AWAY FROM TEACHING AND BECOMING A FACILITATOR OF LEARNING BY TIMOTHY C. CLAPPER

One only has to close their eyes and reflect on being in a typical classroom and depending on past experiences; two images might come to mind. The first image might include a teacher in the front of the room with chalk or book in hand, asking students to read along with them. Perhaps the teacher is writing on the board and asking the students closed-ended questions as they search for facts that may, or may not have meaning to the learner. Unfortunately, much of what existed in the past in education remains the same in present day teaching as well. Many adult learners for example, might reflect on a workshop, conference, or class they recently attended and see a similar picture to the one de-



MOVING AWAY FROM TEACHING AND BECOMING A FACILITATOR OF LEARNING CON'T



“What are those things that my students need to know and what activities can I use that will create real understanding for them?”

scribed above in their memory. Instead of being asked to read along or answer questions that have been written on a chalkboard, they read information from a PowerPoint presentation, often by someone with actual or claimed years of teaching experience. Many may indeed have years of teaching experience, but little experience being a facilitator of learning. The latter, relates to the second image that some may have been fortunate enough to experience and recollect. This would be the image of the facilitator and the classroom experiences they have developed to make learning the best that it can be.

Many teachers may be able to put together a well-prepared lesson plan that lists the objectives and standards that dictate why they must teach the lesson, a possible listing of handouts and textbook chapters they will read from, and certainly some form of metrics for evaluating the session. The lesson plan may even have been assembled using a pattern similar to Wiggins and McTighe's (2005) *Understanding by Design* (UBD) approach which follows the algorithm of identifying the objectives, defining how assessment will occur, and then determining the strategies for learning. However, this algorithm by itself is not a guarantee that the lesson plan will become an effective learning plan.

Therefore, the first thing that a facilitator of learning must do is spend some time formulating a learning plan. For the educator that is tied to casting blame on standardized testing requirements that may be associated with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) instead of concentrating their efforts on creating learning opportunities, this task might not be so easy. What has to be asked is, “What are those things that my students need to know and what activities can I use that will create real understanding for them?” Additionally, one might ask, “What will it take for them to be successful on the standardized test coming up while also preparing them for their future?” Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) might refer to the first part of this question as determining the “big ideas”, or gist of the lesson and certainly this will guide the formation of the essential question that will be used to steer the entire lesson. For example, an essential question might include, “What were some of the events that preceded the United State's involvement in World War II?” In doing so, we try to move toward understanding, and away from rote learning and memorization.

Likewise, the objectives should be clear and functional. They are developed and stated based on what you want the learner to do. An educator can self-evaluate their own methodology by looking at the way they spell out their objectives. “Name each of the dates in which.....and Name the people involved in” while sometimes acceptable, does little to move the learner past rote memorization of facts. “Explain some similarities and differences between World Wars I and II” on the other hand asks the learner to assess and internalize what they know about the subject. Developing good objectives and a strong essential question can lead the educator through the first part of transitioning from a teacher to a facilitator of learning.

Again using Wiggins and McTighe's (UBD) model, once the objectives are identified, the next part of the process is determining how learning will be assessed. Facilitators of learning will note immediately the difference between evaluation and assessment. There is often a heavy reliance on evaluation and summative-type assessments in les-

MOVING AWAY FROM TEACHING AND BECOMING A FACILITATOR OF LEARNING CONT

sons and not enough on formative assessment. As Williams and Dunn (2008, p. 176) observe, many teachers are good at summative assessments, including end of chapter quizzes and tests, or an end of unit paper. What is needed, they suggest is formative assessment that includes feedback to both teacher and learners of next steps that need to be taken, along with identifying areas requiring more attention, perhaps using different activities. If one is truly concerned with performance on standardized examinations, strategies must be used that lead to better understanding of the content. Assessing throughout the lesson in varied ways including feedback and observation will inform the facilitators of which strategies are working and which are not. For the facilitator, assessment will also include recognizing when learners are bored, or not being adequately engaged in the learning experience, and making the proper adjustments 'on-the-fly.' Perhaps one of the boldest and most honorable things an educator can do is recognize that their perfect plan and teaching style might not be working in a particular situation. When they are able to recognize this and creatively adjust the lesson so that understanding and the objectives can be met, they are moving toward becoming better facilitators of learning.

Being a facilitator of learning means that strategies and activities are included that brings the learner to a state of understanding that lead to accomplishment of the objectives. We are natural constructivist. That is, we came into this world building our own meaning and explanation for occurrences, based on our own findings, as well as through socializing with others. Therefore, including activities that ask the learner to construct their own meaning and then reflect their understanding off of other learners goes a long way in creating understanding.

Further, cooperative learning activities included in lessons allow the learner to move around and engage with others actively. Speaking, drawing, hand-waving, and other tactile and kinesthetic gestures are encouraged in collaborative learning. Collaborating with a few learners on content areas is also safer for many learners. Interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences can be developed in small groups while clarity and internalization of the content can be achieved. These intelligences may not be developed fully in traditional classrooms where the learner may be lost trying to make meaning of the content, which can lead to frustration and acting out. Other activities might include simulation and role-play to act out experiences that lead to better understanding of concepts and ideas. Sand tables and models may be constructed as interactive projects that groups of learners tie to the content and the objectives. In explaining the events leading up the World War II, for example, facilitators might have learners conduct research on specific areas such as shipping and commerce, major factors preceding and influencing that war, and cause and effect of major decisive engagements.



“...we came into this world building our own meaning and explanation for occurrences, based on our own findings, as well as through socializing with others”



MOVING AWAY FROM TEACHING AND BECOMING A FACILITATOR OF LEARNING CON'T

Using the sand table as a simulation tool, each collaborative group can re-search and then construct what they see as useful concepts for understanding that leads to the objectives. Facilitators using simulations and role play in learning incorporate all three learning styles including: auditory, visual, and kinesthetic, as well as nearly all of the multiple intelligences identified by Gardner (1983). Whatever strategy is used, the facilitator of learning will ensure that it is one that will allow the learners to become actively engaged with the construction of their learning and not be a passive tool of teaching.

Additionally, facilitators of learning are very familiar with the process of transfer and how this relates to learning. Reflect once again on the typical learning experience, and one might reflect upon experiences of being thrown into what seemed to be the middle of a lesson, and while teachers only write the aim or objectives of the lesson on the board, learners are left wondering what they are supposed to do, where are they are going, and why. Enter the four-phase lesson plan outlined by Williams and Dunn (2008). The four-phase lesson plan consists of active, brain-based learning activities orchestrated in such a way that leads to better understanding of the content and objectives. The learning activities in each of the four-phases are always followed by a reflection process that helps the learners to reflect and internalize the information, in what Kolb (1984) refers to as reflection-in-action, and provides the facilitator with yet another opportunity to assess learning and understanding.

“The learning activities in each of the four-phases are always followed by a reflection process that helps the learners to reflect and internalize the information”

The process begins with the *Inquire phase* in which the facilitator helps the learners to transfer in their base of knowledge. Personal meaning and relevance to the lesson can occur here. Relevance need not pre-exist however, for as Brooks and Brooks (2001) observe, the facilitator can help the learner create relevance. Examples of activities might include the use of K-W-L charts that ask the learners what they *know (K)*, what they *want (W)* to know, and later, near the end of the lesson, what they have *learned (L)*. A variation includes the K-W-H-L chart that includes asking learners *how (H)* they might be able to find out what they need to learn. It should be noted that during this phase, the facilitator is still guiding the learner to the objective, which helps to eliminate any criticism that may exist that student-centered, constructivism results in aimless instruction. What they want to know and how they will learn it is still directly associated with the objective and the facilitator's role is to keep learning moving on that track. In fashion with constructivist principles, bringing in or transferring in a base of knowledge including the schemas and frames of references the learner currently possesses, helps the learner to build upon and alter those experiences, leading to better understanding of the new concepts. Through the reflection process, the facilitator then helps the learners transfer the knowledge into the next phase, the *Gather phase*, where relevant information is gathered and meaning is constructed by the learner. It is here that the learner might find a variety of relevant, pre-determined web pages, short films, evidence-based information sheets for coop-

MOVING AWAY FROM TEACHING AND BECOMING A FACILITATOR OF LEARNING

erative learning, specific chapters of text, or portions of chapters that help them to move toward understanding the objective. The gather phase might even include a combination of all of these activities, or may include other sources not listed here as well. Again, the emphasis is on meaning-making which can make a big difference for those students that seems to be bored, as well as selecting activities that allow for physical movement throughout the lesson.

During the *Process phase*, the next phase of the plan, movement is likely to be a dominant factor in the activities selected by the facilitator. One might select activities that allow for the development of weaker intelligences, while enhancing the learner's stronger ones. Here is where the learners will do something with the information to help them internalize and come to grasps with the material. It might include constructing a project, a class presentation by groups having responsibility for key components of a lesson, or a demonstration or skit that ties it together. Facilitators will select activities that will help them assess the process, as well as the depth or level of learning that might be occurring. Again, this may be different from evaluation because any failure in understanding still provides the facilitator with an opportunity to re-direct and clarify misconceptions about the objectives.

Finally, the last phase, the *Apply phase*, asks the learners "So what now" and "what can you do with this new information." Here, the process of *transfer* surfaces again as the facilitator helps the learner to *transfer* the new knowledge to other applications. This might include a community service learning event, or even some application of the lesson to another school subject. If the lesson were graphic organizers for example, the students might demonstrate how they can now use these tools to help them achieve understanding in their math, or other classes. One might see here a clear example of how this form of authentic assessment adds far more value than many quizzes and examinations for assessing understanding beyond memorization of facts and figures, another emphasis associated with facilitators of learning.

We are in a critical time where many adult learners may be asking whether any lack of understanding during formal education endeavors was caused by own defect, or by teaching attempts that missed their target entirely. For facilitators of learning, this is less of a concern because it is already understood that they are responsible for creating the conditions and environment that is most beneficial for learning. They know that lack of understanding is not the learner's fault and they must do whatever it takes to inspire a love for learning. Great strides can be made so long as educators do whatever it takes to reach learners. With the dropout rates in our nation still at alarmingly high levels, a new charge goes out to educators: become facilitators of learning.

REFERENCES

Brooks, J., & Brooks, M. (2001). *In search of understanding: The case for constructivist classrooms*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall.



“...they are responsible for creating the conditions and environment that is most beneficial for learning”



MOVING AWAY FROM TEACHING AND BECOMING A FACILITATOR OF LEARNING CON'T

Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind*. New York: Basic Books.

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as a source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Tomlinson, C. A., & McTighe, J. (2006). *Integrating differentiated instruction + understanding by design*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Williams, B. R., & Dunn, S. E. (2008). *Brain-compatible learning for the block*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Photos from Microsoft Office.

Timothy C. Clapper possesses a Master of Arts Degree in Curriculum & Instruction and an Advanced Graduate Certificate in Educational Technology. He is an Educational Consultant, a Simulations Specialist, and doctoral learner. His passion is 21st century learning, active learning, and differentiated instruction. Tim may be contacted at TCCID@Dover.Net

We're on the Web!
[http://tccid.dover.net/
PAILAL.htm](http://tccid.dover.net/PAILAL.htm)



We hope that you enjoyed this newsletter. Sharing information and strategies can make a difference. There are so many great educators. They see in each learner the full potential of what can be.

Contact information: Tim Clapper

TCCID@Dover.net