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EDTC 8371: Theories & Practices in Effective Online Pedagogy

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If there is anything that I have been proud of in this pandemic, it has to be my contribution to the advancement of professional development where I work. And, I say proud because it was monumental. This experience was something that I will never forget because I only had one opportunity, there was no time to overcome fear, it was not a difficult choice I had to make, my beliefs were not challenged –but it was a very happy moment to see it work– and looking at it introspectively, it is probably a moment that I would love to relive. Taking our department’s professional development online felt like going from rowing a galley across the Atlantic by hand to jumping into the Avatar Flight of Passage, an adventure. This is exactly how one can compare online versus face-to-face learning. There are good times and struggles in all adventures, but in a world where attention spans are limited to how many characters one can type and videos that you have to like, subscribe, and follow; the time has come to go virtual and the only experience rowing we might get is an augmented reality one.

My inclination to online learning as a District-wide specialist for the seventh largest District in the nation was latent even before I joined the Dual Language ESL department. I had seen some of the most difficult face-to-face capacity building out there. “Death by PowerPoint”, “oh no”, “here we go again”, and more were some of the salutations in my head when I would hear as if Charlie Brown’s mom was about to start the meeting. It really felt like they were not experts and that they were not there. The presentation was there, but they did not give reasons to engage. There were no risks taken or teaching presence. In research from Boettcher and Conrad (2016), I have come to the realization that teaching presence (design of course and materials, guidance and directing) was the element that I was able to identify to be missing in some of the face to face learning I have experienced. One could argue that there was a lack of organization and planning on behalf of the instructor, but it is all a mindset. Online participation also takes discipline and

organization. But if your mindset is not focused on the content then it becomes a failed process. According to research, assessing critical thinking also raises an issue germane to assessment of the quality of the process (Garrison et al., 2001).

If the content is organized, it creates an incredible experience. Our online professional development was filled with interactive activities, engagement and enough socialization of the intelligence. This brings me to another advantage of online learning. Across the District, over 2,800 teachers, administrators and other professionals were able to access the content. This task would have been nearly impossible because of the infectious disease and because of the limited manpower our small department has. In discovering Gagne from Boettcher and Conrad (2016), the idea of making a difference was at the mainstay of our plan. We knew that not all teachers would be able to teach virtually and that the strategies and approach would need to be adapted, tested and maybe even reinvented. In research from Boettcher and Conrad (2016), Gagne elaborates on developing competence through participation in the instructional experiences and this was at the core of the concern of everyone. We help teachers and administrators learn to deliver content that would otherwise could not be accessible through an unplanned online experience.

Accessibility was catalytic, but a major disadvantage that emerged with online experiences was the sense of isolation and lack of skill set demonstrated by some teachers. Their anxiety was evident. For teachers that zoomed through the gathered supplies it was a walk in the park. For teachers that did not understand what being muted was it became a learning principle. The learning tools as depicted in research from Boettcher and Conrad (2016), these tools create an environment. We quickly acknowledged that our teachers needed the support, and we know it needed to be individualized. As teachers began to take the course, they were offered ample opportunities to not

only learn to use the online platforms and tools that would hopefully spark creativity and help them visualize the new experiences that they could weave.

And speaking of organization, creating what Boettcher and Conrad called a Learning Experience Framework where the learner is at the core of the process is what made our experience a very rewarding one. You see, as Boettcher and Conrad explain this framework captures a complex set of interactions among four elements and the roles of those elements play in a learning experience. The major advantage I find in online learning is that if these elements are considerate of the experience of the learner, you will have learning. Attention to detail is critical in all parts and it is very special to see them function. I believe that content is king. The relay of the content and resources that we gave our teachers had added value for them –even in a pandemic. We were the mentors and we tried using a very complex design where we housed content in our learning management system and directed our participants to Microsoft Teams and this is where they would complete their assessments and other activities. If there was a question I was there for the most part, even late at night when teachers found the time to complete the professional development. The Team provided embedded experiences from different platforms that we linked from the course directly to the team. Some teachers had trouble understanding this process but because of the Learning Experience Framework that we were able to develop, the vast majority of all 2,800 participants completed the experience successfully. Our administration did give them parameters to finish but the participants were able to complete the online experience with ample time and liberty. Some teachers covered their face when answering a video reflection and some were very rich and impactful.

Overall, online and face to face learning are different adventures. Online experiences bring proximity to those that want the access. And just like face to face, organization is key to make this

experience work. Some teachers may feel like they are alone in this adventure and may not even know how to read the map. But, if there is efficiency in the experience where individual attention, liberty, flexibility, content, and I would add a little creativity given to participants, you can be successful because that is what happened to us. We were successful in getting content to a lot of people that wanted to learn even in a pandemic.

References

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