Reflective Practice in Action: Philosophy and Running a Seminar Week

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My philosophy of online communication has developed over the course of OLTD 503. I have had the opportunity to experience a plethora of different tools for achieving a classroom community from the learners' perspective. That experience has allowed me to gauge the usefulness of different tools as they relate to my philosophy. The experience developing and moderating an online seminar helped to affirm some of my previous philosophy while creating an opportunity to question other areas. This course also helped me to develop a greater appreciation of the role socialization and communication play within an online classroom.

Philosophy of Online Communication

After participating in and helping to moderate online seminars, I recognize the importance of having a strong theoretical framework in place for the development of a course community, integrated thoughtfully throughout the course (Slagter van Tryon & Bishop, 2009). I also feel that there must be harmony between the pedagogy of teaching and philosophy of online communication in order to have a strong distance learning experience for students.

In order to integrate my pedagogy of teaching and philosophy of online communication, I have chosen to examine both through the lens of signature pedagogies. Shulman (2005) discusses the four dimensions of signature pedagogies as: (1) surface structure, the processes of teaching and learning; (2) deep structure, the assumptions about how learning happens; (3) implicit structure, the beliefs, attitudes and values related to the profession; and (4) what they are not, or the concepts and beliefs not communicated to students. Inquiry-based learning is the process of "asking questions, investigating solutions, creating new knowledge as information is gathered, discussing discoveries and experiences, and reflecting on new-found knowledge" (Crippen & Archambault, 2012, p. 159) and is a signature pedagogy of science, technology, engineering and

math (STEM) disciplines. I would argue that the community of inquiry framework (COI), which integrates social, cognitive and teaching presence in online communities, can be treated as a signature pedagogy for online education (Anderson, 2008; Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007; Kear, 2011). I believe that by examining inquiry-based methods of instruction and the COI framework through the lens of signature pedagogies I can better integrate the underlying theoretical frameworks that inform my philosophy. I will begin my discussion of my philosophy by defining what inquiry-based learning and online communication are not, and work backward toward the surface structure of my online classroom, much like Korthagen's onion model (2004).

What they are not

Inquiry-based learning as a signature pedagogy is not about memorizing facts; rather, scientific reasoning and dialogue are the basis of the development of knowledge (Crippen & Archambault, 2012). Correspondingly, the COI framework is not a one-way transfer of information between the instructor and the student. Students engage in dialogues between themselves as well as with the instructor to create appropriate climate and discourse in the online classroom (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007; Kear, 2011; Slagter van Tryon & Bishop, 2009). Both inquiry-based learning and the COI framework seek to create dialogues between students and prevent passive, one-way communication of information. By clearly defining what the goals of inquiry-based learning and online communication are not, it becomes easier to define what they are.

Implicit Structure

Crippen and Archambault (2012) state that inquiry-based learning relies on the belief that students are naturally curious and that inquiry is a skill that is important to develop in today's society. The COI framework is built upon the view that community is required for effective

collaborative learning, and that collaborative learning leads to higher-level outcomes for students (Garrison, 2006; Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007; Kear, 2011; Slagter van Tryon & Bishop, 2009). Online communication and learning also rely on the belief that the most effective learning takes place within communities, so the time and effort spent to develop them online is critical to the learning process (Anderson, 2008; Garrison, 2006; Kear, 2011). Given a clear understanding of my beliefs about the implicit structure of inquiry-based learning and the COI framework, I will move on to discuss their deep structure including theories that mutually inform both processes.

Deep Structure

I feel that assumptions that inform inquiry-based learning and those that inform the COI framework are strikingly similar. There are many different models used to describe the process of conducting inquiry-based learning informed by constructivist learning theory (Ally, 2008; Crippen & Archambault, 2012; Donovan & Bransford, 2005; Jonassen, Davidson, Collins, Campbell, & Haag, 2009; Lorsbach & Tobin, 1992). Constructivist learning theory also informs the COI framework. Social constructivism is an embedded aspect of the COI framework, and instructor scaffolding of social and cognitive aspects is critical for the creation of an educational experience (Anderson, 2008; Garrison, 2006; Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007; Kear, 2011). As both the inquiry-based learning models and the COI framework are informed by constructivist theory they can very naturally be built up side-by-side within the structure of the course.

I believe that when thinking about the structure of the online classroom, Salmon's Five-Stage Model (2004) can be used to support the development of the social and cognitive presence required for the COI framework, while creating the necessary foundation for effective inquiry-based learning (Ally, 2008; Crippen & Archambault, 2012; Kear, 2011; Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). In stages one and two of Salmon's Five Stage Model (2004), learners are continually

moving through Kolb's experiential learning cycle (2005) – first during the process of accessing and becoming familiar with the online environment and then through the process of social information processing (Slagter van Tryon & Bishop, 2009). Students have to be given the time and structure necessary to form conceptualizations about the people they are interacting with, actively engage with them, and then reflect on the experience in order establish meaningful relationships and identities (Kear, 2011; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Slagter van Tryon & Bishop, 2009). Greater social presence and clearly identified roles make moving through the remaining three stages of Salmon's Five Stage Model (2004) easier for students; they are more likely to develop the sense of trust and community necessary for openly exchanging information – which is also a critical aspect of inquiry-based learning (Garrison, 2006; Kear, 2011; Slagter van Tryon & Bishop, 2009).

Surface Structure

The surface structure of the online classroom requires strong teacher presence, which will be evident to students before the course begins by clear and open communication from the instructor, geared toward helping them access and use the course tools (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007; Salmon, 2004). After the course begins, the presence of the teacher will be more evident from the organization of the course and the structure of the activities presented to the students. The students will also begin to develop their social presence through icebreakers and more structured discussions about course content (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007; Salmon, 2004; Slagter van Tryon & Bishop, 2009).

Given that inquiry-based learning is the ultimate goal, the activities presented to the students will include cycles of questioning, investigating and creating knowledge, followed by sharing with the larger cohort (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Salmon, 2004).

The process of sharing and building knowledge with the cohort and the instructor then informs metacognitive reflection on the material (Ally, 2008; Duit & Treagust, 2003; Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Once students become more experienced in their interactions with the course material and develop relationships with their peers, more complex real-world problems can be introduced. Authentic problems encourage students to interact with their peers in order to gather, discuss and synthesize information (Crippen & Archambault, 2012; Jonassen et al., 2009; Kear, 2011; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Slagter van Tryon & Bishop, 2009). I feel that situated, problem-based learning and scientific discourse requires a high level of trust between learners and as such requires appropriate scaffolding and time for community development before introduction.

I have explored my teaching pedagogy and online philosophy in depth, exploring their common structures and discussing how they integrate together into a cohesive online classroom. In the following section of this paper, I will discuss how my experiences as a participant and moderator in the online seminars have informed my philosophy, and how those experiences may inform specific choices when I am a moderator or instructor in the future.

Reflection on Seminar Facilitation Weeks

Throughout the seminar facilitation weeks, I experienced a variety of tools and styles of conducting an online seminar. These experiences helped to inform my contributions to my group's seminar week, as well as support the development of my philosophy.

I believe it is critical for an instructor or facilitator to have an obvious presence in an online setting, and I think that the newsletters the groups sent out at the beginning of their weeks were a good way to begin to build presence (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). I feel that the newsletter alone, however, was limited and needed to be followed up with something more personal, like the video introductions that group four created. If I were facilitating on my own, I

would have tried to integrate something like that into the welcome message, but the group as a whole did not want to present four different videos to the students and disliked the idea of one person introducing the seminar alone. I believe that was the right decision for our group, but I would still have liked to try that as a method of "setting climate", through the intersection of teaching and social presence presented in the COI framework (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). That is why I tried to greet the members of our cohort as they entered the room during the synchronous session – I wanted to try to personalize the experience. It felt like "too much" during the beginning of the session, so I do not think it was very effective.

Group 5 succeeded in creating and selecting content that really helped to develop the cognitive presence for the cohort, as well as ourselves. Especially in the case of the TED talk followed by an invitation to share their own experiences there was a robust dialogue that characterized cognitive presence: a triggering event, exploration, and integration (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). As the discussion question focused on stage 3 of Salmon's Five Stage Model (2004), information exchange, there was not really an opportunity to develop resolution. However, many people in the cohort exchanged lesson plans and resources during that discussion, so this activity may lead to development outside of the confines of the seminar week.

In my opinion, the biggest achievement group 5 had throughout the seminar week was putting together and successfully running the Jigsaw activity during the synchronous session. Not only did this activity touch on stage four of Salmon's Five Stage Model (2004), but also required the cohort to synthesize many different pieces of knowledge together following reflection and social negotiation (Jonassen et al., 2009). Our community has been developing since the first course, so much of the open communication that made this activity a success relied on previous interactions we had as a group. Thankfully, the jigsaw discussion flowed well and

did not require any intervention from the moderators. I also appreciated the level of interaction all of the moderators had throughout the synchronous session. It was helpful to know that they were watching the other groups, and that while I spoke the chat was monitored. The moderator dialogue throughout the synchronous session was supportive and constructive which I feel improved the progression of the session.

The aspect of the seminar that I was not as satisfied with was the Padlet wall. I had hoped that it would build up like a visual version of a wiki, with the cohort adding more comments and related resources. I had wanted to try using a wiki with our cohort originally, but felt that because it had not been used in other weeks and is generally a "complicated" tool, that it would be too much to try and introduce it in week five. Overall, the Padlet wall allowed the cohort to create an excellent collection of resources, with a reasonably low barrier for use, which was the main intent. I was glad to have the opportunity to use Padlet with a real group of "students" so I could understand the logistics of using the tool and would like to use it again with directions focused on collaborating and building on other peoples' contributions.

One aspect of my philosophy that I did not explore during the seminar was the inquiry-based learning. The prompted discussion lead to rich dialogues, and the Padlet wall was an excellent information gathering and sharing activity, but the explicit reflective piece was missing from our seminar. The seminar groups that did prompt for reflection did not really engage me personally either. I am not sure how best to approach closing the circle on shorter seminars, but appreciated the reflection and closing the circle for the course.

I feel that co-facilitating the seminar really helped me to identify where I would like to improve my practice and gain more experience. Although I feel that theory is a strong foundation for my philosophy, and that I generally have a sound understanding of what I would like to do, I

am still limited by a lack of practical experience. During discussions with the rest of group 5, I could definitely perceive the different lenses the other group members viewed the material through – which was very helpful for me. I tend to become focused on what I feel is the "correct" way to do something. Without the dialogues our group had, I would have developed a seminar that was more focused on reading and reflecting than the sharing and collaborating activities we presented. The main shift in my philosophy to focus more on the importance of socialization and community is due to my experiences with my group and the success of our seminar week's activities.

I found I leaned very heavily on my technology experience during the co-facilitation, which gave me space to be the "expert" in one area. I definitely self-identified my role within the group, which helped me to learn more from the rest of the group (Slagter van Tryon & Bishop, 2009). I did not feel I needed to "catch up" with anyone or acquire a lot of new skills to contribute to the success of the group, so I spent more time listening to and thinking about what everyone else had to say. Overall, the group seminar was an amazing metacognitive and reflective experience for me.

I believe that the next time I have the opportunity to facilitate or co-facilitate I will have the confidence to take on less of a technology-based role and more of an active teaching role. This co-facilitation experience has increased my certainty in my skills and helped improve my confidence in my philosophy.

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