

Process Review for Biology in Society CrCrTh645

Capturing the process of my personal and professional development through this course
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As I think about my own process of thinking, developing capacity for seeing in new ways and implementing the works for this course, several things come to the surface.

Making the installments fit the audience:

At first I thought I gained less from this course than previous courses in the depth of connections... I struggled with shortened timeframe for making connections with the work we are involved with by having to produce something each week that applied to a specific audience. This had its merit in focusing intention or meeting production requirements and course content, but I think this also limited exploratory thinking for myself. It shortened my thinking... forcing me into content and a product rather than the journeying of critical thinking. It was difficult in this framework to build connections between each week's installments. For a couple installments and my final paper, I threw out my initial audience entirely, resulting in taking initiative in my own learning, maybe through developing autonomy, and having little regard to how this might manifest itself later. Not that this was a disregard, but a place of unknowing and self-trust that the affect would somehow work out. The best example of this is when I wrote "A reminder to my future self: metaphors in science and life" for the Metaphors of control and coordination in development Installment.

From this installment and the letting go of a forced structure, I realized the place I seemed to find myself in. The struggle associated with new structuring of data and mapping of concepts at this point in time, is a place of conflict between two seemingly opposed concepts... being in the here and now (being present in the moment) and planning for a future. These conflicts are internal and external: internal in my state of focus and attention, in judgment of myself: external in the expectations of others and the responsibilities of management, leadership and planning the direction of departmental goals. I recognized for myself the metaphor *Play is a bridge...* it's a tool available in almost any place and time to bridge the conflict and keep my attention in the moment. So while quotes can also help bring awareness back to intent, they don't necessarily bring me into a place of presence, a behavior where real awareness and change takes place. *So put down the camera and see like a child.* Play and enjoy what is fully alive in this moment. And in busy day-to-day work life, take note when thoughts fight to the surface... make time to let go and listen without judgment, *make time for slow, stand still and witness.*

So two things I'm considering is that while I may have thought I learned less and had less to say in this course, when I allow myself to let go of a firm structure, the

freedom allows the new connections to emerge. Play is in this context of freedom is a bridge to new understandings. Secondly, I need to let go more often of judgments and expectations of myself to allow self-acceptance and courage to take risks to develop deeper self-awareness and new connections in both inner and outer work.

The value of freewriting:

I missed having the structure of freewriting at the beginning of each class as compared to the PBL courses. Freewriting for me is a bit like talking to a good listener without someone having to actually be there... listening to self. Having this not part of the class experience has in a strange way put the use of this tool in tension with its alternative. And therefore I was able to find my own meaningful use or practice for it. I used freewriting extensively to help bridge writing blocks. And I also found it useful after drawing concept maps to try and tease out the new connections. I don't have many samples to submit here as I'm finding the value of freewriting not in the product and therefore often don't keep them. I have also found freewriting a useful tool when preparing for a meeting with one or all of my staff at work to help free the place I'm holding thoughts of what is most important to share and my implicit motivation. For my own practice, I'm hoping to engage with freewriting before online courses begin even if they are not part of the guidelines or expectations.

Placing things in tension with alternatives:

The other theme well developed and experienced in this course is understanding by placing things in tension with alternatives. I've already commented on letting go and forced structure tensions. And it was certainly evident from week to week that we looked and examined alternate views of the week's topics. But I think there was another unplanned tension between the numbers of formal teachers in our class compared to those of us who are not.

This teacher domination forced me to think in alternatives about how much of what teachers do might transfer to workplace mentoring and support of employees' personal and professional development through my theme of collaborative explorations. And I think this also contributed to the surfacing concepts for me of what I want to be and develop in the workplace:

- I want to support a process rather than preach a prescribed method
- It's a practice and a process and we don't have to have all the answers before we start something – it's more important to listen to feedback, observe, listen and revise
- It's about personal change as much as it is about growing your co-workers or employees
- There is more meaningful stuff behind building support and courage for the journey of risk-taking and that embarking on this journey will translate into effective relationship building
- We need to cultivate an intelligence of the heart

- Crossing the threshold from performance to practice will necessitate a shift of focus from the development of the intellect to an opening of the heart.”¹
- Fear and building courage are my biggest obstacles... I need to start journeying on building courage to make a jump towards whatever might be next

Becoming aware of the forces that hold us or release us:

One theme well developed and experienced in the course this semester is the concept of becoming aware of the forces that hold us or release us. Through the structures and tools practiced in class, we discovered possible biases,

But interestingly, I had a much more profound experience related to letting go of the paper; it wasn't until after the presentation that I somehow felt free to criticize my own position. I was finally free from the need to produce and in a place to listen to myself, the experiences of the class and course content. What I realize now is that what I was exploring in class was a deep desire to correct something traumatic to my experience of workplace community. Immediately after the final presentations, I found myself struggling with a nagging gut feeling about times when these explorations don't work or shouldn't be tried. I witnessed surfacing thoughts at work, while driving, while having conversation or dreaming. I now realize this “stuff” is coming from a place from past experience and emotional baggage related to failed collaborative explorations in a place where consensus building and decisions by consensus were the outward culture but rarely experience by those engaged.

I witnessed multiple failures of consensus building in the decision making process where others and I were left feeling trampled on or misled. I suppose some part of me hopes there is a better way, not that decisions cannot be made other ways, but that somehow when collaborations are engaged, that people feel valued and heard in the process.

So my paper is limited in how rounded the topic is explored with a bias coming through the refraction of my personal experience. This is where I am right now on this journey of refracting this experience and thinking about ways to encourage more meaningful relationships through workplace interactions. There certainly is more work I can do on this topic and by no means is this final version of my thinking. It's simply a place in time with where my thinking is on the topic at hand and the complexities of the relationships behind them, the real world environment reaching for something more abstract and theoretical to help realize what is happening. I suppose the first step has been realized... that I have this bias. Now the work begins to learn how to move from here, open up my thinking and emotional risk taking through the process, how to let down my guard a bit and allow myself to truly witness the connections I'm feeling... then realizing what I've neglected in the mandala. But I'm also starting to listen and value that the concepts of tools or techniques might be better termed strategies or currents for building

foundations to support space. How-to is an easy discussion but has little real world value.

After reading Peter's "Journeying to Develop Critical Thinking" paper for the third time, I've started to wonder about the dichotomy of being in the here and now and how that is often experienced in tension with what the workplace expects as a method of doing business. Multitasking is the expected practice of many employees, especially in management. Clearing away distractions and being in the here and now is often not valued and perceived as weakness or inability to multi-task. I'm not suggesting I believe this culture. I feel that clearing away distractions and focusing is more productive and allows deeper thinking. But nonetheless the perception of multitasking is present in most workplaces. And what we experience in academia sometimes creates its own culture that does not easily translate into workplace or life experiences.

Final thoughts:

As I reflect on this class, I'm still intrigued by the idea of creating my own 'mandala' as reference in my Reflective Practice paper. Many of the concepts outlined in Peter's paper for his own 'mandala' would appear in mine. But somehow I feel much more complexity by adding workplace/academia, self-imposed and cultural expectations, and practice and theory applications. The Making Space for Taking Initiative In and Through Relationships mandala starts to build the complexities I'm feeling but don't have words for yet by adding, "explore difference".

Being at a distance I sometimes feel the effect of journeying alone. My partner is paramount in supporting my journey, but he struggles with understanding what it is I'm doing and going through on a conceptual level. He understands my day-to-day struggles, but because he is in a different place on his own journey, he struggles to appreciate the concepts of travelling the path of "developing a deep listening practice with a candle rather than a flashlight, allowing for the natural development from purpose."ⁱⁱ Rather, he is more times purpose or goal driven than be here now appreciative when it comes to paying for education without a job in focus. We talk about this openly and support each other through the process. He is not against my education, rather fully supportive. He just struggles with understanding value in the context of the complexity of uncertainty. We are exploring the differences between his and my experiences in the workplace as it relates to supportive or authoritative. But I need to develop a larger network of people thinking about similar struggles in their own practices to add to a support network. I've reached out to a Reflective Practitioner in the Horticulture Department at Cornell University after hearing her presentation on using Reflective Practice in the horticulture/art programs at Cornell. We've been exchanging some emails and will hopefully meet in person next time I'm in Ithaca. I appreciate having the NewSCC group, but I'm missing the face-to-face interaction of supportive friends since my move.

Some personal struggles that remain:

- Photography as a tool for play and making time to explore how this fits into my life now (not 2-4 years ago)
- Working full time to support need for retirement and health insurance security in a job I find interesting, but somewhat limiting, yet also important to proving supervisory skills. The job is rewarding, but I don't see this as the job I will retire from. Something else is brewing under the surface of my awareness.
- Still struggling with physical distance in the CCT program – how do I set up better support or local interactions within Cornell community?
- Still struggling with outcast feeling from horticulture and worth in the community

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ⁱ Jones, Michael. (2003) From Performance to Prescence: The Organic Nature of Learning and Change. Reflections vol.4 no.3

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