

Things is not always what they seem – Realization of a Changing Perspective

Jennifer

Introduction

Punya Mishra created this [ambigram](#) for me in a course I completed, Creativity in Teaching and Learning (CEP 818). When the flipped, “Jennifer” can still be read; this comes as a surprise to some as things are not always as they seem. As you all return to an upright position, I would like to take a moment to describe how PE and Health teachers can sometimes be viewed. Traditionally, we are viewed as less academic, more practical in our abilities. I remember our lecturers at Edinburgh University prepping us on the socio-cultural challenges that come with being the jock, or as we say in the UK, the drilly (from Drill Sergeant!). Please see this (rather amusing) [webpage that gives an insight into “Drill Lessons”](#) from the Victorian period. Things have changed considerably for me in the past two years during my Masters journey. As a result, I believe how I am viewed within the school has changed. I hope that changing peoples perspective based on their pre-conceived view of what a PE teacher is, has had a positive effect to raise my profile and that of the subject overall.

A Learning Journey

I never really engaged with learning in university. At times, I can admit I was completing work because it was a means to an end. My work ethic took a full 180 in many respects as I progressed within my Masters. I believe I experienced a change in priorities; I was eager to learn when courses and tasks were relevant, thought provoking and most importantly applicable to what I was doing in classes. The most beneficial classes have been those where I can immediately put knowledge into practice, and ultimately reap the rewards as I feel I am adding value to my teaching. This Masters has given me confidence, and allowed me to see that I have the capability to learn and moreover enjoy learning. My students sometimes talk about the “love” they have of school; developing their knowledge and getting “in the zone” with their studies is a spark of life for them. This was an alien concept to me before I started my Masters journey. That moment that I finally “got it” clicked; I understood their experience and began to see learning in a whole new light. My perspective of education had most definitely changed.

As I contemplate the different classes I have taken part in, I can reflect on the way my responsibilities have changed within the past two years. This experience has given me positive momentum to move forward to become more of an active contributor, and a leader within the department. I am currently involved in a series of courses that will earn me a middle leadership certificate. The Masters has changed how I approach my job, as I am now able to see possibilities as I am more forward thinking, aspiring for growth as a professional. This has encouraged me to progress and set a positive example.

PE teacher or coach; not both?

The first thought that struck a chord as I began synthesizing my experiences was the lack of sporting reference in my thinking. Over the two years, my role as a coach became less significant to me. As my priorities changed (i.e. taking on the role of PS-12 coordinator), I began to take less interest in the sports based courses within the Masters program. I found them interesting, but not engaging; that learning spark I spoke of earlier was not there. One of my original goals was to gain a better understanding of the American system, and that I did! I found the coaching mentality of classmates was very different to mine. I began to see how my lack of competitive drive had a significant effect on my ability, or my philosophy as a coach. I see that my coaching style is that of a PE teacher and not a coach. My focus was on students’ ability to deal from failure, understanding how to cope with pressure, learning from mistakes and supporting others within their team. Social and emotional development was more important to me than times. Technique improvement and achievement of personal goals were more significant to me rather than podium positions. Am I less successful because of my outlook? Some coaches may say yes. I beg to differ.

I am grateful that the courses within the Sports and Leadership concentration were set up in a way that I was able to question points of view through discussion forums, seek others opinions and formulate a greater

understanding of coaching. With this said, my focus turned towards technology. I found myself taking a keen interest in the use of technology during these courses, and I found ways to modify concepts covered to benefit my teaching within PE classes. In particular, the tasks helped me differentiate for high ability learners and lead me to find a curiosity within technology integration.

A Taste for Technology

Electronic Portfolios in Teaching and Learning (CEP 813) was my first experience where I really considered how the courses within the Master could significantly effect how I approach my role within classes. This course seemed to be tailor made to me and was the first step to becoming more of a risk taker using technology. The fear of the unknown was an issue for me. After teaching for ten years, you get in to the swing of how things work. During CEP 813 I developed the use of Sportfolios; online sports portfolios. Using a variety of clever add-ons and tools, I was able to create platforms for me students to showcase their work. This linked closely with formative assessment and encouraged me to look closely into how authentic, meaningful assessment can positively impact teaching and learning. This I am especially grateful for, as the Middle School has transitioned to Standards Based this year. I am able to support teachers with regards to their own assessment because of this experience.

Modeling is vital to encourage other teachers to do more within their teaching. My responsibilities have changed as I took on the role as PS-12 coordinator. I aim to support members of the department to do more with the resources available, and the Masters courses have enabled me to do so. Technology and Leadership (CEP 815) stands out for me over the past two years as one that helped me to embrace the challenge of becoming a Middle Leader, or moreover an effective Middle Leader! I particularly enjoyed creating a Professional Development ½ Day plan as part of this course. Blending my newly acquired knowledge of technology with strategies for effective leadership gave me confidence to push forward and use this momentum to encourage others. My knowledge, and the confidence that comes with this knowledge allow me to contribute to the wider community. People are interested in what I have to say, and the power of word of mouth gives me an upper hand as I attempt to collaborate more within my department, but out with to High School teachers who now value my opinion, seek me for help and ultimately take me more seriously as an educator.

A reality check; who ARE you as a learner?

One course in particular taught me an unexpected lesson; be more open minded with learning and don't be shy to come out of your comfort zone. CEP 818, Creativity in Teaching and Learning made little sense to me. Moreover, this was because I saw little relevance, and spent time (or wasted time from my perspective) doing tasks each week. I was shocked when I got towards the end of the course to experience a light bulb moment. It was almost like a switch in my head where everything made sense. What kind of learner am I and what type of learner do I need or want to be? I was so concerned with the individual tasks I failed to identify their purpose in the bigger picture. I was narrow minded, and naïve in my thinking. This course was excellent, not only because I finally understood how the content could translate to my teaching, but because it taught me to have more trust in what I was doing. I judged my learning experienced and was limiting my ability to learn. The tasks made me come out of my comfort zone; I, for the first time had to become a risk taker. Creativity in Teaching and Learning has changed my outlook as a learner. I reevaluated what motivation, perseverance and self-reflection means to me. I am very grateful to have had that opportunity, as my approach in subsequent courses was more positive and richer as a result.

Getting the hang of this now...

I am in the process of completing my final two courses Teaching and Learning Across the Curriculum (CEP 816) and Capstone Portfolios (ED 870). I am finding that many of the skills I have learned have been very useful when completing these courses. I feel I am finally getting the hang of this learning people talk about! Becoming more confident with technology has meant that I am able to progress and take my learning a step further. Teaching and Learning Across the Curriculum utilizes new media. Previous experience has given me a great foundation where now I can springboard to challenge both my thinking and my ability. In addition, I am more confident to share my work, as I am proud of what I have achieved. For both courses, I have developed websites that previously were bare and not all that user friendly. To be able to now suggest a particular section of my site to colleagues and model progressive practice has been empowering, especially when colleagues can learn or enhance their knowledge because of something I have shared. I admire professionals such as [The PE Geek](#) or [Mr Hair PE](#) who give teachers the opportunity to learn more about enhancing student experiences through technology and innovation. I am able to consider the impact of a learning community (whether online

or within the building). Collaboration and communication is key to our success as teachers, and I am confident I can be a more integral part of this after my Masters experience.

Conclusion

I am responsible for change. Taking control of who I want (or wanted) to be as a professional is my choice. This Masters was the first step in taking responsibility. Instead to talking the talk, it was time for me to walk the walk and embrace the need for change after 10 years of teaching. I feel confident to say that I am proud of my achievements within my Masters courses. I have experienced success, not only in the form of grades but from personal achievement, the feeling of progression and growth as a person. To finally admit that my interests are broader than sports, and to embrace the challenge of stepping outside my comfort zone has only encouraged me further. I am excited to see where this experience takes me. I am currently completing a Middle Leadership series of courses and look forward to collaborating with colleagues and developing my ability to be an effective leader. Taking a look at something from a different perspective can be sometimes surprising, and beyond your expectations... this journey has exceeded mine.