The PUSH and the PULL of it

Whoever is doing the doing is working the hardest, and whoever is working the hardest is doing the learning.

Recently, I showed one of my education classes a portion of a DVD on effective teachers. The quote above can be attributed to an idea the presenter (Dr. Harry Wong) was making. His words always make me chuckle. You see, my students will tend to get somewhat grumpy when working to understanding a concept or define a complex idea; oftentimes they look to me for "the answer" so they can move along. In moments like those, I like to explain to them (teasingly) that I already possess my teaching license AND have a job; I'm not the one who needs to demonstrate that I know the various topics or can perform the various tasks associated with teaching. *That* requirement lies directly with **THEM**. Therefore, they should work to figure it out, after all, I already know the answer. ☺

Before you think too harshly of me, you should understand: I am a constructivist—beholden to the educational philosophy that learners need to make their own sense out of information, roll around in a concept and get dirty. *They* need to make the connections, explore the relevancy, spot the misconceptions……if I do that work for them, it becomes mine. It should be theirs. My responsibility is to facilitate their discoveries, to shape and tone what they realize with an eye to the learning objectives.

The Sage on the Stage

The traditional teaching environment is that of a PUSH mentality. The instructor is the "Sage on the Stage"; the owner and distributer of all that is knowledge. The instructor determines what is shared, how quickly or slowly, and to what extent. The traditional instructor is doing all the work in his/her classroom. From preparing the lesson to pushing all the information to the students. The Sage can even pop in at a field event; he will allow the team to go through an event, but be the one to process what happened, telling said team what they did right and wrong and what they should do in the future.

How many instructors leave work mentally, if not physically, exhausted at the end of a full day of instruction? To stand in front of a group of people and push information to them 6-7 hours a

day is quite an exhausting task. I don't know personally as I refuse to be *that* person, but there are those of us in the profession who are the "doers' in their own educational environments.

The Guide on the Side

If we flip this model, we develop a learning environment (rather than the traditional *teaching environment*) that allows our students to "do" as we facilitate, or become "The Guide on the Side". Pulling information demonstrates a commitment to having students attempt explanations, test ideas, and ask questions. This puts the learner in the position of doing the tiring, messy work of grappling with the material while the instructor supports, assists, and corrects.

The instructor, however, does not get a free pass in this model. For this dynamic to be successful, instructors must be confident, well-versed and knowledgeable in their subject matter. Also, they need to know the backgrounds and experiences, even generally, of their learners so as to supplement and build upon what is already there. Pulling information is a delicate, but tough job. If not done correctly, the "so what" becomes tangential or not aligned with any specific learning objective.

Other Considerations

For this sort of learning model to be fully effective, the institution needs to ensure that systems are established to support maximizing student learning. Programs of Instruction need to be written in a way that lend themselves to suit *Guides* rather than *Sages*. Training Developers need to design learning activities that place the learner at the center of the instruction (Pull) rather than the instructor (Push). Instructors need a solid, systematic on-boarding process that extends beyond the Instructor Preparation Course (IPC). Individual units and companies need to ensure that new instructors have ample time to learn the material, understand the vision for educating and training students, and have the opportunity to shadow seasoned instructors who model the appropriate expectations. Lastly, instructional leaders need to ensure that visions and expectations are communicated and understood.

In the meantime, there are strategies that can be used to implement more **PULL** than **PUSH** in any learning environment. For assistance in figuring this out, contact the Educational Support Group (ESC) at TLDE.

The members of TLDE and the ESC wish you and your families a happy holiday season filled with peace, love, and happiness.