Philosophy of Education
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My philosophy of education is discourse regarding my beliefs about the learning environment and those who interact within it. I specifically use the term discourse as Gee (1989) defines a discourse as "a sort of 'identity kit' which comes with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take a particular role that others will recognize" (p. 6) and explains that the words used within a discourse hold power over "actions, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities" (p. 6).

Influenced by theorists and philosophers such as Freiere, Giroux, and Knowles, I view the learning environment, not bound by a brick and mortar classroom, as a location of possibilities, a place of creation, and a place of collaboration. Students and educators come together to explore, think, dialogue, innovate, and grow (Hook, 1994).

Educators are responsible to *facilitate* and *mediate*. As facilitators, educators design and organize instruction, provide feedback and assessment, and engage students in direct instruction and dialogue (Garrison, Archer, & Anderson, 2000). They think about technology integration in a pedagogically sound manner (e.g. does this technology enhance or distract from learning) and use it to facilitate instruction, not simply for the sake of looking "cool." As mediators, educators skillfully assist students' negotiation of knowledge through interpretation of and guidance through complex subjects. The ability to facilitate and mediate requires: (a) knowledge of the subject of study; (b) an understanding of and commitment to the learners' development; (c) a sense of timing; (d) the ability to listen and ask good questions without just giving the answer; (e) flexibility, responsiveness, empathy, and ease with ambiguity; and (f) the humility to say, "I do not know but we can investigate it together." A collaborative stance toward students is also necessary.

Students are empowered by educators to be *participant learners*. Thus, they are responsible to be active, dynamic participants in the learning process; they need to engage, read, analyze, debate, integrate, synthesize, and take "mutual responsibility for learning" (Hooks, 1994, p. 144). And, the effectiveness of this teaching and learning process is best tested in the manner described by Greenleaf (1970) when discussing servant leadership, "The best test, and the most difficult to administer is: do those served [e.g. *students*] grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants [*educators*]?" (p. 181).

For the extended version of my philosophy of education with examples of specific strategies, visit http://amandaszapkiw.com/philosophy-of-education/