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Navigating the Terrain:
Emerging Frontiers in Learning Spaces, Pedagogies, and Technologies

Constancy Amidst Change: Reflections on Teaching and Learning Conversations in an Open University

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Using a scholarly personal narrative, I share about my first year pretending to be a deputy director, responsible for 'faculty training' under the Center of Open and Digital Teaching and Learning in an open university. My reflections over time in storied form as part of teaching and learning with colleagues (Ingersoll, 2018) aim to illuminate what constitutes our ongoing and best practices within the institution's so called Open and Distance eLearning programs or ODeL (Alfonso, 2014). I branded a series of faculty learning activities as "T&L Convoes" to bring to the fore topics worth talking about, like an online version of stories we would normally share over 'merienda' or breaktime. Focused group discussions were undertaken to interrogate how faculty members learn best, and their current practices which seemed to work as examined through the lens of teaching presence, an element of the Community of Inquiry framework by Garrison et al. (2000). I also inquired about what else they would like to learn, hence topics for the T&L Convoes tackled assessment for student success, managing large-sized classes, doing synchronous live classes and faculty-tutor dynamics. As I reexamined recorded sessions (stored data) of our T&L Convoes, I found myself taking a critical stance, asking whether we as an open university and champions of ODeL are in fact contributing innovative teaching practices or do we simply come across as such because of the technologies we choose to enhance our practice. Findings which constitute our best practices boiled down to engagement of active and independent learning through course site features, use of direct or explicit instructions, facilitation of critical discourse, timely feedback on submissions, and intentional learning community-building efforts (Villanueva & Eacersall, 2024). I also highlighted shared issues among faculty members which to my mind were seemingly a blast from my past as a newbie higher education faculty, fifteen years back. These concerns were related to a sense of disconnectedness, grading/marking assignments, finding time for research and publication as well as work life balance. I resolved to no longer pretend but sustain these worthwhile engagements with fellow faculty members by banking on social presence and cognitive presence. These "T&L Convoes" may be optimized to trigger curiosity and exploration alongside other peer-learning activities which should comprise a wholistic approach to faculty development experiences. Grounded on constancy of purpose (Dye, 1991), I choose to persevere in order to drive this reflexivity further on to ascertain whether there will be integration and resolution to all we say and do as faculty members within our ODeL programs. The importance of a personal and reflexive approach to determine peer-learning sessions with colleagues is affirmed as an optimal way to make a needs-based, just-in-time learning happen, versus the so-called 'in-service teacher training' residential universities are accustomed to undertaking. Effective use of technology enabled us to operate as colleagues learning from each other's practices, equally reinforcing the communities of practice (Wenger, 2000) as a supreme pedagogy we shall continue to own up to amid the ever-changing landscape of open universities.

Keywords: community of inquiry, scholarly personal narrative, faculty development, online learning

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ASCILITE 2024

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