

SOME CHANGE REALLY JUST CREEPS UP ON YOU

BY KEVIN LOHAN

It used to be that as an educator, there was a bit of pressure on you to have all of the answers.

Maybe you remember those first few weeks in front of groups when you felt the weight of responsibility.

“What if I say something wrong?” you would wonder in the sleepless nights.

“What if they ask a question I can’t answer? I’m supposed to be the ‘teacher’. It’s all too much.”

The pressure was on to have the perfect memory. We mostly got around that after some practice by using one of the many strategies for ‘parking’ questions and coming back with answers later.

That is, of course, unless you were one of the lucky ones who happened to actually have all the answers and the perfect memory.

Those good old days of personal uncertainty and self-doubt have been brought back to me recently on a couple of occasions and it struck me that there has been a fairly radical change in ‘classroom’ behaviour. (Please do not make me change the word classroom. It’s just easier to write. Put your own word in there if you must.)

Anyway, I guess it has been a while since I was actually in a facilitation role because what I witnessed on two separate occasions could not have been just coincidence. There must be a movement going on out there that I have been sheltered from.

Learners were finding their own answers.

Well, blow me down with a feather.

On the first occasion, I was merely an observer in a very technical training program that I had helped to write. The facilitator was trying to help people new to the entire industry, to grasp some fairly technical concepts about equipment. On occasion, as you do (and as we all did in those first few weeks of self-doubt and fear of being right all the time), the facilitator occasionally slipped into jargon or concepts that went over the heads of the learners.

At one point, I noticed that one of them was working away on their laptop (which was open on the desk for use at various times during the program).

Here they were, ignoring the facilitator’s words of vast wisdom and doing heaven knows what! Updating their Facebook status, I thought.

Then they blurted out something like, “Oh, I see. That’s what an axle counter is. Now I get it.”

They had been googling pictures of the technical equipment being described in the course and getting their own understanding since it was not coming as well as would be hoped from the facilitator.

Not only were they learning but they were being empowered to do so at the same time.

I wish I could have said this was my plan in the instructional design all along

but that would be too easy. (I can say though, it is now part of my plan as often as I can make it happen.)

On another occasion, I was again sitting in a technical course I had helped to write. It had a lot of law supporting it and you know how tricky that can be.

The facilitator had said something like, “I’m not exactly sure what The Act says about that” and then someone had their phone out in a flash and was adding “Section 42 of the Act says that ‘blah, blah, blah.’”

It was just fantastic.

How did this revolution happen without me noticing it. Have I been in a cave or something?

I’ll tell you one thing though. I now make it a habit to say at the start of every course ... “Get your phones out and turn them on.”

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