A Blank Book: A Response to Parsons

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Parsons took a very personal and reflective look at the process of contributing to a class wiki, an assignment in the Principles of Learning (PoL) Course for MEd students at University of Ontario Institute of Technology. This contemplative approach has inspired me to undertake this review in a similar manner and compare my own experience as one of the first students to contribute to this wiki in 2010.

The aspect of this article that resonated most powerfully with my own initial interaction with the wiki was Parson’s blank page at the beginning of his paper. I often experience this same, overwhelming feeling when setting out to accomplish something new; writing this commentary for example. However, with this wiki, it was not just a blank page but a blank book when we were handed the reigns to create content and I had never worked on a collaborative website at the time, something I initially viewed as a hindrance. However, as I considered that Parson’s previous experience with HTML coding shaped his process in creating wiki content, I think that my lack of experience with such programs was an advantage to me. I immediately realized that creating content in Microsoft Word and then transferring it into the wiki would be the best use of my limited, technological skill set. In doing so, I seem to have escaped the bumpier learning curve experienced by Parsons.

A distinct difference between my wiki process and Parsons is that my experience was one of creating something brand new on a blank canvas. While initially overwhelming, I now believe that my job was much easier than those of later cohorts. Yes, I grappled with similar inquiries as Parsons; What if I posted inaccurate information? Who am I to be posting academic information for others to learn from? However, because the chapters of our book were blank, I did not have to question my role in the process. I was there to be an author, not an editor. My job was simply to create content, and that I did. As I review my contributions, they were consistent throughout the semester. I was also able to create
large, free flowing contributions that would later become chapters in our class book. I get the sense that it was less piecemeal than the experience of Parsons.

Parson’s conclusion neatly summarized the overall experience of contributing to the PoL wiki. It demonstrates a growth in awareness in how the author saw himself situated within the task; from hesitant participant to confident contributor and author. He also notes that this growth was largely a result of experience with the wiki. I found this fitting considering his mention of Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Romer’s research (1993). Mastery takes time, and according to this study and Gladwell’s position (2008), this time must be deliberately spent practicing a task. With Parson’s description of his contributions, it is without a doubt he was undertaking his process in a deliberate and methodical manner. Is he at that 10,000 hour mark? I’m sure at times it felt like it but I think Parsons, as well as anyone else who has worked on the PoL wiki, would agree it was never meant to be mastered. Here I am, well over 7 years since I contributed content, still reflecting on my process as author in our ever growing book. From my perspective, the wiki was meant to provide us with an ongoing learning experience in which we could create and reflect on academic information in a collaborative manner and I would say it has well served its purpose.

REFERENCES