Gagné’s Reflections on Her Journey through the Principles of Learning Course Wiki – a Commentary

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In recounting of her experiences with the Principles of Learning (PoL) course wiki and the associated tools, Gagné is outlining her contributions to the (PoL) course wiki along with an assessment and presentation of her personal and professional development throughout her time in PoL. Through some trial and error, and varying levels of experimentation, Gagné was able to achieve an overall high level of contributions to the course wiki.

The PoL Wiki is a rich repository of resources compiled by students in the PoL course as part of the graduate program in education at University of Ontario Institute of Technology and as such has been in existence and continuously expanding since first being introduced in 2010 (W. Hunter, personal communication January 28, 2018). All students moving through PoL over the past six years have had a hand in creating a resource for current and future students to refer and add to. This resource with its dependency on contributions by, and collaborations between students in PoL, over time, stands as an example of social knowledge building through a social constructivist activity (Holmes, Tangney, FitzGibbon, Savage & Mehan, 2001). The course requirement for Wiki contributions is that they should occur throughout the duration of the course, and on a regular basis, from the beginning of the course and not all at the end of the course thus showing evidence of engagement in social constructivism.

Gagné offers that her contributions to the Wiki fell short in terms of overall collaboration with other learners and that the level of contributions, throughout the course from beginning to end, was not in line with course expectations both despite her best intentions. This is contrasted by Gagné’s assertion that her overall quantity and quality of posts met the expectations of the activity and that her personal growth through the process is evidence of her learning through the activity.

Gagné says she was at first overwhelmed with the task at hand as a novice at co-creation on a Wiki platform and as such she feels that with more scaffolding from the instructor that she may have engaged in a more meaningful way much earlier. I would argue that the “guidance” she feels would have helped her as well as future students would remove the opportunity for true construction of her own, or any other student’s own learning around collaborative content creation for a Wiki. The constructivist approach is one that relies on
the students own individual experiences and prior learning to set the stage for their exploration through new learning in a social context (Vygotsky, 1978). Gagné’s explorations and trial and error in her initial attempts at co-creation in the PoL wiki laid the groundwork for what she eventually was able to contribute. Those initial attempts, as frustrating as they may have been, were as important in her overall learning with the wiki as her future contributions would prove to be. Furthermore, Monica’s learning with regard to building, formatting and linking content would not perhaps have held as much meaning in the end through her participation in the Wiki if that learning had been based on more detailed guided instructions and tutorials.

In terms of collaboration, while there is no mention of making use of the discussion thread that is by default attached behind every wiki entry, it seems to me that her definition of collaboration was bound by the timeframe of the course and interactions with class peers with regard to co-creation on the wiki. One important element of collaboration with this tool is that while the work done by a student today may be completely new, students can also improve or add to existing content created by previous students in the course and in that way co-create or collaborate in the building of the repository on the Wiki. While Monica admits that she was not able to make continuous contributions from the beginning of the course to the end, her contributions do show evidence of true co-creation of content and collaboration in constructing her learning by picking up where others had left off. In this way Gagné has joined a community of learners and authors (Augar, Raitman, & Zhou, 2004) that stands as evidence of a much larger collaborative effort as she added and linked to previous work and as her work is added to and linked to by future learners.

Ultimately Gagné’s overall sense of accomplishment and self-admitted personal growth in overcoming her initial lack of self-efficacy and ability with the technology demonstrates her ability to construct her learning in a way that may not have been possible through a more structured and guided approach. Her contributions to the PoL wiki while not all necessarily completed through on-going collaboration with her own class peers, will stand for future students to review and refine, just as she has with the work of past students. Gagné has shown herself to be a prolific collaborator in this resource that will continue to be compiled, studied, and transformed.

REFERENCES
