

Session 8

Watch It, Do It, Know It: Cognitive Apprenticeship

Making Thinking Visible to Build Student Confidence in Imperfect People and Institutions

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For the most part, I have been content with just muddling through life without ever making a serious attempt to understand the thought processes behind the decisions I and others made that have shaped my life. An unexpected benefit of teacher education is helping me clarify those thought processes. One simply cannot become a good teacher without understanding one's own thought, or cognitive, processes and the USF credentialing program provides many opportunities to develop that understanding.

In the press of daily life I have seldom stopped to consider how to visualize my thinking by either articulating my reasoning or reflecting on problem solving strategies. In retrospect, the few times I have paused to reflect, progress on tough problems followed.

Most of the time, though, I've relied on gut instincts I have increasingly come to trust, especially when those instincts conflict with signals from organizations with large, self-perpetuating bureaucracies. By pausing to reflect and to articulate my instincts, I hope in the future to be more successful in persuading those in such bureaucracies with insightful words to seriously consider my views. Perhaps then there will be less need for antagonistic direct action to shake them out of their bureaucratic stupor.

One of my goals then, is to teach my students how to visualize their thinking using cognitive apprenticeships so that they, too, can more effectively advance their views. Before I can offer them a cognitive apprenticeship, though, I must first engage them "in interesting and challenging tasks that motivate them to develop expertise."

(Darling-Hammond *et al.* , 2003) Unfortunately, our government and society offers many such challenging and authentic tasks for lower income students and their families - tasks that would increase their opportunities, make their neighborhoods safer and improve their health by convincing governments and businesses to adopt more equitable and sustainable policies. Like many other teachers, (Gillen, 2014) I plan to help students articulate and reflect on their own thinking processes in order to build on their strengths and identify gaps in their thinking about their government and their lives.

After making my own understandings visible, and likely and unavoidably modeling some of my own misconceptions, too, I will help students become aware of theirs, especially misconceptions aided and abetted by institutional and societal propaganda. My classes will provide opportunities, for example planning of field trips to view social problems that impact their daily lives and preparation of invitations to outside speakers who claim to have solutions for those problems, for students to assist each other in examining their views and the impacts of those views on their lives.

Once students understand the limitations of the people and institutions who have shaped their views, they will likely open to learning how to constructively acknowledge imperfections in those same entities. Constructive acknowledgement of imperfection, but never complete acceptance, are prerequisites for working constructively with those entities and for students to have confidence in imperfect people and institutions. My goal is to eventually replace inarticulate doubts and fear that cause some students to lash out, unpredictably and counterproductively against nearly anyone and any institution, with confidence that they can work constructively with those same people and institutions to improve their lives.

References

1. Darling-Hammond *et al.* 2003. *The Learning Classroom: Theory Into Practice*. Detroit: Annenberg Media.
2. Jay Gillen 2014. *Educating for Insurgency: THE ROLES OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN SCHOOLS OF POVERTY*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.