

What We Know Is Not Necessarily the Ultimate Answer

By Huong Nguyen

I definitely think that the way most people learn and teach changes throughout the years. I can say for sure that the way I learned when I was in elementary school is a lot different than how it has been the last couple years especially since graduating high school. I went through an obvious change when I first entered into community college because teachers presented to me new ideas and methodologies of learning and teaching. It was no longer a top down learning situation but a space where the classroom participants were encouraged to teach and learn from each other. Learning was no longer about what the professor brought to the classrooms but what each student can contribute. All my ideas about learning and teaching changed and continue to develop the more I interact with people around me. However, at one point in life, learning and teaching was very systematic and structured.

At a very young age, I was told and believed that the teachers had the answers and were there to teach us what we needed to know. The history of the United States for as long as I can remember began with “in 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.” I grew reciting lines that I was taught to be “our” history. Like the clique goes, we are all sponges waiting to soak up the information. The information from K-12 was interlinked with each other. I was taught these things and I believed it. The way information was taught made learning very much like a sponge. I remember being told to read and learn information in order to memorize and repeat them.

Things began to change when I attended community college. Some of it had to do with the relevancy of the information that I was learning. What really changed though was the way things were taught beginning with the introduction of Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. I not only read about his ideas around teaching and learning but I had classes in which professors subscribed to those ideas. Learning became fun and interesting to people around me as well as myself. We learned through our interactions with each other and by discussing the things we disagreed on as well as agreed on. Learning and teaching also meant participation within your perspective community. Learning is a continuous process within every interaction that was to happen. Everyone that I worked with had the mind set and willingness to learn something new and out of their familiarity. Teaching was a little bit different in that we had to be careful not to set up a hierarchy within that teaching space. The learning part was a little bit easier to grasp but teaching required us to understand what we know is not necessarily the ultimate answer. Teaching and learning are very much interwoven with each other. Teaching meant learning and vice versa. Ultimately, both became a continuous process.

I mention familiarity earlier as well and by that I meant relevancy. The information I had learned was something that I could easily connect back to a collective history I had identified with.