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HOW TO EVOKE THE LEARNER'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE LEARNING PROCESS AND ITS OUTCOMES?

TIME OF CHANGE

What inspired me to write this article was the enormous change I had to go through with many other trainers, educators, and teachers moving from a 3D workshop space to a virtual one. It was quick and abrupt, and personally, it required a fast revision of my teaching style, my methods, and maybe even more importantly, my set of assumptions and beliefs about what an effective learning process looks like and my role and responsibility here.

One of the essential insights I got while reflecting on all of the above was to realise that even though I believe the learner is responsible for the final results of their learning process, I had better control over the learning environment in face-to-face training. I was able to see what was going on in the group and how people interacted to react to the "unspoken" situations. I'll give you an example:

During f2f training, I was very clear about not allowing open laptops. I always explained my reasons (multitasking isn't beneficial while learning, it's a distraction for the person using it and other participants). I can't tell the participants to close their laptops during online training, can I? However, what I started doing is far better because I began inviting learners to be more aware and attentive to the distractions they experience and their influence on the learning process to make more conscious decisions. This virtual training room also showed me that I need to accept that it is the learner's choice. Sometimes they will go back to doing whatever they find more important or attractive to do right now. In this scenario, I again have an option to stop and reflect on how our behaviours and distractions may influence other learners so that we all together find a solution to minimise it.

Those two situations, in my perception, describe pretty well the SHIFT that is happening more visibly than before in the trainer's role in terms of the areas of responsibility.

That is why it helps me to state my role as follows: I am responsible for creating the best possible learning conditions, which I can accomplish through the **DESIGN** of the training, which builds learners' **AWARENESS** of how much the influence they have on the final results of their learning process through elements such as mindset and attitude you are approaching the learning process, being aware of your own learning needs and creating your learning environment). Last but not least, our learners need to make their own **CHOICES** concerning what they learn, how they know and what outcomes they want to achieve to feel more responsible for their results. OK, so how do we do that?

It I will share some of the practices that I DO believe help learners understand and see their role in the whole process. I will also give examples of patterns that I observe in different pieces of training, courses that I've attended as a participant.

Small shifts during a one-time training

The condition we are in, the state of body and mind with which we enter the learning process influences it strongly, beyond what we want to be aware of. Even though it seems common knowledge that if I'm tired or if I feel irritated, it may impact how I learn. Yet, we don't have a self-check habit of stopping and noticing where I am with my thoughts and feelings. There was more time for that during longer pieces of training (at least one-day workshops). However, now in the online reality, when everything seems shorter and quicker, I have an impression that checking "how I am" and what condition I am in became one of the things cut out from the agendas because there is no time. That is why at the beginning of a workshop (even if it lasts 2 hours), I will start with a quick check-in on how people feel and their attitude. Depending on how much time I have, I'll do it in various ways. Let me give you a few examples of the quickest versions:

▶ **I ask the participants to assess themselves on a scale from 1-10** - "what is their level of energy with which they start the training?" and "what is their level of concentration from 1 to 10?". After getting the numbers, I ask them if these are good conditions for them to acquire knowledge and learn new skills and if no I ask them to check if they need to do something about the level of energy or concentration to help them be more present during the training (and it is about looking for possibilities and options you can take and let go of the things you don't have control over)

▶ **Sometimes, when I notice that people seem to be agitated or come in with a visible level of nervousness.** When it happens, and my observation is it happens more and more often, I offer a 1-minute mindful body scan or breathing focused exercise. It helps all of us to calm down a bit our nervous system and to make us aware of what we are bringing to the training room. Sometimes, I'll ask participants to express what is present for them with one word (I prefer to invite them to speak, but if we don't have time and we are online, I use the chat). What is worth mentioning, this kind of activity at the beginning can bring many positive outcomes to the whole workshop (encourages honesty, invites authenticity, helps to relate, and also, giving a name to what we are experiencing at the moment can bring relief in itself).

Asking about learner's expectations

I was taught to ask participants this question: What are your expectations? I understand the reason behind it – check if what they expect is what you can deliver. Got it ✔

However, I noticed that sometimes these questions encourage some learners to take responsibility for their learning outcomes outside (e.g. on the trainer). It also enables our mind to generate solutions (I will learn how to say NO because I think that will solve my problems), and sometimes our mind gets to fixated on its ideas.

That is why I prefer to ask people What brought them to the training? To what situations/problems do they want to find some answers? Why do they think this training can be helpful for them? From my experience, these questions are more open and focus on the reasons for choosing a particular workshop than specific solutions.

When people reflect on what brings them to the workshop and what aspect of their life/ work they want to improve, they seem more invested in the learning process. When our learner has this sense of searching for a good solution rather than on their way to execute the solution they thought they had.

Deciding on the group rules

At the beginning of a workshop/training, it is vital to establish some ground rules so that everyone knows how we want to work together. I became very mindful about how I wanted to invite people to this activity and how I wanted to phrase the invitation. Tips I follow:

- ▶ explaining why It can be helpful for their learning process and effectiveness
- ▶ referring to the topic of the training and kinds of activities that we will be doing and asking what they need to feel safe to engage in those activities
- ▶ or asking what helps them learn in a group of people?

Spotting learning disturbing

When I was doing an Embodied Facilitation Course, as a participant, I was invited to explore all the things from my inner landscape (mindset, attitude, beliefs, expectations, etc.) that can interfere with my learning process. We were encouraged to reflect on our learner's patterns that may not be helpful to stay engaged and open-minded. It was an invitation to be more observant of what was showing up.

They called it **learning trolls**, which I liked because I like giving shape to my limiting beliefs. What can be a learning troll? One of my learning trolls is "Oh, I already know this exercise. I'm not going to engage too much", and "puff" goes an opportunity to discover new layers of this experience. For some, it can be "I know the theory, can we move on, please?" or "I expected the trainer to be more XYZ", "I don't like how the trainer mispronounce the word XYZ" which make me more concentrate on the person than on the content. Or maybe "No, I don't need to join a peer group. It will be a waste of time" I need to emphasise that sometimes It may be true that the trainer is not good or the content is chaotic or that you don't need to join a peer group. However, this is an invitation not to follow all those thoughts automatically and examine them first because sometimes they may stand on our way to learn effectively. We are responsible for our attitude, so why not help learners see that?

Designed with a choice

This one, on some level, is a no-brainer. Being able to choose gives us autonomy, which translates into a sense of security. That is why we should be on an ongoing look for choice possibilities for our learners.

We can give them a choice about:

> ► how they want to sit and where,
> ► when and how they want to show up (e.g. camera on/off in online reality);
> ► how to approach a given activity/practice,
> ► and during longer learning processes:
> ► which exercises they want to do in between the meetings or maybe what additional activities they can participate in such as joining a peer learning group,
> ► how much they want to engage by providing a set of exercises with different groups of requirements;
> ► whether they want a certificate/proof of attendance/ an exam or a way to prove the level of choired skills

More importantly, be clear about why you give such choices, what they mean and how different decisions will impact the learning process and group work.

To sum up, this online reality invites us trainers/educators to revisit our view on responsibilities in the learning process. In my opinion, it is an invitation to share this responsibility more often through a process DESIGN, which creates space for building AWARENESS and offering CHOICE.

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