

[Title Here, up to 12 Words, on One to Two Lines]

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In order to be an effective teacher, one needs to have a clear sense of self and demonstrate a strong presence (Meijer, Korthagen, Vasalos, 2009). Korthagen's (2004) Onion Model can be used as a point of reference to guide this personal journey. Similar to the metaphor of an onion, as you remove each layer, the personal reflection deepens. At the center of the onion, the most difficult and personal questions are asked (Meijer et al., 2009). The purpose of this paper is to discuss the three most inner layers of this model (belief, identity and mission) as it pertains to my own role as an online facilitator and the importance of communicating online. Reflection on my core values and personal philosophies will assist my continuous growth as a professional.

Of the three layers to be discussed, personal beliefs and educational philosophy are found farthest from the center. As I think back on my experiences, I admit to trying many different approaches and have blended educational theories such as behaviorist and cognitive theory over the years. However, regardless of the newest and greatest educational trend, there are three main concepts that have rung true with me since the beginning of my career. I strongly believe in connecting with my students, valuing the individuality of each student and creating engaging lessons. At the beginning of OLTD, we were introduced to Stephens Downes' concept of Connectivity (Ally, 2008). His ideas of using the Web 2.0 to allow students to create their own paths of learning while connecting with others online coincide with my beliefs (Ally, 2008). While facilitating online, Moore points out that it's also important to incorporate a variety of different interactions, such as student-student and student to teacher (Moore, 1989). In doing so, it's possible to build a sense of community in an online course while reducing the

transactional distance perceived by the student (Moore, 1989). And lastly, creating purposeful and engaging lessons can be implemented by following Grant Wiggins' theory of backwards design (Wiggins, 1989). Combining the ideas of Downes, Moore and Wiggins, I can align my teaching philosophy and integrate these practices while facilitating in the online environment.

As we transition into the next layer, the questions of identity are posed: who am I and what kind of teacher do I want to be (Korthagen, 2004)? With age and life experience, my concept of identity has changed with the different stages of life. Currently, I see myself as a lifelong learner in all aspects of my life. As a teacher, I am constantly implementing new ideas into my practices and therefore, experience reciprocal learning from my students as we work together to accomplish common goals. As a parent of three small children, I am learning the value of patience, the importance of time management and the need to prioritize my values to promote strong family ties in my children. And lastly, as a student continuing my graduate studies in a new field, I am constantly being exposed to new theories and pedagogies. My personal identity comes from blending these three different parts of my life together so that my personal self becomes the same individual as the one that is the facilitator. In other words, the values that I have in my personal life transfer into those that I have in my professional life and thereby allow me to have a strong sense of presence in my teaching practices.

At the inner most layer of the onion lies the most personal and revealing aspects of the core reflections- the level of mission (Meijer et al., 2009). This level asks the question of what is deep inside us that moves us to do what we do (Korthagen, 2004)? As stated above, my personal identity is of a lifelong learner. This belief stems from an

innate sense of curiosity of how the world works and the need to make sense of things around me. This has lead my down the path of obtaining my degree in Biological Science. Upon finishing my degree, I could have chosen to work in a lab or do research; however, another side of me enjoys working with children and sharing the joy of constructing knowledge. For these reasons, I chose to become a high school Science teacher. My current profession motivates me and helps define the other levels of the Onion Model found above this innermost layer. As an online facilitator, my goal is to continue on my learning journey and impart my passion for Science into the virtual classroom.

Personal reflection is key to understanding what motivates us and helps explain the decisions that we make when faced with adversity (Meijer et al., 2009). Using Korthagen's (2004) Onion Model, I was able to evaluate my beliefs, identity and mission as it related to my own core values. The next step in this process would be to put my philosophy into action while creating course materials and building relationships with my students in my practices as an online facilitator. Having a clear and deep understanding of your core values allows you to maintain balance in both your professional and personal life.

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