I believe that each learner is a unique individual with his or her own set of experiences, knowledge and ways of knowing. As an adult educator it is my job, in all aspects of my work, to support learners in meeting their fullest potential by creating learning environments that respect, draw from and build upon learners’ unique life experiences, talents, and skills. Learning environments that are safe, support risk-taking, and invite teamwork and sharing of ideas lend themselves to more effective learning. The elements that I believe are conducive to establishing such cooperative learning environments include the teacher as a facilitator of learning, encouragement of student involvement in the planning and evaluation of instruction and learning, and support and respect for individual interests, experience, and orientation to learning.

When the teacher's role is to facilitate or guide, providing access to information rather than acting as the primary source of information, the learners' search for knowledge is met as they explore and form answers to their questions. For students to construct knowledge, they must have the opportunity to discover for themselves and practice skills in authentic situations. Providing opportunities for experiential learning and allowing adequate time and opportunities for learners to reflect upon the experience critically, derive useful insight, and incorporate the results creates an opportunity for individual discovery, construction of knowledge and change.

Equally important to the facilitation of learning is having the opportunity for student involvement in the planning and evaluation of instruction and learning. Developing curriculum around student interests, needs, and ways of knowing fosters intrinsic motivation and stimulates learning. One way to take learning in a direction relevant to learner interests and orientation to learning is to invite student dialogue around the units of study, learning strategies, and activities. Given the opportunity for input, learners generate ideas and set goals that make for much richer learning than I could have created or imagined myself. When learners have ownership in the curriculum, they are motivated to work hard and master the skills necessary to reach their goals. When the voice of each learner is heard, an environment evolves where students feel free to express themselves and that their ideas are valued.

Passionate about finding the most effective ways of stimulating and sustaining intellectual growth of those in my courses, I find learning to be a complex process. This process is tied to previous experience, is content and context specific and prompted by individual interests and orientation to learning. As a facilitator of learning, I am attentive to these factors and work to adapt approaches according to the needs of the learners, subject matter and setting. This focus on the learner includes providing strategies designed to improve learning. I often encourage
learners to explore their own unique ways of knowing as a means of enhancing the experience. Central to adult learning is the concept of informal and incidental learning (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). Encouraging critical reflection both in-action and on-action, I am able to increase learners’ self-awareness of the learning opportunities posed by life experience, or informal and incidental learning.

I do believe in reflective practices and the transformative nature of education (Schön, 1987). We each bring our own perspective, point of view, and limitations to any experience based on our personal history. By encouraging an understanding that social and political forces frequently shape the construction and use of knowledge, students sharpen critical thinking skills enabling them to transgress limitations. I encourage reflection and students to question how they know what they believe to be true about the world in support of their challenges of existing boundaries. This helps students see boundaries, whether personal or social, as constructed and affords them an opportunity to move beyond boundaries which is both empowering and transforming.

Facilitating learning provides an opportunity for continual learning and growth. One of my hopes as an instructional designer and educator is to instill a love of learning in my students, as I share my own passion for learning with them. Teaching demands humility as much as respect. It is crucial that educators and trainers recognize the power inherent in their role and are self-reflective about their actions. In my facilitation, I work to be mindful of my position as a role model of the kind of learning I strive to promote among learners. Transformative learning is a reciprocally educative endeavor, informative and uplifting for teachers and students alike (Schön, 1987). It is about opening hearts and minds and changing lives for all those involved in the process. I know I am successful in my teaching when students tell me that they have learned “to see the world through a new lens” or “to think more critically.” These are tools of empowerment and rewards of transformative teaching and learning.

When the educator’s role is to guide, providing access to information rather than acting as the primary source of information, the learners’ search for knowledge is met as they learn to find answers to their questions. For students to construct knowledge, they need the opportunity to discover for themselves and practice skills in authentic situations. Providing learners access to hands-on activities and allowing adequate time and space to use materials that reinforce the content creates an opportunity for individual discovery.
