

## **Abstract**

The Audacious Learner is a risk taker. She approaches learning boldly, overcoming fear because she is driven by the will to know. In this paper, I utilize ideas from “Blogging with Audacity” (Skellie, 2008) whose work analyzes what makes a successful blogger and blog. I draw parallels between the successful, unconventional blogger and the unconventional, self directed learner.

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I keep a blog about self directed, authentic learning and recently, I read an article called "*Blogging with Audacity*" written by Skellie, a woman who'd studied what makes a successful blogger. As I read, I noticed that her ideas about blogging audaciously parallel the very attitudes I would prescribe to approaching learning.

I describe 'the audacious learner,' as exhibiting desirable behaviour to learning new things: that is, being daring and taking risks. All breakthroughs, new ideas, original thoughts are acts of bravery. Getting to something fresh means first stepping into the unknown.

What does it mean to take risks when it comes to learning and acquiring new skills? To start, there has to be interest. Without interest, learning is a very unpleasant affair. You can nurture it, but you can't teach interest. This belongs to the individual; it has to come from the learner.

When you are enamoured by what you are interested in, keen to find out everything there is to know about it *and then some*, there is no question of allowing fear to stand in the way; this is a hallmark to being an audacious learner.

I recall as a little girl in England, how frightened I was at the thought that I would have to one day read the 'big girl' books my sister was reading at the time. I was afraid, at the tender age of 5 that I would be embarrassed in school because I didn't know how to read.

And when I eventually went to school and we were asked to read 'one on one' with either the teacher or one of her helpers, I recall that I was not allowed to take home the next reader up because I had stumbled on one of the words (one!!) in the first reader. I still remember the word; it was "away."

But I was determined to go home with a new reader and so I went to one of the helpers and read the book to her and this time, got the word right.

The helper, smiling encouragingly at me, told the teacher I needed the next reader up. But the teacher cried, "Shame on you! You sneaked to the helper and cheated."

I was not allowed to take the new reader home, and although I felt embarrassment as she had intended, I was far more indignant that a great injustice had been done. Luckily for me, I was never one to be easily put off.

Behaving and acting out of the norm, going beyond one's boundaries, these are attitudes that are not encouraged especially within the context of public schooling. The opposite is true: they are strongly discouraged. (*This brings to mind Ken Robinson, as well Seth Godin: "time and again, the curious are punished"*)

But breakthroughs are made by the non-conformists and unconventional.

And that requires stepping outside of one's comfort zone, the familiar or the contrived. It requires imagination. As Einstein famously said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited, whereas imagination embraces the entire world, stimulating progress, giving birth to evolution" (Calaprice, 2000).

In "Blogging with Audacity" (Skellie, 2008) writes a list of what, in our society, it's conventional for people to do and then contrasts it with how non-conventional, successful people behave.

The author writes that it's conventional that people:

- Don't ask for more than is offered to them
- Don't try to talk with people who are better known or higher status than they are
- Don't admit their failings and mistakes
- Don't celebrate success publicly
- Don't try things that could fail badly
- Don't change their mind once it has been made up
- Don't give up, no matter whether circumstances and goals change
- Don't question what everybody else does
- Don't ask others for help

Now take this list and like Skellie has done, replace the 'don'ts' with 'do' and you have a portrait of the Audacious Learner.

"Don't ask for more than is offered to them?"

Try stopping audacious learners, who will go as far as they want because they know that they are the masters of their own learning. "Nobody *gives* you an education. If you want one, you have to take it," says educator and author, John Taylor Gatto in a recent article entitled *take back your education*. "Only you can educate you—and you can't do it by memorizing. You have to find out who you are by experience and by risk-taking, then pursue your own nature intensely." (Taylor-Gatto 2009).

And because of this confidence, audacious learners are more willing to “approach and talk with people who are better known or higher status than they are” (Skellie, 2008).

It's the will to know, the thirst to 'go and get it' that drives a bold learner to talk to those who are 'already there.'

If their first efforts to open a dialogue fail, they try new and creative ways to get the conversation started. They realize the best way to learn how to do something is talk to people who has done it before. They also know that, because most people assume that experts will be impossible to get a hold of that very few people actually try, making the chances of success much better than they seem (Skellie, 2008).

I think of my oldest daughter, an aspiring writer, who on her own initiative has contacted authors she greatly admires and has interviewed them on their writing techniques and how they write, in order to get ideas on how to develop her own skills. In most cases, she was met with approachable, supportive writers who gave her encouragement and useful advice.

Don't admit their failings and mistakes?

We learn from making mistakes. If we are afraid to make a mistake then we will never do anything exciting because we already know the outcome of our actions - predictable and boring. Failing is *part of* the process.

This is one of the worst aspects of institutionalized education: it's bad to make mistakes. You learn to live in of fear of failure. The focus becomes **passing tests, at the expense of learning** and so we become timid and small in our approach to learning new things.

"They DO try things that might well fail. Because what if they don't? And if they do, will it really be so bad?"(Skellie, 2008). With audacity comes asking that 'dumb' question and not being afraid of appearing stupid but admitting to not knowing when you don't know. What do you have to fear except a bruised ego at the worst? But if you approach the problem as an adventure other, unforeseen paths suddenly open up to you.

Don't change their mind once it has been made up?

We can all relate to this one. "You want to what? Quit? No, no. You can't do that. You'll be a quitter. Besides, if you quit, you might never have another opportunity like that again..." and so on. But permitting yourself to change your mind, or recognizing a lost cause and giving up when it makes common sense to is being flexible and that flexibility will allow you to be able to see other avenues for growth and new goals.

Don't question what everybody else does?

Question authority is one of my favourite quotes to my kids. Question, question, question. Don't take everything for granted. The Dead Kennedys (1985) told it like it is (although crudely): "The dumbest buy the mostest." Not because something is deemed 'normal' does it mean it's right or inherently good. "They don't assume (without thought) that popular beliefs are correct, or that popular courses of action are the best ones. They temper the wisdom of the crowd with their own observations and research" (Skellie, 2008).

When you approach learning with an open and inquisitive mind, *when you are daring enough to make use of the opportunities that arise and 'carpe diem,'* you are forging your own adventures. What you will gain will be something of your very own and who knows where that will take you?

## References

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