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THE ROAD TO HYBRID COURSES: CHALLENGING YET REWARDING

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Abstract: *Faculty who have good technology skills and are searching for a way to adapt a course into some form of a distance education course have a number of options. Faculty who have the support of a technology specialist who can share many opportunities such as collaboration technologies and digital media, enable more flexibility in how courses are delivered. The ability to reach beyond the four walls of a classroom has helped developed an attitude that faculty are looking for innovative methodology, using technology in the classroom. Online programs, hybrid courses, audio-video conferencing, and virtual office hours have the power to eliminate traditional barriers of time and space for faculty and students. Faculty adoption of technology requires time, resources, technology support, and reflection to build the confidence needed when using various technologies in the classroom. Support and practice help to develop the confidence and comfort that is needed to use technology effectively.*

Introduction

Faculty who have initiative and creative thinking have led the way to the expanding of digital technologies within our programs in colleges and universities across the country. Faculty having a good foundation of technology skills is the first step into being innovative in offering courses through some form of distance learning. However, having a skillful technology specialist to support faculty through highly technical systems like Cisco, has helped faculty achieve much more than was thought possible in distance learning. Opportunities were discovered using collaboration technologies that provided synchronous and asynchronous video and digital media. This opportunity helped faculty to realize that adding powerful technologies enabled more flexibility in the delivery of courses and flexibility in communication with students. For example, students can attend class via live interactive video, as well as access time asynchronous recordings made outside of class.

The ability to reach beyond the four walls of the classroom is a contemporary focus for goals of college and university faculty and administration. Administrative support has helped established distance learning as part of the goals and missions of their institution, which encourage faculty to bring technology innovation into the classroom. It is true that a great deal of time is needed for creating courses that incorporate digital media and collaborative technologies, but the successful implementation of the technology is highly valued by all stakeholders. Collaboration technologies that extend interactions outside the classroom such as online programs, audio–video conferencing, and virtual office hours have the power to eliminate the traditional barrier of time and space for students and faculty. These tools are making the educational process much more efficient and effective (Bergman & Sams, 2012).

It is understood that competence of course content is an expectation of all faculty in higher education; however, using technology to take course content to another level in pedagogical approach is the challenge. It is the intentional use of technology and digital media in the classroom that requires faculty to look at their content through a different lens. The level of engagement that faculty build into a course with collaboration technologies, coupled with rich content, will engage and empower students in the learning process.

Through Process to Product

"Teaching Using Multiple Intelligence (TMI)" is a graduate course in which faculty wanted to go beyond the traditional approach to teaching to a more distance form of learning. This graduate course is comprised of

teachers from the surrounding metropolitan area, who possess a great deal of initiative or are self-starters and who have used technology and digital media. The change of this traditional Multiple Intelligences (MI) course format to that of a hybrid course was based on the rationale that those who are adept in technology and self-starters would be successful in a hybrid course. Graduate students who may not have a good technology background would receive extra support to ensure their success in the course. It is hoped that both the modeling of a hybrid experience and what is learned about using multiple intelligence theory may then be implemented in the graduate students' own teaching.

The learning theory that most effectively helps teachers with the diversity of learning is Multiple Intelligence (MI) theory, which is primarily used in PK through 12 schools. Howard Gardner's MI theory, which began with seven MIs in the 1980s, has now evolved to eight (Gardner, 2006). Gardner suggests that the brain has many capacities for learning that he calls intelligences, which are: linguistic, mathematical/logical, naturalistic, spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Educators have seen the value of MI theory and continue to use it to help students learn more effectively (Douglas, Burton, & Reese-Durham, 2008). Theories of how children learn differently are not so new as many think. Frederick Frobel, the Father of Kindergarten (Frobel, 2003) approached learning with young children many years ago with some of the basic aspects of MI. Frobel saw a child's interest was piqued when learning was exciting. Frobel understood that learning through the five senses experientially is valuable and is a very good example of the truly authentic learning that educational leaders value. Educators today strive to achieve a successful learning experience with similar approaches though MI. Therefore, when teachers develop learning activities they need to keep in mind that each child will have a different experience because each learns differently. Most children learn well with a direct instruction or traditional approach, but more children learn better with a MI approach because it helps all children learn in the way they learn best (Moran, Kornhaber, & Gardner, 2006).

From the Beginning of the Evolution to a Hybrid Course

A great deal of time was spent in researching the literature and attending workshops that covered blended learning, flipped, and hybrid courses, to learn how to take TED 8070, "Teaching Using Multiple Intelligence" from a traditional to a hybrid course. One of the most helpful books in changing the course format was Bergmann and Sams' (2012) *Flip Your Classroom.* In their book, the authors share information on how it is possible to go beyond the classroom walls with just knowing basic skills of technology; however, the support of skilled technology specialists, library media specialists, and colleagues who pioneered this approach is essential. Without the technology specialist and the encouragement of colleagues who pioneered the way, this hybrid course would not have been developed.

Originally this course met on campus two days a week for approximately 3 hours each class day. In developing the hybrid design, the course was to have on-site Discovery Days one day a week which supported group interactive learning. Group interaction was completed through synchronous interactive video, on-site projects, and in-class literature discussions on the Discovery Days. During Inquiry Days, the graduate students learned on their own, which gave a great deal of flexibility for course delivery. Inquiry Days involved multiple individualized learning activities, including: asynchronous video lectures that were pre-recorded, online videos created by subject matter specialists, short essay question quizzes accessed through our learning management system and submitted via email, and Discussion Board assignments.

Individual Inquiry Days

The first big challenge was how to present content in a way that was not only informational, but also interesting and engaging to the graduate students. The literature, as well as colleagues who have used distance learning before, suggest that learning when using distance education is not always so engaging as in a traditional, face-to-face courses (Bergman & Sams, 2012). Face-to-face learning allows for the social and emotional nature of interactive exchange between faculty and students. Using technology for recorded lectures delivers content, but not always in an interactive manner with students. Four interactive video lessons were developed so that students could view the faculty as well as the digital content that guided the lecture. In the video lessons, faculty made sure to have breaks, include thought provoking questions, and to be animated enough so that the interest of the graduate students

could be retained. Each of the video lectures ran for approximately one hour. The assessments of the knowledge gained from the lectures were determined by short-answer quizzes online through the learning management system. The library scientists at the university were very helpful in providing links for streaming videos that students accessed on the learning management system. The short answer essay quizzes, mentioned earlier, also contained questions related to the videos to determine the knowledge gained by the graduate students. The Discussion Board on the learning management system allowed the sharing of research on multiple intelligence theories and how these theories could be used in PK through 12 classes. Forums were available for the graduate students for discussions of journal articles about the three major theorists of multiple intelligence. During the pilot hybrid TMI course, a number of journal articles were provided for the graduate students to use; however, during the following years the course was taught, graduate students were responsible for finding their own articles for review and discussion.

Campus Discovery Days

Once a week the graduate students came together on campus to learn in an interactive way. The purpose of this on-site class was for the students to share what they had learned on their own during the Inquiry Days. Later in the semester, the graduate students also used Discovery Days for working on projects such as the multiple class lesson assignment, and on the final culminating group project, which was the Multiple Intelligence Fair.

For the class lesson assignment, graduate students were to develop five lessons that incorporated all eight multiple intelligences, identifying the content taught, the age group, and how the lesson involved using each of the eight multiple intelligences. These lessons were shared with the class on one of the Discovery Days, then were placed on the learning management system so the graduate students had access to the lessons that were developed all year long.

For the final culminating project, the graduate students held a Multiple Intelligences (MI) Fair. At each of the MI displays the intelligence was defined, and a minimum of 5-6 activities and assessments aimed at a specific age group were presented. The graduate students wrote a reflection on the process of developing their own and visiting the other MI fair displays. The student reflections on the MI Fair during the pilot year indicated learning and cooperative member interaction was the same on Discovery Days as in the traditional course format of previous years.

Concluding Thoughts

As stated earlier, the pilot of the hybrid course, TED 8070, “Teaching Using Multiple Intelligence (TMI)” was determined successful by faculty and students. The success of the hybrid course was determined by the graduate students receiving high grades as well as providing highly positive scores on the course and teacher evaluations. When comparing the grades of past TMI courses that were taught in the traditional format, the grades of the graduate students and the course and teacher evaluations scores were basically the same as in the piloted hybrid course. As stated by Bergmann and Sams (2012) and colleagues in higher education, the evaluations of a distance course are sometimes lower than a traditional format. Therefore, since the grades and the scores of this course were basically the same, this is good and therefore higher than was expected.

There was discussion among some graduate students and higher education faculty, that maybe the TMI course could be taught all on-line, without any on-site days in the classroom. However, due to the fact that this course is a model of how to teach in the K-12 educational system, and the fact that interpersonal intelligence is a key intelligence in teaching and learning, it is highly unlikely that this course will be offered in a completely online format. People interact better in person due to many nuances of body language, and other ways in which language is expressed. This leads the faculty to the conclusion that a totally on-line course, even for graduate students, would lose too much in communication. Group interaction is needed for the benefit of learning how to teach using MI theory in the classroom (Douglas, Burton, & Reese-Durham, 2008), and in the preparation of group projects, so on-campus learning is an important part of the graduate course.

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