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FIT

Relfective Learning Portfolio

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Introduction

I have worked as an adjunct instructor in FIT's Career and Internship Center since 2004. In 2008, I began teaching online courses as well. Both my live and online courses support FIT interns' learning on their credit-bearing internships. In Spring 2019 I will teach my first blended internship course, and I am using this reflective learning profile as a way to think through how best to use technology to make both the live and online facets of the course more effective.

Teaching Philosophy

My philosophy is to create a positive learning climate in my classes and to be a facilitator of my students' learning. To do so, I am mindful of my personal values, and I try to take actions and make decisions in line with these values when I interact with students. The values are:

Curiosity – asking students to explore why the course is personally meaningful for them and encouraging them to clarify their own values and priorities — and those of their colleagues.

Reflective learning – emphasizing that their internship and our course are opportunities for them to learn from their experience; working with them to identify positive outcomes and areas for development as an ongoing part of their professional development.

Respect – Conducting classes in which all students feel valued and accepted on their own terms; listening with resilience to ideas that I may not agree with.

Humor – Encouraging students to have fun; using playfulness as a generator of creativity, positive emotions and a feeling of connection.

Love - bell hooks has said that love involves focusing on the spiritual development of others. In her words, "Commitment to a love ethic transforms our lives by offering us a different set of values to live by. In large and small ways, we make choices based on the belief that honesty, openness, and personal integrity need to be expressed in public and private decisions." (hooks, 2001, p. 88) I agree and believe that love involves seeing students as they are and showing commitment to supporting their growth to become the people they desire to be.

So, in summary, my philosophy is to facilitate students' learning and development through constructive behaviors that demonstrate my commitment to their goals and my expertise in helping them reflect on and learn from their experience.

Learning from a Master Teacher

I completed my Ed.D. in adult learning in the mid 80s and have had many opportunities to work with master teachers. My dissertation advisor Jack Mezirow helped me understand the principles of reflective and transformative learning and got me thinking about how I could apply them in my own practice. Another professor Stephen Brookfield was a model for helping me develop my skills as a facilitator of learning. I observed his ability to teach by asking questions and creating effective

learning activities. In his book, *Discussion as a way of teaching*, he emphasized: "Discussion ... affords people the opportunity to expand their horizons, develop new interests and appreciate new perspectives." (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005, p.34)

As a professional trainer in many organizations, I have often had the opportunity to co-facilitate with other trainers. In nearly all cases, I have learned techniques for making learning engaging, effective, and fun. I have been especially focused on improving my skills as a facilitator. When you ask students questions, you need to be able to show respect for, and work effectively with, the answers you receive. Then, the goal is to involve others in the discussion, encouraging them to reflect on and respond to what has been said in ways that all will feel understood and respected. A good discussion will lead students to new and useful information that they have had a say in creating and "owning." I can sincerely say that I have been working for 30 years on how to conduct a discussion effectively. I believe that I have definitely made progress but there is still room for learning.

Finally, I believe that there are master teachers all around if we pay attention. My personal trainer Marilyn Stith-Bass is a good example. I started taking sessions with her last year because I realized that as a "senior" I need to work on my flexibility, strength, and conditioning. In her sessions with me, she "sees" me, shows her commitment to my personal objectives, challenges me and encourages me with positive feedback. Her approach reminds me of what I am trying to do with my students albeit in a different setting.

Example of Successful Lesson

I think my session on communication skills has been particularly effective. I start with an activity that surprises students, a listening test that most of them fail. It helps that realize that conscious and unconscious barriers often influence how they take in and exchange information with others. We discuss how these barriers may affect their ability to work effectively at their internship sites. From there, we begin work on active listening skills. Students practice paraphrasing and asking open-ended questions in work-related situations. We also focus on discussion skills: building and differing constructively with others. After their in-class practice, students apply three of the communication skills at their internship site. They write up reports on how they used the skills, describing the context, the actual words they said, the responses they received, and their assessment of the results. I have found this lesson to be particularly successful because the students typically show that they can use the skills effectively in a relevant work situation and are generally pleased with their efforts. I have also found it to be a good way to help students understand the value of reflective learning and get practical experience in using it.

Example of Unsuccessful Lesson; How to Address Challenges

My lesson on writing effective resumes has not always been so successful. Regarding this topic, students have "heard it all before" and their eyes glaze over when it is mentioned. I have shown examples of effective and ineffective resumes, provided tips, and then asked them to look at their own resumes and give each other feedback on how to improve them. Then, they submit a revised

resume as an assignment to be graded. Unfortunately, this has not been a particularly engaging or interesting session. This is a session that I will discuss more in a later section of this document on using technology effectively.

Why Expand the Use of Technology?

Up until a few years ago, I did not see much value in using technology for learning. Whether it was a video conference with a group on the other side of the world or a self-paced video module, technology-based learning always seemed like "second best" to me. You used technology when you could not do the real thing, which is live interaction with an instructor at a physical location. I resisted teaching an online internship course until my frequent business travel made it an easier option for me, but I was still not convinced of its value.

Then, with guidance from Tammy Cupples and Jeffrey Riman, I realized that online learning offered benefits not available from live instruction. These included:

- More resources: videos, articles, and broader sources of information available for learning on the internet.
- More inclusive discussions: all students participate not just the talkative ones.
- Self-directive research: students can research topics on the internet and present and support their own ideas in discussions.
- More flexibility: students have more leeway as to when and how they complete assignments.
- More intimacy: in my experience, students seem freer to "open up" about personal and career issues in online journals than they do in written assignments.

I also learned a lot by participating in SUNY's Tool of Engagement project designed to develop instructors' skills at using instructional technology effectively.

So, why expand technology? It seems to me that in this blended course I can maximize the use of technology and live instruction so that students can gain the best from both. From my experience, live instruction is good for:

- Building rapport and creating community among students.
- Practicing communication skills in "real time."
- Explaining procedures and information that require Q&A interaction.
- Reflecting on learning; discussing and committing to action steps.

Then, I can use technology as a means to increase the amount of learning resources available and to provide flexibility in how the students access the learning.

Experience of Technology for Students & for Me

I intend to use Blackboard to organize the learning experience for the students. Students will have the six modules of the course in one location, with all readings, videos, and other activities easily accessible. Each module will be outlined so that students will be able to view the learning objectives, learning activities, and resources in one location. Then, they will be able to use these outlines as a checklist to make sure that they meet the learning objectives for each module.

One example will be the lesson on resume writing described previously. Students will complete it using a fully online module. They will watch a short video that I will create on writing effective resumes. They will review sample resumes from my previous students. Then, they will research information on the internet and share ideas and best practices in an online class discussion. Finally, they will update their resume and submit it to me for feedback and grading.

I believe that using technology in this way will provide models, encourage interaction about what makes for an effective resume, and finally help students re-think and revise their resumes effectively.

For me, I think it takes the pressure off having to provide all of the information on resume writing. Instead, I will be acting more as a facilitator as students research and develop their own ideas about what will make their resumes stand out to potential employers. Also, by using the Blackboard grading function, I can increase my efficiency in giving feedback and grading.

What I Intend to Implement as a Result of this Technology Certificate Program

In addition to the points mentioned above, I intend to present the concept of reflective learning in our first live session and use it as a "frame" for all of the course activities. I will encourage students to see their internship as an opportunity to try out new skills and behaviors and reflect on their effectiveness by identifying what they did well and what they can do differently or more effectively the next time. Technology will be used to organize the course, to deliver content, and to encourage students to reflect on their learning. The specific technology tools will be:

1. A Blackboard "shell" to organize the content and modules; readings and other course materials will be available for downloading.
2. Voicethread to deliver short videos by the instructor.
3. Blackboard discussions to encourage students to conduct online research and report results.
4. Blackboard grading tools so that students can get clear and organized feedback on their work.
5. Lynda for high-quality videos on topics such as interviewing skills and salary negotiations.

How Will this Approach Contribute to Classroom Practice?

I intend to use a "flipped classroom" approach so that the time spent in the classroom is used for creating community, practicing communication skills, and reflecting on learning. Technology will supply useful information and practice before classroom sessions and will also supplement and reinforce learning after the class.

Overall, my goal is for students to feel engaged in the learning because technology and live instruction will be used in ways that complement each other and maximize their effectiveness.

Evaluation

I will gauge students' reaction to this blended course by requesting student evaluations at the end of the semester.

In addition, I will use Stephen Brookfield's Classroom Critical Incident Questionnaire to assess student's reactions and learning during the second live class.

Finally, I will review students' reflective learning assignments to assess their satisfaction with having achieved course objectives and their own objectives.

Big Picture: Technology and Learning

I am grateful for the opportunity to prepare this Reflective Learning Portfolio. It has helped me think through my philosophy as an instructor and how I can best achieve it given the resources available. It has helped me distinguish between learning objectives and the process used to achieve them. It has helped me to consider how best to stimulate and sustain student engagement by thinking clearly about how I can use technology effectively.

Many thanks to the Center for Excellence in Teaching for the one-day course and the many learning activities that have supported my development as an educator during my career at FIT. I very much appreciate your professionalism and commitment to high-quality learning.

References

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