**"Bringing Heat To A Cool Medium: Increasing Engagement In Hybrid Courses."**

**An ELA Professional Development Workshop**

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**Abstract**

This proposed professional development workshop will involve ways to create greater engagement, emotional connection, and interaction in hybrid courses. We will not be working online but will meet in an in-person “idea lab” format to look at different types of exercises and assignments that create a sense of engagement and community in a hybrid course. Working in groups facilitated by the presenter (and by the group members), participants will be asked to generate new and better experiential learning designs for courses taught in the hybrid format.

**Rationale for the PDW**

The peculiar nature of the hybrid learning format is such that students like meeting online since is it convenient and also mimics their social media life. On the other hand, students sometimes express disappointment or a sense of loss of the active and personal experience of the in-person class. There are several ways to think about hybrid courses but they are generally thought to mean that half the classes meet online with the other half meeting in the traditional in-person format. The challenge in this format is to create the sense of community, student engagement, and learning opportunities we develop in the best of the in-person teaching model. In addition, “while the hybrid format combines the best qualities of online and face-to-face classes, it also retains the weaknesses of the two formats it comprises. For example, designing a hybrid course may take as much or more effort and time as an online class on the part of the instructor. Handling the dual environments and ensuring that they fit smoothly together can also pose an additional challenge to the instructor. Technological issues and troubleshooting may remain a hurdle for both the professor and students. And face-to-face sessions must still be designed to maximize active learning and student engagement.” (2012. Leading change in public higher education)

So, what are the key aspects of bringing heat (engagement) to a cool (less personally involving) format? The answer might be in these three issues: understanding hot and cold learning environments; engaging students; and understanding the advantages and disadvantages of hybrid learning.

Working in groups facilitated by the presenter (and by the group members), participants will be asked to generate interesting possibilities for creating greater engagement in hybrid courses. We will try to do both “invention“ - *the creation of a product or introduction of a process for the first time* and “Innovation,” – improving on *an existing product or process* (Grasty,2015) . Participants will gain some greater knowledge of what works for experiential learning in the hybrid course as well increased understanding of the variables of failure in creating a hybrid learning community.

**Talking Points for Workshop**

**A hot versus cool learning environment**

Try to imagine the answer to this question: What are the attributes of a great, online instructor? Is this even possible in a learning environment that is cool to the touch? In 1964, Marshall McLuhan wrote of ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ forms in his book, Understanding Media.In the chapter “Media Hot and Cold” he explains a ‘hot’ medium as an extension of a physical sense that is dense with information. The Images and text of books are ‘hot’ visual media because they deliver a lot of visual data and leave little room for interpretation on the part of the audience.

Television, computers, and digital media have little inherent information and so require a higher degree of participation from the learner. This is good for learning because it demands a certain amount of active participation to understand what is going on. Students and the instructor have to make an effort to learn. The basic idea is: “the hot form excludes (so you have to work harder to get it), the cold one includes (so you can learn in a passive way). An example of this is the difference between an online lecture (cold) and a seminar (hot). You learn more from the seminar because it allows for more participation.” Learning online connects people and feels involving but is it? When you can just lean back and click it off, did it really demand so much?

“Hot media favor analytical precision, quantitative analysis and sequential ordering. Cool media, on the other hand, are usually, but not always, those that provide little involvement with substantial stimulus. They require more active participation on the part of the user, including the perception of abstract patterning and simultaneous comprehension of all parts. Cool media are detached, professional, and stimulating but in random ways. (2011, Kuskis). In short, there is a lot there to see but without creating heat, we are only surfing the web. The metaphor is perfect.

1. **Engaged learning**

“Employee engagement is generally defined as the focused passion, energy, and enthusiasm that employees apply to their work performance. The construct was introduced around 1990, mostly forgotten about for 10 years, and then resurrected by the management consulting industry, thereby spearheading 15 years of significant attention in the literature. It has since become the grand ideal of the human experience at work. There is also a parallel pursuit to describe and model how to best engage the cognitive and emotional energy of students in the classroom. Many management professors likely struggle with keeping all students (not just the most easily engaged) attentive and deeply invested in their learning.” (2016, Donovan & Kutcher)

I think we should accept the premise that a successful class will require a learning environment that engages students. Although the methods for engagement may vary by class format, “active learning” is a fundamental characteristic of a good course. (2012, NSSE results.)

There are several ways to build or increase student engagement in hybrid classes but batching the findings of several sources suggests ten rules. They are as follows:

1. Build a narrative so students know the arc of the course and the intention of the assignments
2. Create progress inertia – That is the idea that An object at rest stays at rest and an object in motion stays in motion.” Predictable inertia killers include: Destination Ambiguity; An Unclear Path; and Demonstrable Slowdown of Progress**.**
3. Task Autonomy – for the students, making your own decisions matter.
4. Creating ownership of the process and the assignments
5. Optimizing for flow – from the work of M. Csikszentmihalyi, flow is comprised of several variables: A challenge activity that requires skills; The merging of action and awareness; Clear goals; Direct feedback; Concentration on the task at hand; The sense of control; The loss of self-consciousness; and the transformation of time
6. Aligning to attributes of the students, the instructor, the electronic learning platform, and the learning goals of the course.
7. Rewards and recognition as a consequence of gamification designs
8. Measuring and adapting change based on your metrics for the course.
9. Managing the signal to noise ration. The signal is related to the key variable of interest – the construct you’re trying to measure, the program or treatment being implemented. The noise is all the random factors in the situation that make it harder to see or hear the signal (e.g. lighting in the room; local distractions; how people feel about the course or the instructor; relevance of the assignment; etc.). We can design in signal enhancers or noise reducers
10. Improve process cycle time. This Six Sigma idea refers to the total time from the beginning to the end of a process improvement project, including total process time and all delays. Some examples in the hybrid teaching process include: Better or More Frequent Assignment Feedback; Better Discussion Board Participation; Measurement of Effectiveness; Adaptive Change (James. 2017).
11. **What’s good can also be what’s bad when it comes to hybrid learning.**

Students generally report that they like the hybrid learning format. In addition, there are some promising outcome studies. Gonzales (2014) concluded after a six-year study into the differences between traditional face-to-face, hybrid, and online sections of her Core 1 biology class. Her results showed a higher rate of performance success from hybrid students than the on-line students, though both showed a higher success rate than the traditional face-to-face students.

We think that the format combines the best qualities of online and face-to-face classes but it might also reflect the weaknesses of the two formats it is built on. (2012, NSEE Report)

Hybrid class learning can be passive (watch a recorded lecture or video) or active (“Use the Discussion Board to answer questions and organize thinking based on the lecture you heard and your readings.”). It can substitute in lazy ways for actual teaching by simply posting assignments or it can liven up the in-person classes through use of the “flipped classroom” model. . “Flipped courses are those in which the entire course structure encourages students to learn outside of class material that they then use in class to deepen their learning. These courses are built on concepts such as learning-centered course design, active learning, and technology-enhanced learning and generally deliver instruction in both an asynchronous and synchronous manner. (2012, Hybrid Challenge)

What we do know is that the hybrid format can embody whatever we build into it. It is easily molded to the specific nature of the course being taught but also brings some the challenge of teaching without the visual cues and other nuances of classroom interaction. Whatever it is, it seems here to stay so we need to become more skillful in its use.

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