



The art of learning design

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Technology plays a delicate role in the enhancement of pedagogy. The forced integration of computers into the classroom has been a revealing period of time, which has left some teachers and their shortcomings exposed.

Presented with a range of new tools and encouraged to further 'engage' students in 'meaningful' ways, schools have invested hours into tech-focused professional learning. The purpose is to utilise the latest learning and teaching aids in the hope that students acquire an invested interest in their education.

Every month vendors and app developers improve their platforms in response to the needs of the most efficient and proactive teachers... and the lines between technology and pedagogy blur.

But for many, this bullet train is passing by with just a few on board. The reason isn't because some teachers have missed their opportunity to be involved, it is because most are not ready to apply transformative methods to their teaching practice.

One notable outcome of this journey at my school became apparent at the beginning of the year... unless the teaching methods and content were ready, the use of advanced technologies would do nothing more than highlight a teacher's shortcomings.

It was a difficult realisation to accept, but we decided a review of teaching practice was in order. From there we could decide the best way to support staff, and guide teachers towards calculated and appropriate technology decisions that genuinely promote their sound teaching programs.

21st Century Learning Design

1.

Course Development -

Review & deep assessment of teacher's course/lesson plan.

2.

Course Delivery -

Google Sites

iTunes U

SEQTA's
Teacher Assist

- Learning Pathway
- Learning Resources
- Units/Tasks
- Dates/homework schedules



3.

Course Execution -

Google
Classroom

Showbie
/iTunes U 3.0

SEQTA's
Coneqt Lessons

- Private questions
- Group comments/updates
- Homework/task submission
- Annotation of docs & notes

1 Course development

I am fortunate to work among incredible teachers, one of whom has been granted the task of shaping and formulating a culture of teaching excellence at my school. In doing so my colleague has introduced me to the relatively



uncomplicated concept of Backward Design. Simply put, teachers ask themselves what it is students should know, understand and be able to do by the end of a course.

The idea was originally developed by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTigh. In their book titled *Understanding by Design*, they encourage teachers to analyse their lesson plans closely:

- 1 What should participants hear, read, view, explore or otherwise encounter?
- 2 What knowledge and skills should participants master?
- 3 What are big ideas and important understandings participants should retain? These choices are the 'enduring understandings' that you want students to remember after they've forgotten the details of the course.

At my school, these questions signal the start of a framework, which keeps the learners squarely at the centre. The framework asks 'Who are my learners?' encourages one-on-one teaching moments and intricately unpacks assessment.

The method supports the teachers while at the same time challenges them to reflect on their practice and deconstruct their own pedagogy. Teaching staff are aware that even the best technology use does not enhance a poorly structured lesson plan or course.

2 Course delivery

As we move into the next stage, teachers begin

to draft their learning pathway and shape the program for students to access.

Technology has evolved in such a way that its pedagogical use falls into two clear spaces: A learning pathway for course delivery and a communication/creation tool for course execution.

It is important that a software tool is chosen which is accessible and simple for students to use. You must also provide some level of choice for your staff, and I have learned that a teacher needs personal ownership over a platform. For a teacher to feel empowered let them choose from a narrow selection of software. Allow them to discover the merits of each, and become the authority.

We have chosen three platforms and staff members are supported in the adoption of each. Although not a 'how-to', the following guide helps to illustrate the options that we provide.

Learning Pathway in iTunes U

iTunes U Course Manager is accessed on any computer. It is a place where teachers can place all of the videos, pdf documents, websites etc. that the student needs to access. It is a linear design, that walks students clearly through tasks which need to be completed.

Courses are typically designed with verb-like assignments:

- 1 Watch DNA Chalk Talk
- 2 Listen to this lecture
- 3 Watch the video on DNA
- 4 Study this animation etc.

The assignments are interwoven into posts, which create the body of the course. The courses are accessed on the student's iPad.

Learning Pathway in Google Sites

Google Sites is a natural evolution to Wikis. Effectively, an easy to build collection of web pages, teachers can choose to structure their course using pages of their choice, e.g. a Welcome page, a Resources page and if they choose a Units page and so on.

A Google Site is no different to building a simple website and teachers can personalise the menu items and add pictures/movies, change fonts, and background colours to make the course look and 'feel' interesting.

Learning Pathway in SEQTA's Programs

Teachers Assistant (TA) is a very popular choice for schools in WA. The system is deeply engrained into our Learning Management System (LMS) – also developed by SEQTA, which brings obvious merits such as integration with compulsory attendance, marks books and reporting.

Although visually lacking, the program feature is awesome. Teachers can provide details of each lesson and include assessments, homework due, and even link to ACARA for syllabus references.

From a principal's perspective, a very important aspect of using your internal LMS, is that you have authority to access all programs at

a time of your choosing. Please remember that should you choose to utilise a free third party (like the previous options), you may not be able to review course content for quality.

3 Course execution

So the start of the term is upon us, and teaching staff have deepened their course content, structured the learning pathways; all that's left is to hold the hands of students as they progress through their learning.

A goal from the teacher's perspective is to contain all course related activities into one space, with particular attention to student questions and homework submission. Personally, I have never been a fan of students emailing a teacher's inbox with course related questions or homework submissions.

iTunes U 3.0, Google Classroom and SEQTA's TA can all manage homework hand-in, private/group discussion and integrated grade book. One solution may have minor advantages over the next, but these subtleties have to be assessed by your teaching staff, for they will be managing the technology.

Over six years of experimentation my school has decided to provide clarity by mandating the use of these software tools. We have provided scaffolding and professional learning. But above all, if a technology is to succeed, teachers need to decide which tool works best for them. In the same way that our students need differentiated instruction, so do our staff.

Conclusion

In our efforts to enhance learning, technology use has done little more than to magnify weaknesses in our own teaching practice. Certainly staff at my school are re-aligning their focus from technology back onto outstanding course content, development and execution.

Pro-active support from your school, with clear direction, will advance student programs and teaching methods. Both parties will become more engaged through appropriate technology choices, which will inspire all to achieve their very best.

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