

It Takes a Community : Faculty Development in the Department of International Liberal Arts

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Abstract

The global pandemic due to COVID-19 forced the acceleration of a trend that has been more than two decades in the making : the incorporation of digital technologies in higher education. At this institution, while the technological infrastructure has always been strong, there has been little in the way of formal discussions on how transformative modern digital technologies can be. Instead of leading to fundamental changes in both teaching and learning, there has been more of a transition from one form of media (analog) to another (digital) without any fundamental change in teaching practice. This shift in technologies without an accompanying shift in pedagogies is not uncommon (Aoki, 2010 ; Ertmer et al., 2012). For experienced teachers to be willing to modify their practice, they need to be open to ideas of change (Demir et al., 2012), and in higher education, regular faculty development is employed as a system to share new ideas on teaching. This paper introduces topics related to teaching and learning in the 21st century and explains the faculty development program created for the 2021 school year.

Introduction

In the past, when teachers were the source of knowledge that was handed down to students, traditional “teacher-centered” classes were expected (Printy, 2008). With modern technologies, knowledge is no longer hard to obtain, and what was once “considered in the past century as a competitive asset, is now a commodity. When everyone has access to all information, distinction can only come from how one transforms information for the generation of new ideas” (Corazza & Agnoli, 2015, p.3). While technology provides access and possibilities that can contribute to better learning outcomes, understanding, recognizing, and experimenting with the different ways technology can be used meaningfully is left to individual faculty. While some teachers even question its relevance in the classroom (Koehler et al., 2004), whether technology is seen

as a tool, or as a gateway, its mere availability does not have the power to transform teaching practice.

Teaching is not simply a matter of presenting information to students. There is a distinction between knowing a subject and knowing how effectively teach that subject. Shulman (1986) distinguished between content knowledge (CK), or “the amount and organization of knowledge per se in the mind of the teacher” (p.9), and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), which adds the component of an “understanding of what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult” (p.9). In higher education, many faculty do not have any explicit training in teaching and pedagogy and will often default to the teaching styles they experienced from their own instructors (Cuban, 1986). While educators are aware of issues and best practices in their fields of expertise (CK) as a natural byproduct of research and education, it is through participation in faculty development that an awareness of current thinking on teaching and learning can promote a change in practice (Kirkwood & Price, 2013 ; Scherer et al., 2021).

Change in practice is only possible when teachers become more explicitly aware of their own implementation of pedagogy, a process which can be facilitated through a community of educators sharing their own ideas and experiences (Hakkola et al., 2021). Ongoing teacher education has been shown to help with developing an understanding of new pedagogies and learning tools which in turn, help achieve the goal of “enhancing the teaching and learning process” (Çelik, 2011, p.159). In the 2021 school year, the goal of the department of International Liberal Arts’ faculty development program was to promote both reflection and discussion on teaching and learning so participants could learn from and aid each other in becoming more aware of the possibilities for improving on practice.

Describing Teaching with Technology

Modern classrooms, teachers and students tend to possess digital devices that are used throughout a class. In addition to simple communication, they are used for preparation, presentation, information distribution, note taking, document creation and for final submissions. As these devices are used regularly, it is important to have some way to classify how they are used. SAMR is simple framework for describing how technology is utilized in education was created by Puentedura (2006). It describes four stages :

- Substitution : a change in media, with no meaningful change in instruction/learning
- Augmentation : the technology provides some improvement over an analog version
- Modification : a task has been redesigned to allow for impactful technology integration

- **Redefinition** : a new task has been created that would not have been possible previously

Substitution would be the equivalent of distributing PDF vs a printed handout, or have students write a report on a computer instead of by hand. An augmented file might include hyperlinks, videos or sound on the PDF distributed electronically by the teacher or might have students include multimedia in their reports/presentations. As engaging as these kinds of uses can be, they are relatively basic uses of technology. Modification of a task transforms the familiar into something new. Collaboration is possible, even when separated by time and space. Students can create something different than traditional reports/presentations. Redefinition of a task creates new learning opportunities that can only be achieved through the use of technology. The SAMR model serves to illustrate how knowledge of technology and its capabilities becomes a factor in how an educator will decide to use incorporate technology in the learning environment.

The 21st Century Teacher and TPACK

One framework that defines the different competencies associated with teaching with technology is TPACK, developed by Mishra and Koehler (2006). In this framework, three spheres of competency are identified : content knowledge (CK), pedagogical knowledge (PK), and technological knowledge (TK). Using a Venn diagram (See Figure 1), they illustrate how these competencies converge to form more competencies : technological pedagogical knowledge (TPK), pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and technological content knowledge (TCK). And where all spheres intersect, there is technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPCK). This framework provides a handy model to help educators more clearly visualize what it means to teach effectively with technology (Koehler & Mishra, 2009 ; Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

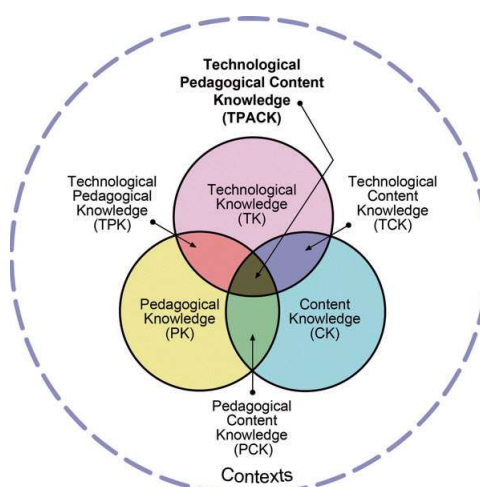


Figure 1 : *Venn Diagram of the TPACK framework* (Image reproduced by permission of the publisher, © 2012 by tpack.org)

In terms of thinking about teaching and learning, the TPACK framework provides simple model for contemplating awareness, or the lack of awareness, in any of these different arenas of knowledge.

2021 Department of International Liberal Arts Faculty Development Sessions Overview

Faculty Development for the Department of International Liberal Arts during the 2021 school year was envisioned as a hybrid program composing of both synchronous discussions and asynchronous online components. To facilitate the asynchronous interactions, a shell was created in the LMS Canvas. The reason to use Canvas was two-fold :

1. To create a layer of separation between the host institution's own systems, and thereby hopefully help participating faculty feel more at ease in their online communications.
2. To demonstrate some functionality of Canvas that would lead to incidental learning and increased awareness of new technological possibilities with asynchronous communication.

Sessions were held once a month during the spring and fall semesters of the 2021 school year. When time allowed, Zoom was used to hold group discussions on session topics and then it was hoped the discussions would continue in Canvas. When there was no time for a synchronous component, faculty were notified of a new Canvas prompt at the end of general faculty meeting or through email.

Session 1 : Faculty Ideas on Teaching and Learning (May 2021)

The first session was a mix of synchronous and asynchronous components. For the synchronous portion, Canvas was introduced, and instructions were provided on how to post in Canvas. Faculty members were given some time to discuss topics and issues in Zoom. In order to promote metacognitive thinking on teaching, the first month's prompts were as follows :

A common question on job applications for teachers at universities is : What is your philosophy of teaching?

The question I want to focus on here is : What is your philosophy of learning?

Part I

In this discussion do two things :

Think about how you normally teach :

- How do you present material?
- What kinds of questions do you ask students during class?
- What activities do your students do in class?
- What kinds of assignments do you give students for homework?
- What kinds of questions do you have on tests?

2. Above was about how you teach. Now please answer this question : How do those tasks help students learn your material?

We often think about how we teach. The goal of this task is for you to think about learning. This might be a difficult post for you to write. Please don't worry if you find it difficult. There are no wrong answers to these questions.

Part II

This is a discussion forum. Over the next few weeks, read through your colleagues' answers and please add comments or questions to other people's posts.

The purpose of this task is to thinking about learning. You do not need to write long answers, but please give the topic some thought and write what you feel.

Session 2 : Bloom's Taxonomy (June 2021)

The June session introduced Bloom's Taxonomy along with links for further information. This was chosen to illustrate different levels of learning. In Bloom's Taxonomy, "remember" is at the lowest level of learning, followed by understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create. Along with the taxonomy, a list of action verbs was given that represented activities associated with each level of learning. In the discussion forum, participants were asked to share assignments they had created that illustrated the different levels of learning. In addition to sharing materials, participants were encouraged to comment on their colleague's posts. It was hoped that through the sharing of assignments, faculty would see different ways their colleagues challenge their students.

Session 3 : Schema and Society (July 2021)

Schemas can be defined as "knowledge structures that are composed of previously acquired generic information" (Gagné & Merrill, 1990, p.25) and are relevant as an FD topic because it is important to consider the knowledge structure of a "class" from both perspectives of both teachers and students. The presence of a schema can influence the creation of learning tasks and how they are received by students. As a culture, Japan is primed for teacher-centered classes

where knowledge is received from the teacher, but in the modern age, student-centered classes are seen as more effective in teaching the skills needed to succeed in the 21st century (Biddix et al., 2015; Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010).

In the prompt for this session, an image which listed the skills most valued by Japanese companies ranked from high to low. This image showed how soft skills such as communicative ability, problem solving, and critical thinking were ranked much more highly than language skills or general academic achievement. In the synchronous session, it was pointed out how these desired skills were not subject specific but related to students' ability to function independently in modern society. The asynchronous discussion prompt was as follows :

Part I

Our goal is to use our classes to prepare students to become active members of society. For the most part, the companies that will hire our students prefer students with developed "soft skills".

- How does your schema of university compare to your students' schema?
- What do you think of the rank of importance in the table above.
- What knowledge/skills do you want your students to learn?
- How do you use your lessons to help prepare students for their future lives?

Part II

As this is a discussion forum, please respond to your colleagues' posts. Give your opinion or ask a question.

Session 4 : Fall Semester Teaching Goals/Challenges (October 2021)

This session was completely asynchronous. As this was the start of the fall semester, the purpose of the prompt was to push the concept of trying something new with classes/students. The top level of Bloom's Taxonomy is "create," and the goal here was to encourage faculty to try something new and share it with other teachers in the department. It was hoped that this would be seen as an interesting way learn more about what colleagues were doing in their classes and foster discussions between colleagues related to the practice of teaching. Following a video introduction, the prompts were as follows :

1. What is something new you are trying this semester? (about your teaching or with your students)
2. Share an idea or teaching plan with the other teachers of this gakubu. What is

something you have made/done that you think : this is good!

3. Write a question : What do you want help with? What do you want to do better?

a . Write it here and other teachers may be able to help you.

Session 5 : Synchronous Group Discussion (November 2021)

This session was entirely synchronous. In Zoom breakout rooms, groups of six to eight teachers shared ideas and issues related to the classes they were currently teaching. Through these topics, it was hoped that teachers of different academic backgrounds would find ideas of interest that they could then apply to their own subjects. It was also an opportunity to share problems or issues that were currently being experienced and get advice or suggestions from people with different backgrounds. Teachers' perceptions of what happens in the classroom are directly related to their relative pedagogical knowledge (PK) (Judson, 2006), so faculty benefit when they can share their impressions with teachers coming from different backgrounds and levels of experience.

Session 6 : On Academic Ability (*gakuryoku*) (December 2021)

This session was entirely asynchronous. As the 2022 school year would see the introduction of two new faculties and two new curriculums, the prompt for this session was intended to help faculty focus on what they really wanted their students to learn in the upcoming academic year. The topic was academic ability, or *gakuryoku*, and was chosen because it is often a subject of discussion among faculty and administration. As this session occurred when faculty were in the process of making syllabi for the next year, it was hoped to provide opportunities for both sharing and receiving ideas related to learning outcomes expected of students. The prompt was as follows :

1. I often hear that our students' *gakuryoku* is weak. For you, what exactly does *gakuryoku* mean? What are some specific points that make up *gakuryoku*?
2. Next year, we will have new *gakubus* and new curriculum. With this fresh start, what knowledge, skills, and abilities do you think students need to develop related to *gakuryoku*?
3. How will you incorporate those skills and abilities into your classes?

Session 7 : Reflection on the Fall Semester (January 2022)

This session was entirely synchronous and took place during the final days of the fall semester. On Zoom, faculty were reminded of their entries from Session 4 : Fall Semester Teaching Goals/

Challenges. After reviewing the original discussion page in Canvas, faculty were placed into breakout rooms to share their experiences, challenges, and successes over the preceding 13 weeks. It was hoped that this discussion would provide an opportunity for faculty to reflect on what they had done and have an opportunity to hear about their colleagues' classes and teaching ideas.

Conclusion

In previous years, faculty development sessions within the department were held only once or twice a semester. Those sessions were predominantly "how to" sessions where one or two faculty members would present some information to others. And while that information could be useful, those meetings tended to model the kind of teacher-centered knowledge delivery that is not representative of the student-centered pedagogical approaches that are key to active learning and lead to better learning outcomes for students.

With the 2021 school year, the goal of this faculty development program was to engage faculty members in ongoing discussion related to teaching and pedagogy. The prompts served to increase awareness of issues not just associated with teaching, but with learning as well. In addition, discussion activities were designed to model the kinds of practices that we hope to see our students perform in our classes while offering value for everyone who had the time to meaningfully participate.

This program was successful in that it provided ongoing faculty develop throughout the school year. In all, 21 faculty members participated in the asynchronous aspects of the program. Time spent in the Canvas shell averaged 3 hours 42 minutes across all members with the most active member spending 14 hours and 25 minutes pushing the discussions forward. It was a promising start to see so many members of the faculty contribute their ideas and expertise to their colleagues as we began to form a community of practice that can support and help develop each other's development as teachers. The plans for faculty development in 2022 are to improve upon and continue what was started in 2021.

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