

A New Culture of Learning

One of the things that guided me to the Applied Digital Learning program at Lamar University was my passion for education and technology. As a child who was always tinkering with the settings and taking things apart on my family's Microsoft computer, I developed a heavy interest in how technology worked. Fast forwarding to the present where I am now a teacher, I continue to search for ways to not only implement technology into my classroom, but also examine ways to better create the best learning environment for my students. After reading *A New Culture of Learning: Cultivating the Imagination for a World of Constant Change*, I was able to not only gain a better perspective of different concepts of learning and also validate some of my own opinions towards learning. One of the most interesting things about the book was the declaration that there is a necessity for change in how students learn. As a child, I was not the ideal student. I was very distracted and it usually took me a few times to learn something challenging. School for me consisted of sitting at my desk all day and only getting up to take class restroom breaks and go to lunch. I remember sitting in rows and reciting our times tables like a robot while the teacher pointed at the board with a pointer. I didn't think this type of learning environment was anything out of the ordinary until I became an adult because it was what I was programmed to do. However, after reading this book, I began to notice some of the thoughts and opinions that I developed late in life made me feel valid.

Learning Environments

In order to achieve the most success for students, creating a significant learning environment is a matter of extreme importance. Thomas and Brown (2011) describe that our educational system is built on the assumption that teaching is necessary for students to learn. However, as we have seen in recent years with the heavy reliance on technology, the model of information trickling down from the teacher to the student can be viewed as an outdated model. The more traditional route of learning can be seen as very standardized. Where in which, learning is treated as a series of steps to be mastered, as if students were being taught how to operate a machine or even, in some

cases, as if the students themselves were machines being programmed to accomplish tasks (Thomas & Brown, 2011). This example reminds me of how fast food restaurants operate. If you purchase a hamburger from any Burger King restaurant in the United States, more than likely it would taste the same as another restaurant as the company operates with a standard model. Although this may be great for businesses (and convenient), is this truly the kind of learning model that we want to encourage for our students? Should education be run as a business or as an institution to create learning experiences? One of the issues that I see as being a problem is that the information that is being taught does not seem to evolve or change very much. Many of the things that I am teaching in my third grade classroom were taught to me in almost the exact same way as it is being presented today. As standardized tests more so determine the value and success of student/teacher performance and also tie into district funding, learning to show trumps learning to grow. But is a standard model of teaching truly helping students learn? As the world around us continues to evolve, shouldn't how students learn be the line leaders of learning? A change is needed, and it is needed now.

A question that came to mind when I began to think of an idea for my campus and students was how could I encourage my students to not only share what they are learning in class, but also motivate them to want to participate in a collaborative learning environment. One of the things that made me consider my [Innovation Plan](#) was how I could inspire students to share their passions and reflections on learning with their classmates, teachers, and parents. With the implementation of e-portfolios, it would allow students to showcase their skills and receive feedback from their peers through created blogs and the ability to comment on Google documents. (Thomas & Brown, 2011) explain that communities derive their strength from a sense of belonging. So as students are able to compose their own writings of their reflections or opinions about a topic pertaining to what they are learning, they could also gain insight from their peers thus having their perspective validated or giving them a new point of view to take into consideration.

Challenges for Teachers and Students

No matter how much you plan, one can most certainly expect challenges along the way. The implementation of e-portfolios is not exempt from the occasional challenge or bump in the road. Challenges within implementing a plan are just part of the process. As I review my [Innovation plan](#) and [Implementation outline](#), I detect that there will be some scenarios where students and teachers could have difficulty. Let's start with teachers and staff. I consider myself a very tech savvy person and I love seeking new ways to incorporate technology into the classroom. Nonetheless, some of the professional educators I have interacted with may sometimes refuse to take on a new task because it would interfere with how they currently run their classroom. Even though this could be a problem, another challenge I can see occurring is the daunting fear of teachers having to learn a new system and incorporating technology. Thomas and Brown (2011) explain that embracing change means you are looking forward to what is coming next and viewing new sets of future possibilities. At first, change is a difficult thing to embrace especially after doing something for so long. A lot of the resistance to change can be due to frustration, however it could also be that way because learning new things can be too challenging. In order to combat the intimidation of taking on new tasks and projects, it is important for learners to ask questions no matter how complicated or minimal they may be. My role as the leader/teacher in this project is to create that learning environment where individuals are able to ask questions and receive consultation.

I believe the same thing can be similarly said about the challenges from the students' perspective. When I began drafting my plan for e-portfolios, I had the image in my head of starting with third grade students. Although students are more familiar with technology compared to their teachers at their age. However, one of the factors that I believe could be a challenge in implementing e-portfolios would be showcasing the purpose and motivating the students to participate in its creation. As a third grade teacher, there have been many times where I had an awesome (in my opinion) lesson planned only to have my students ask to go to the restroom or nurse to get out of class. In reality, I knew what the reason was for them wanting to leave the room. Motivation

plays a key role in all of learning. Students have to see the purpose of what they are learning and also the end goal of why it is so important to put forth the amount of effort needed.

Creating the Significant Learning Environment

We just reviewed some of the anticipated challenges. However, how can those challenges be addressed? Let's begin with, in my opinion, the most important challenge: influencing teachers to take part in the program. Teachers have so much on their plates. Many take part in extracurricular activities, tutoring programs, professional developments, and not to mention handling their own personal lives. The last thing some teachers would want is another project added to their already full plate. However, I know that a lot of the problems with getting people on board with a project is bridging the learning gaps with the technology and also being able to implement it into the classroom. Throughout the duration of the implementation process, I plan to act as a support system to teachers and staff to address their needs in learning and building their own e-portfolios. My goal is to host information sessions and create anonymous surveys through Google Forms so teachers who are not comfortable asking in a support session are still able to ask a question. I will then address the question in a "FAQ" section of my own e-portfolio. However, I will continue to emphasize that all questions are valid to encourage teachers to participate in discussions.

I mentioned that teachers buying into the program is the biggest challenge because in my experience, students can be motivated if you tug at what interests them. I didn't realize how much of a kid was still left in my body until I started teaching elementary aged students. Things that my students were interested in like superheroes, video games, and certain movies were some of the things that helped us form a fun relationship. But as they learned some of the things that I liked, I made sure I listened to their conversations with me and their friends to be able to tie in their interests with what we were learning. In my classroom I knew it was important for them to be kids and let them play. Huizinga (1978) describes what makes play powerful is that it is a tool needed in order to engage in experimentation. Play allows learning to

continue to happen while not conforming to a traditional learning environment. An example of this could have been seen in my classroom this past year. I learned early in the year that my students loved the game Among Us. Among Us is a multiplayer game where there is an Impostor among the Crewmates on a spaceship. The impostor travels around the ship sabotaging tasks and eliminating them from the game. A task in the game involves matching colored wires. One of the activities that I created for my students was a wire task similar to the game where they would match vocabulary words. I would write a meaning in one box and the student would have to click and drag the word that matches and then connect the wire. This was an activity I would use for vocabulary words and reviews before weekly tests. The students thoroughly enjoyed the activity because it incorporated something they enjoyed and helped them practice vocabulary. So in order to motivate students into participating, it is important to find what they are passionate about and relate it to the purpose of the project.

The Impact

I am a firm believer that creating a significant learning environment will benefit and have a major impact for those involved. Of course there will be unexpected bumps in the road and issues where we would have to modify or possibly remove from the plan. However, with the continued support of administration and staff, we can build a better learning environment that is centered around student learning and the use of technology. With proper training and support, teachers will learn to create e-portfolios while also increasing their own professional technology skills. As our classroom leaders' confidence and skills develop, it would trickle down to the students. Teachers will motivate their students by creating a learning environment where students have a say as to what they can showcase and how they can design their e-portfolio. By giving students opportunities to create and design their e-portfolio, they are provided a blank canvas to display their passions.

Conclusion

As the world drastically changes daily, there should be an expectation that education changes with it. Standardization works well for certain things, but how well does it work for students? Are all students the same? I've attended many professional developments on "Differentiating", however the strategies that we learned seem to only apply to a small group of students who don't understand a certain skill. As the years continue to pass, education needs to change to how students learn best. Utilizing technology, having students collaborate in group work and discussions can play a major role in the information they are receiving. Douglas Thomas (2012) explains that for most of our lives, learning is natural and effortless everywhere but school. Learning is natural and does not need to be something that occurs just from memorization. Learning must occur from experiences and passion.

References:

Thomas, D. & Brown, J.S. (2011). *A New Culture of Learning: Cultivating the imagination for a world of constant change*. Createspace.

A New Culture of Learning, Douglas Thomas at TEDxUFM. (2012, September 12)
Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IM80GXlyX0U>

Huizinga, J. (1971). *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*
Beacon Press.

Projects, Passion, Peers, and Play. (2019). Retrieved from
<https://vimeo.com/315814044>