Chapter 7

Transforming Preservice Teacher TPACK by Transforming Faculty Digital Agency: Case Studies From the Provost’s Inaugural Digital Learning Initiative Fellows

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ABSTRACT

In 2016, the Office of the Provost at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University initiated a highly competitive faculty digital learning initiative (DLI) to promote student-centered learning by retooling existing courses to reflect current and emerging technology trends. For this chapter, the experiences of four fellows were considered within the TPACK framework level of use (LoU) structure in addition to considerations of how the face-to-face to digital transformation were perceived by fellows in terms of what they knew about their pedagogic methods prior to, during, and subsequent to completion of the fellowship. Additionally, descriptions of how each fellow retooled the curriculum and construct of her/his course to reflect better the needs of the 21st century learner will be cross-analyzed through event-flow networks against her/his re-envisioned personal teaching philosophy to establish if pedagogic transformation actually occurred across the digital plane.

INTRODUCTION

The 2016 introduction of the Provost’s Digital Learning Initiative (DLI) was in response to Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) alumni and employers of FAMU graduates who reported that, while students may have sufficient content knowledge in their respective fields, their technology skills were not reflective of what is expected in the twenty-first century workspace. In direct response,
the Office of the Provost conducted multiple online surveys and face-to-face focus groups to receive feedback regarding faculty perceptions of students’ technology skills in addition to gauging interest in the proposed initiative. After reviewing the results of the surveys and focus groups, it was determined by the Provost that there was sufficient interest and need to offer a professional development opportunity for faculty to redesign their courses, key tasks, and student learning outcomes (SLOs) to align better with the technical skill set expected of today’s college graduate. A taskforce of faculty and administrators was created to develop the framework for the DLI in addition to the applicant qualifications. The taskforce used a Likert rating scale to screen applications; fellows were selected based on factors such as existing use of technology, key tasks and associated SLOs, and anticipated plan for course redesign. Invitations to submit applications began late fall 2016 with fellowships announced in mid-spring 2017.

FAMU faculty from schools and colleges across the university were invited to apply for the highly competitive fellowship which included an application packet and essay questions explaining interest in and commitment to the initiative. Applicants were not required to have any formal educational background or training in the field of teaching and learning; actually, restricting the fellowship to only faculty with degrees in education or a related field would have been considered counter intuitive to the underlying goal of the fellowship. From among the numerous applications submitted, an inaugural group of 10 faculty members was selected to participate in a 12-week series of interactive workshops, collaborative dialogues, and cooperative visioning to redesign their courses and create personal and professional transformational experiences. Faculty included professors from schools and colleges including Allied Health, Agriculture and Food Sciences, Architecture, Biologic Sciences, Business, Education, and Political Science. Progress monitoring took place at months three (3) and six (6) by way of presentation to the full faculty (month three) and among the fellows and trainers (month six). Select fellows were also invited to present faculty development workshops through the university’s Teaching and Learning Center, focusing specifically on a component of their course retooling they deemed to transform their pedagogic practices and resultant student learning.

As noted in the Horizon Report (2017), there is a sense of urgency among institutions of higher education to reconceptualize traditional face-to-face learning environments to align better with the individualize learning of the twenty-first century student. As such, many colleges and universities have undertaken initiatives to support digital literacy development among faculty and staff in order to support the technology needs expected by twenty-first century students. Although much has been written about the need to harmonize teacher education training with authentic classroom examples, university faculty development programs certainly reflect the opposite practice (Albion & Maddux, 2007; Dieker & Rodriguez, 2014; Richey, Klein, & Tracey, 2010). There is a notable lack of digital and media literacy competencies among university faculty (Hobbs, 2010). Thus, there is a significant transition that faculty must make in their instructional practices to reflect changes in their own digital literacy which is dependent on integrating current technologies such that their students experience positive sociocognitive movement between content and technology. Notably scarce from the educational research and related literature is the deconstruction of traditional notions of the teacher candidate as a passive training recipient in favor of exploring how the same trainings offered in a different environment – such as a virtual setting - might actually contribute to a teacher’s authentic pedagogic development. Traditional face-to-face teaching environments, then, are characterized by the noted digital cognitive distancing between faculty and students. This distancing results in the situational removal of the student from the actual instructional context. Such distancing is of particular concern when considering the personalized instructional needs characterizing most twenty-first century students.