Chapter 17

Leveraging the Technology-Enhanced Community (TEC) Partnership Model to Enrich Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides the Technology-Enhanced Community (TEC) Partnership Model to enrich higher education. The TEC Partnership Model addresses the incorporation of community resource professionals into coursework to provide authentic learning experiences for students. The model is situated in a case study of an online Human Rights Education course, designed to serve the needs and academic interests of K-12 practitioners, community practitioners, and students in a variety of disciplines. This chapter describes the experiences and impact from both perspectives of the partnership and provides examples from the Human Rights Education course to show the model in practice. The final section also provides an overview of the strategies others can use to incorporate similar partnerships and collaborations among instructors, students, student-practitioners, and practitioners in the field.

INTRODUCTION

Two rising forces in higher education around the world have shifted the work we do—the comprehensive modification of higher education with the accompanying need to compete and an increased focus on technology-enhanced learning. The former often brings a focus on authentic learning and the latter often is elaborated through a focus on online and blended learning. The challenge is to
bring authentic learning into an online or blended classroom in ways to enhance student participation and motivation in a course, especially when many of our online students are practitioners themselves.

This chapter introduces a model for integrating community partnerships and practitioners into higher education through technology, the Technology-Enhanced Community (TEC) Partnership Model. The explanation of the model is based around an online Human Rights Education course. We describe the experiences and impact from the perspectives of the partnership, and we provide examples from the Human Rights Education course to show the model in practice. The final section also provides an overview of the strategies others can use to incorporate similar partnerships and collaborations among students, student-practitioners, and practitioners in the field.

ABOUT THE CASE

The Human Rights Education course is a partnership itself between the practitioners of the University of Minnesota’s Human Rights Center and an instructor in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development. The course was originally designed for practitioners in K-12 education and community-based organizations who wish to learn about human rights, human rights education, and how to become advocates for human rights in their professions. In practice, the course appeals to a wide audience of students, ranging from K-12 teachers, higher education professionals, nurse educators, community practitioners, and undergraduate and graduate students from a variety of disciplines.

One of the main tenets of human rights education is that it is participant-guided and context-driven. As such, the instructors create an authentic human rights education (HRE) experience for students by bringing in as many real-life experiences of HRE advocates and practitioners from around the world as possible. They use many different technologies to do so. The instructors of the course call these practitioners “community resource professionals” and include the following statement on the course syllabus that explains their participation.

Human Rights Education practitioners will join the class throughout the semester, offering their insights, experiences, research, and feedback. As a core component of this course, we believe that these individuals can help us have a deeper understanding of effective human rights advocacy and education strategies, methods, and impacts. Our reason for integrating Community Resource Professionals is to expand our learning community to ensure a global perspective and different experiences in the field.

One stated course outcome also directly connects with the community resource professionals: The Human Rights Education course “introduces students to and facilitates conversations with human rights practitioners and scholars in the field.” The involvement of the community resource professionals in the Human Rights Education course provides the examples for the incorporation of the Technology-Enhanced Community (TEC) Partnership Model.

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Helping students learn and discover by connecting to a community of practice is certainly not a new concept in education. The apprenticeship model was a common method dating back to the Middle Ages to help young children acquire a particular craft or skill. As the importance of learning of a particular proficiency ebbed toward a need for a more broad-based, general knowledge over centuries, John Dewey (1916) still stressed the role of education as “a fostering, a nurturing, a cultivating, process” to help students discover how connected we are to each other in our “social environment.”
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