

Reflection = Enhance Interrogation Technique

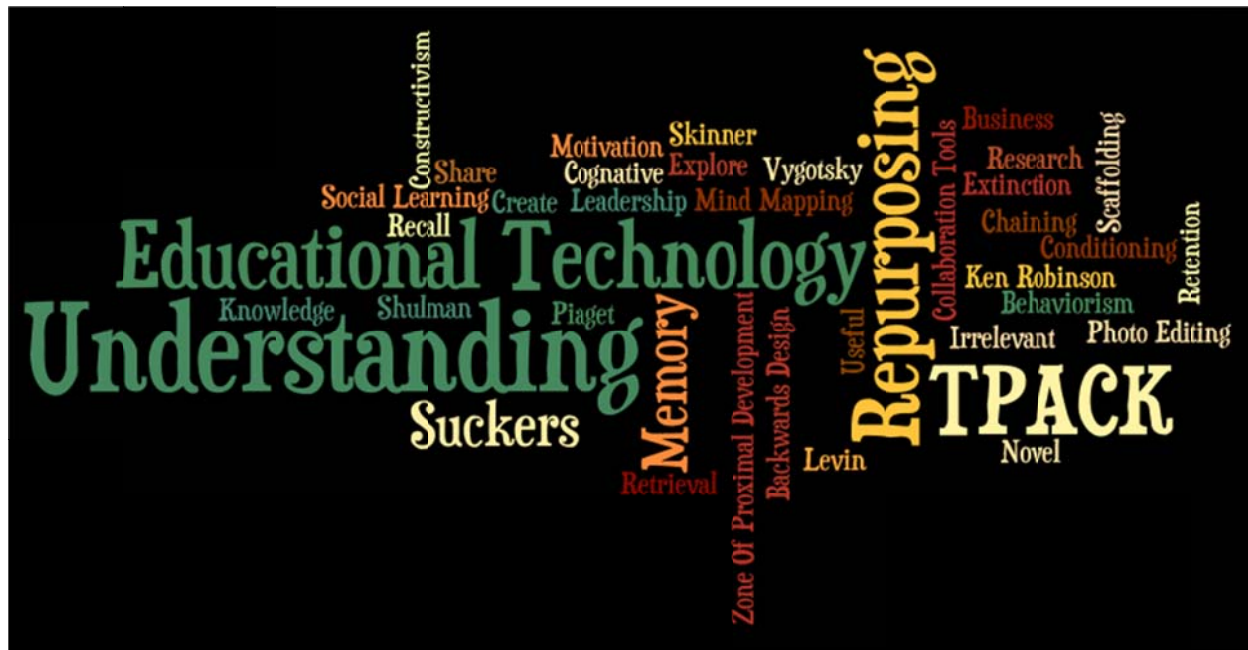
A final reflective paper? Must I? Really? At this moment I imagine the process that I am taking to write this paper as taking place in a small dark room with a single lamp hanging over a small table and a single chair. I am sitting in that chair trying desperately to please my interrogators so they don't beat me again. "Specifically, we would like you to discuss (a) what you have learned and how this learning has mattered to you (if at all) and why?" Oh god please no more!!

What have I learned, how does it matter, and why? Looking over the past six weeks I am reminded of a quote from a reading way back on the first day, "The most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach him accordingly." As a teacher that sounds like a pretty good "above all else" kind of statement to have. As a learner, and for the past month and a half that is what I have been, when trying to understand what is going on, maybe the most important thing to know about your teacher is "Why are they doing this?" Finding out "why" leads to what he or she thinks of what they are teaching (content), how they are teaching (pedagogy), what tools they are using to teach (technology), and what they think of you as a learner (context). Why do some teachers talk all the time while others seem to hardly say a word? Why do some teachers give pages out of the textbook as regular reading while others bring in outside texts? Why do teachers show movies, have you write papers, work in groups, or teach you math/English instead of dance and web design? Why?

If writing this paper is an interrogation, then I like to think of the TPACK Framework as an "enhanced interrogation technique." More to the point, its similar to water torture. Ok . . . not

really. I hope witty irony is coming through instead of disrespect. In an attempt to figure out why my professor, Dr. Punya Mishra of Michigan State University, made the choices he did this summer I am going to turn his own weapon against him. I am going to take the TPACK Framework and use it against this summer's seminar. Why did he teach us the things he did, the way he did, with the specific tools he did, and what does he think of us as learners? What was he thinking? In the end, I felt like a stoner, "Far out man, he's using TPACK to teach us about TPACK." Oh, sorry, I didn't mean to get my metaphors mixed up. I'm being interrogated and TPACK is water torture. Let's move on.

First, the content. I am at the tail end of a six week program in which most of the content was taught in the first two weeks. If we turned the Summer Hybrid Program itself into a Five Minute University (thanks to Father Guido Sarducci) what would it teach? The easiest way to find that out is for me to just list all that I can remember. Thanks Wordle.



The image on the previous page is all that I could remember in five minutes. If I gave myself more than just five minutes I'm pretty sure I could come up with more than just those few ideas, but that would destroy the Five Minute University metaphor. I also remembered a Wordle that we saw at the beginning of class. The image below is from that presentation and is, I guess, what was intended that we learn.



I have very little to say about what we learned. I don't disagree with the theories we were taught. It's hard to come up with an argument against the greats like Vygotsky, Piaget, and Bloom to name a few. Along with content based on how to teach, we also learned about a series of tools, or technologies that we could use in our own classrooms. The really hard question is did our professor practice what he preached? Did he apply those principles he taught us to his own teaching practice? Almost each and every day the seminar focused on a different topic or content. Can each day's content be found in every day's pedagogy and technology use?

After letting me smoke a cigarette, have a glass of water, and try to butter me up (your good cop act isn't fooling anyone) we move on to the pedagogy. How did our professor attempt to teach us? What was his means? The first, and most obvious, was direct instruction. Lecture. Many of our closing videos were even lectures given at the yearly TED Conferences. Within those

lectures were stories. I know more about Dr. Mishra's kids than I ever thought I would in such a short amount of time. This point is an illustration of the Mind Mapping Activity that my group did. Our focus was memory, stories, and emotion. If you tell a story and make that story emotional, it is more likely to stick in your head than if you just stated the facts. His stories had an emotional appeal, and have thus stuck around.

The second is group work . . . lots of group work. This followed right down the line with the social perspective on learning. I'm quoting the PowerPoint, "Much of students' identities are formed by the groups they participate in at school." The part I will remember about our groups this summer was the method in which they were devised. We each rated our own tech ability on a scale of 1 to 4. We were then told to make our own groups any way we wanted as long as they fulfilled two expectations: gender diverse and ability diverse. In that five minutes when groups were being formed I was traded from one group to another because ours had two 4s while another had only 3s. I am constantly amazed at how well this method worked in creating our group. We were gender diverse, ability diverse, grade level divers, subject diverse, etc. I say this as a person who usually dislikes group work and shies away from it, but this time I truly enjoyed my group mates and was contently impressed with their work. It brought my game up a notch.

The final method of pedagogy I want to mention is the format our assessments took. We were given a mix of small, ungraded assignments and larger graded projects. There were no tests, and the only quiz was more a joke than an actual assessment. It was a review. I remember someone once said, what you put in your test is the last lesson you will teach on that subject. The projects

themselves were diverse, but the presentation of those projects were not. In all cases we either made a website or wrote a paper. The deliverable required for the ungraded assignments were actually more fun and required greater creativity to create than those we were required to do for a grade. The point may have been to incorporate many of those aspects into the larger graded projects, but I am only thinking of that now, here at the end.

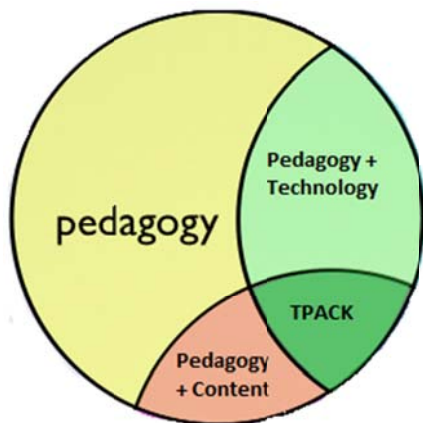
As a self-proclaimed nerd (NERD POWER!!), when talking about technology you grab my attention faster than almost any other topic. It has the same “Cocktail Party Effect” as hearing my name. “Did you say technology? Let let me tell you blah blah blah technology blah blah computers.” The use of technology in the seminar this summer was extensive; as you would expect from an educational technology seminar. Like the list of content that I could remember, I would have an equally hard time make a list of the technologies. Not because they weren’t memorable, but because they were too numerous. Those that I remember being highlighted above the others were Weebly, Wikispaces, digital photography, digital video, photo and video editing, Facebook, Wordpress, Twitter, and Google. As I asked in the content section, does our professor practice what was preached? We used each and every one of these during class time. We were taught them and we used them.

The organization of these three components, content, pedagogy, and technology, took place within a summer seminar, the context. It was a hybrid of face-to-face and online sections. While working together we endured eight our days, numerous projects, and lectures. While working separately we focused on completing a relatively few major projects. It was a piece, one third, of our educational technology master’s program. This structure was set up because of how our

professor looked at us as students. We are professionals. We have requirements on our time beyond these classes. The hybrid, in my opinion, attempted to weigh that reality against a real need to pull people together to create interesting dialogue and produce creative projects.

This is what I remember when I look back and reflect. Its all I can tell you man, now will you let me go? I have a family. A wife. Two kids. They are going to miss me at some point. Its still not enough is it? Its not enough for me to just look back and remember, you want to know what of the past six weeks I will actually use and why. Darn you and your inquisitiveness. So, at this point reflection turns to foresight. A question I ask many of my students is what they see themselves doing in five years. And now I am being asked that, but maybe a little more specific. How do I see using this experience in the next five years?

As person who puts together Professional Developments as a part of my job, the most useful takeaway for me is what we did. How this class operated and what tools it used to teach us



Educational Technology. The PDs that I need to plan focus almost solely on pedagogy, how to teach, but even if that is the focus, the teachers are still talking about what they are teaching (content) and the tools they are using to teach (technology). I image a TPACK diagram where Pedagogy is highlighted, not separated, but dug into more deeply than the other two parts.

In a couple of weeks I myself have to put together a weeklong series of workshops for the teachers. In planning these workshops I started with an underlying question, "If I could get a jump start on the year, what would I want to get done?" The days are structured similarly to the two week face-to-face portion of this: theory in the morning and application in the afternoon. For example, one of the topics is how to physically organize your room to facilitate greater participation and remove barriers to learning. We are starting with a brief presentation on theory, a group discussion in which teachers travel from room to room brainstorming ideas, and finally three hours in the afternoon in which they are given time to set up their rooms.

Once the initial week long seminar is over, teachers are breaking into groups to work on specific issues that we face at our school on a daily basis: poor attendance, a high suspension rate, poor standardized test scores, and a large number of students failing their classes at the end of the year. How do we keep these discussions going without creating a burden on an already overworked staff? Utilizing asynchronous discussion tools that we looked at during our CoolTools assignment may lighten that load.

The largest project I have in the works is taking the Understanding Understanding Project and turning it from lightning, my groups chosen topic, to graduation requirements. I have this impression that many of my students have no idea what it takes to go from one grade to the next and in the end, what it takes to graduate from high school. Conducting interviews, filming those interviews, and editing them in a manner similar to that project may help my school understand how the students look at what they think they are required to do to be successful academically.

Beyond my current employment, and with an eye towards my overall career as an educator, I am more prepared to discuss technology integration into the classroom at all levels. The results of the post-test on the very last day of class revealed the impact of general confidence on specific confidence, and I have to admit that I feel more overall confidence. I may not know a specific technology, but I believe that given time, I am able work it out. I may not understand someone's particular content area or why they are teaching the way that they are, but I know that can dive into it if I need to. This confidence isn't empty. We covered and uncovered a large amount of material in the past six weeks.

So are you happy now? I have spilled my guts. I have nothing left by my shame at not being able to withstand your torture techniques. But then again, we all have a breaking point, and as I said at the beginning of this class, I'm nerd, and you asked me what I learned in a nerd based class. I was happy to oblige.

