

Chapter 2

Using the COVA Approach to Promote Active Learning in Digital Learning Environments

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ABSTRACT

Active learning pedagogies using digital technologies hold much promise. Yet over the past several decades despite all the advances we see in how technology impacts most aspects of society, the advances in our educational institutions have been much smaller. Why? We have focused on the technology as a quick fix and have not focused on the learning. Rather than look to the latest teaching trend or hottest activity of the day, we must reimagine all aspects of our teaching and learning and purposefully build our programs as significant digital learning environments that inspire, foster, and facilitate deeper learning. This chapter reveals how we have built a Master's program that uses the active learning principles of choice, ownership, and voice through authentic learning (COVA approach) and how we have created a significant learning environment (CSLE) that fully engages and equips our learners to be digital leaders.

INTRODUCTION

When you first consider the notion of active learning in digital learning environments, you will more than likely be inclined to expect to find a detailed list of instructions or directions on how to do active learning in digital learning environments. While we will be explaining how we have built a Master's program that uses the active learning principles of choice, ownership, and voice through authentic learning (the COVA approach) and how we have created a significant learning environment (CSLE) that fully

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engages and equips our learners to be digital leaders, we must first provide a broader context of how our approach and program works. Seth Godin's (2017) eloquent perspective of maps and globes will help you understand how we will present the COVA approach and the CSLE: "If someone needs directions, don't give them a globe. It'll merely waste their time. But if someone needs to understand the way things are, don't give them a map. They don't need directions; they need to see the big picture" (para. 1). In this chapter, we will be providing the bigger picture to explain how things came to be, how things are, and where we are going next with the COVA approach and CSLE. In a future publication (already in development), we will create a detailed map that provides directions on how the COVA approach and the CSLE can be implemented in your organization.

WHY ISN'T EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY MAKING A DIFFERENCE?

Issues, Controversies, and Problems

Even though we are seeing the unprecedented use and disruptive impact of technology everywhere in the world around us we see little of this innovative impact in education. For example, in 1998, the ETS reported a negligible positive relationship between computer use and National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores in math for 4th graders and a slightly more positive result for 8th graders (Educational Testing Center, 1998). A more expansive multi-year study that involved hundreds of schools and thousands of students by the U.S. Department of Education (2007) found that "test scores were not significantly higher in classrooms using selected reading and mathematics software products" (p. xiii). A more recent report by OECD (2015) revealed that PISA scores showed "no appreciable improvements in student achievement in reading, mathematics or science in the countries that had invested heavily in ICT for education" (p.3). This research is finding its way into our popular press and we are seeing titles like *Screens In Schools Are a \$60 Billion Hoax* as authors like Kardaras (2016) point to the fact that there are major problems with technology use in education.

So why hasn't the application of technology to education made the difference that its advocates claim it can make? Because we have been focusing on the technology and not the learning. Equally problematic is the fact that we have been attempting to gauge the effectiveness of applying today's technology based on yesterday's standards. Papert (1993) likened this to:

Attaching a jet engine to an old-fashioned wagon to see whether it will help the horses. Most probably it would frighten the animals and shake the wagon to pieces, "proving" that the jet technology is actually harmful to transportation. (p. 29)

Most people would chuckle at Papert's example and ask how can anyone or any group be so naive or foolish? Yet, by trying to improve our passive traditional teacher-centered pedagogy with the application or addition of technology, we have essentially strapped a technological jet engine to our classrooms. Perhaps we should be pleased that we are at least not harming the animals (the teachers and students) and haven't shaken our classrooms (the wagons) to pieces as the 'no significant difference' test results would show.

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