

Chapter 13

Using Student Choice to Promote Technology Integration: The Buffet Model

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes the results of a curriculum redesign of a course in technology integration in an initial licensure undergraduate program. By looking at the diversity of interests and skills as a strength of students, rather than a problem with the class, the authors have been able to develop a class structure that increases student achievement and interest. The purpose of this chapter is to describe a course model that better accommodates the diversity of majors and technology experiences available to students. While all students are held accountable to the same course objectives, multiple options are provided for learners to choose a path to meet those objectives. Rather than requiring all students to participate in the same activities, students are allowed to select activities and content related to their individual content areas and skill levels. Allowing students choices helps alleviate problems in delivering content to students with different majors and background knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

It is common for teacher education programs to require an introductory educational technology course. Like many schools, our College of Education has seen the focus of this class shift over the

years. Historically these courses served as a place for students to learn how to use the computer. We thought of these as computer literacy courses, and assignments focused on demonstrating mastery of applications and various tools (Fewell & Gibbs, 2003). As more and more students come to these classes with significant technical skill and experience in using technology for personal use, the

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focus of these courses has changed. We think of them now as classes in technology integration, and we turn our focus from teaching pre-service teachers how to do things with technology to how to use technology to impact learning (Roblyer & Doering, 2010; Grabe & Grabe, 2007; and Newby, Stepich, Lehman, Russell, Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2011). As such, the content of these courses has moved from technical skills to issues in technology integration, such as determining the affordance (Norman, 1988) or relative advantage (Roblyer, 2003) of a technology, instructional planning, learner engagement, project-based learning (Harris, 2010), learning theory, instructional strategies and assessment.

Students enrolled in these courses come to us with wildly varying interests, experiences, and curricular foci. For example, a typical class will have a mix of majors from elementary and early childhood education, to physical education, to music education, to math education and everything in between. The problem we face is one of relevance. For example, it seems obvious that what works well in a secondary social studies class may not work well in a middle school music class. However, student expectations in these classes are for examples of what to do in *their* classes. This is not, in our opinion, an unreasonable expectation. But if you add this expectation to the vast range of technology proficiencies that our students bring to the class, you can see how difficult it is to keep everybody focused on the ultimate goal of learning to integrate technology into *their* future classes. The question for us has become: How can we teach the course content while still making the examples relevant to everyone?

We have examined these issues and concerns for a number of years. We have worked with faculty in methods courses to figure out how we can help bridge the gap between our class and the clinical experiences in a vast array of content areas. We have found that we can drive student achievement by focusing on a student's individual strengths and interests and that the

interest of the individual student can be a tool to bridge this gap. By looking at the diversity of interests and skills as a strength of our students, rather than a problem with the class, we have been able to develop a class structure that increases student achievement and interest. The purpose of this chapter is to describe a course model that better accommodates the diversity of majors and technology experiences available to students. We are using the Buffet model (Twigg, 2002) to help develop strategies that allow for choice.

THE BUFFET MODEL

The buffet model is one model of course redesign studied by the National Center for Academic Transformation. The focus of the Center is to “provide leadership in using information technology to redesign learning environments to produce better learning outcomes for students at a reduced cost to the institution” (National Center for Academic Transformation, 2005, para 1). While our focus was not cost reduction, we thought that several aspects of the Buffet model would solve the problems discussed above. Specific concepts from the buffet model we used to redesign the introductory educational technology course include:

- Offering students multiple options to reach the same learning outcomes;
- Providing multiple ways for students to work with the content such as lectures, individual discovery opportunities, team/group discovery opportunities, and individual and group projects;
- Using face-to-face meeting time to explain the buffet structure, the course content, and the various ways that students might choose to learn the material;
- Offering course content organized in modules;
- Dividing tasks among faculty to eliminate duplication of effort and capitalize on fac-

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