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CEP 817
Final Paper

In this, my final project for CEP 817, I will be taking a look back on our semester based on the concept of design. I will start by first explaining my thoughts about the class itself, my expectations and why they were and were not fulfilled. Next, I will take a look at myself and my own teaching methods, what I learned and how bringing design into my classroom will help me grow as an educator. Finally I will take a step back and give examples from my own life and experiences in learning from the design method. I will then attempt to link those experiences to ways I can use design in my class so my students are the ones who benefit the most.

Thoughts on CEP 817

This is my first online class here at Michigan State, and I would have to say that I didn't really enjoy the experience as much as I thought I was going to. I guess I am old school; I would rather have to go a classroom, with strict time periods, and meet in person with instructors and fellow students. I have felt all semester that everything with the format of the class is too distant and feels almost fake. I would assume that this might have to do with the fact that it is my first class and I am trying to adjust to something new. I feel out of place having to read other peoples thoughts instead of hearing them in person. It is a poor way to gauge how someone is really feeling about a subject. Take myself for example, every time I wrote answers to the readings in class, I revised what I wrote at least 3 or 4 times, what this does is make my answers different than if I were expressing my feelings in the classroom environment. For someone like myself who doesn't communicate though writing, as well as speaking and discussing

issues it made the class more difficult. I think it took away from, what I perceive as my strongest asset as a teacher, being able to explain things to my students in THEIR language, which is different from an academic setting. With that being said I think that both Punya and Mike did an excellent job setting the course up, facilitating discussion, and forcing the students to take accountability in the Group Summaries and Good/Bad Examples.

For my Big Kahuna project, I chose Imperialism. As a world history teacher I think that Imperialism might be the single biggest factor in the problems facing our world today. Since the topic is so massive, I might have had a case of the “eyes being bigger than the stomach.” I really don’t think there is any way to fully cover the topic to the extent that I would like to have covered it in my project. There is just so too much to cover, I could honestly spend 10 years adding and adding and still not be complete. That being said, it has the basics and I feel that it is a solid teaching tool for my current and future students to take a look at and another way other than to learn from other than my lectures.

Teaching By Design:

I feel like you now need a little background on my teaching career in order to understand why teaching by design would be a difficult concept for me to integrate into my classroom as it is currently run. I have been teaching for almost 2 full years now, before I was a full time teacher, I subbed all around metro Detroit for 3 years and I also completed a full year of Student Teaching. What I perceive as my biggest problem in teaching is my overall design of the courses. I have never taught the same subject twice. While my course content knowledge is above par, I still don’t feel like I have a firm

enough grasp of the classroom environment which will me to plan my lessons around my students figuring things out themselves. I understand that this is my weakness, I just can not get myself to let go of the reins and allow the students to wander around by themselves. My first year, I was hired during the 2nd week of the school year, so right away I was already playing catch up, when I walked into class the first day, that was the first time I had seen the text book and for the rest of the year I felt like I was one day, maybe at times, one week ahead of the students. Then I was laid off, and lucky enough to be brought back for this year. Again, I was brought back two days before school started, at a different school this time with two classes to prepare for. Just when I felt I had my legs underneath me I was told that at the end of the semester I was changing the classes I taught, so at the start of second semester again I was given a new book, new curriculum, new standards, and for this idea of teaching by design I was given a new extremely immature group of students. Again I found myself one day ahead of the students. Last week I found out I was again being laid off this summer so who knows where and what I will be teaching next year, if I am lucky enough to be rehired again.

By the time I figure out what the course is like and how I need to teach it seems that I am on to the next challenge. All this moving around gives me zero time to look at how to design the course and where and when to be the facilitator and allow the students to discover on their own and which sections I need to pull in the reins and become the instructor. Every year I have had to start from scratch. Since I receive the book basically the first day of class, I hardly have time to sit down, and really design what I am going to do. I have no idea how each chapter relates to the previous ones, where I need to skip

ahead or find my own resources if the book doesn't fully cover the topic to my liking. It really isn't until I have gone through the whole year or semester that I begin to understand the course myself. For that reason I really don't feel that I am able to give my students everything they need. Half the time, I don't even know what we will be covering the next day in class, let alone have the whole year planned out, week to week like many of the seasoned veterans in my school. There have been many times when I feel frustrated with my lack creativity in the course and I truly feel that I am treading water and barely keeping my head above.

Over the course of this semester I have realized that teaching by design is different than designing your teaching. I can also look back to the classes that I have taught and know exactly which areas I could have designed projects which would give the students that ability to go out on their own and make discoveries. One example that pops into my head right away is Chapter 29 in my World History class covering WWI. I really felt that as we were covering WWI the students were involved and interested. The end of the chapter test results proved that since as a whole the 130 student grades were much higher. What I am thinking is, that if I teach the class next year, when WWI comes around I will have the students do some type of project that revolves around them researching and designing their own skit, website, or diorama of life in the trenches. Instead of me spoon feeding them the information they will have to go out and find out for themselves what trench foot, dysentery and mustard gas were and how they affected the lives of the men and women nurses on the front lines.

Another area where I fail my students is in them developing critical thinking and constructing deep understanding of a topic. I know that many times I take the easy way out. Instead of forcing my students to think about why something happened, the consequences of an action, I stay at the surface of issues. I do that because in 4 out of my 5 classes are not at that level of thinking. If I ask a question that involves actually understand the concepts my students just won't answer. Instead, they will sit there and wait for someone else to answer and then copy down the answer given; to them digging into a subject is a waste of time. I find myself asking the simple questions so I can get an answer. As a teacher I know that this is wrong, I know that with these surface questions, they will most likely forget the knowledge in a matter of hours, whereas, if they were to have to think about the concepts and how they apply then that information will stay with them much longer. Even though I know all that, I still find myself giving them the easy way out and maybe with forcing them to design their own projects in the future not only I will be able to grow and mature as a teacher but my students will become more interested and thus more meaningful to themselves.

Learning by Design:

I have been trying to come up with examples from my own life of learning by design and I have come up with a couple. The first example compares myself with a friend of mine. We have both recently purchased a house within the last year. The second example I want to talk about is my own Big Khuna project and the experiences I had working with that. Finally, third, I want to bring up learning by teaching.

Home ownership is a big deal with the economy in a recession and Obama offering large tax credits to first time home buyers a couple of my friends and I have purchased homes within the last 9 months. My buddy, we will call Ryan, purchased a big \$250,000 house on a golf course in Commerce Township. The owner was about to foreclose on the house so Ryan and his fiancée got a good deal. I went a different route. My grandparents both passed away about two years ago and their house has been on sale for the last year. Since my dad wasn't going to get what he wanted for it, I decided to take it off his hands, and in doing so have kept it in the family. My grandparents built the house after WWII when my grandfather came back from the Pacific and my dad and uncle grew up in the house so I am proud to now say that I live in it.

Taking care of a house is a responsibility that I take seriously. Ryan on the other had doesn't have a clue. When something goes wrong at his place he calls someone to come fix it. He didn't doesn't know how to paint, has no idea about staining wood, lawn care, heck he didn't even know how to hook the cable wire up to his TV when we lived together. To put it simply he is a total buffoon. For myself taking care of my house is a perfect example of learning by design. When something goes wrong I either get out a do it yourself book and figure out how to fix it, or my dad comes over and gives me a hand.

When I fixed up the back den I decided to redo the whole room. I painted and put in new baseboards, molding around the doors and window, chair rail and crown molding around the ceiling. Before I could begin work on the wood I had to paint the room. Now, I have painted rooms before, so this wasn't a new or fun experience for me. But it still

applies here, when you paint something, just like designing the Big Kahuna, you are the only one who knows where the flaws are. Maybe you missed a spot around the widow molding or you got a little paint on the ceiling and had to use ceiling white to paint over the spot. The point being it's your work. The same thing went into the wood work that I added to the room. I wanted it to be as nice as possible so I used Oak, my dad helped me to start, showing me how to miter the wood and stain and lacquer it, after that I did everything else on my own. I learned from my mistakes, when I look around the room I see where I had problems fitting the pieces together, areas where the stain doesn't look exactly right but those are things that only I see. The reason I see them is because I understand the time and effort it took to design the room. In the room all the outlets were all two prongs so I had to change them to the three prongs. Again, my dad showed me how to ground the wire, switch the other wires and after the first example it was up to me. The first one I did took a little while but it worked, the second one a little faster and the third one was taken care of really quick. Learning by doing really gave me the confidence that if I need to fix it in the future I will have no problems at all. Hopefully, I can one day translate that into the classroom, and let my students learn on their own, stop controlling everything that takes place. Let them figure out their mistakes, present their material to the class.

The reason I decided to go with Technology for my masters is because to be honest with you I don't know that much about the new technology. I was a master at Nintendo, Super Nintendo and Nintendo 64 but then I stopped playing video games and then last summer I started playing X-Box 360 with my brother and I realized two things.

One, I forgot how fun, stress releasing and the number of hours you can waste playing video games. But, second I didn't realize how quickly I became outdated with Technology. I couldn't figure out the right buttons to use, since there are so many more on a 360 controller, I did not understand the lingo the players were using and most importantly since I am super competitive, I was constantly being destroyed by my brother and his friends. I need that to change, so I bought a system, spent way to many hours playing and am now I am on par with those guys for the most part.

While making my Big Kahuna project, I made a huge mistake in the website I decided to use. I had used Geocities in the past for a fun a little webpage my friends and I set up for a poker league we used to run when I was in college. The site was perfect for that. You only needed a couple of pages and a "guest book" so we could talk trash to each other. When I needed somewhere to go for the Kahuna I went to Geocities. At first it accommodated all my needs; it wasn't until much later in the semester when I was attempting to put the whole project together that I realized the error of my ways. The Geocities site severely restricted my creative capabilities and my overall vision for my project. The biggest problem was that the site wouldn't allow me to upload any videos. When I started adding PowerPoint presentations I started to run out of space on my "free" drive. I contemplated buying more space but I didn't want to be sucked into a year long contract for a class that was going to be over in a month. Next thing I knew I was in a world of trouble. I tried every possible way to get videos uploaded on my site with no success. I eventually, as you will see, had to set up a second site though my school's web page, link it to my BK site and use the second site as a as a place to store my videos. It is

hardly ideal and I am very disappointed with it. I think it makes my BK look amateurish and very unprofessional, but there is nothing I could do and it's what I am now stuck with. Sometimes you have to sleep in the bed you make. The good thing is that my site is set up to help students understand my topic, which it does and a little extra clicking shouldn't effect the learning process.

The next time I have to set a webpage up, I WILL NOT be using Geocities, I can promise you that (especially since Yahoo just put up a disclaimer saying they were going to be shutting it down sometime later this year). Instead I will be using one of the newer sites, that prior to the class I was unaware of. As I tell the players on my JV baseball squad, it's not what you did wrong its how you learn from what you did and next time you are in a similar position doing the correct thing. For myself, next time, I won't take the easy way out and go to an inferior site and use it because I am familiar with it. I will leave myself open to new options and make the correct choice.

One day during my subbing career I was in a science classroom. The teacher had a whole bunch of science related posters on the board so I was bored and looking at them. My eyes found on in the front corner of the classroom that said "You retain 20% of the information you see. You retain 50% of the information you hear. And you retain 90% of the information you teach." And I thought about it for a minute and I thought to myself, "No way is that possible." For whatever reason that poster has stuck in my head. When I started teaching I realize how true it was. Having to teach something means you have to

understand it. Often times my students will ask me questions and I always have an answer for them, and most of the time my answers are even right. At least once a month someone asks me how I know so much on so many different topics and I quote that poster. Since I teach the material, it's my job to know what's going and the more I teach the more information stays with me. It's almost like as I teach I am learning just as much as my students. Learning by design, since I am designing the lesson plans, doing the readings and relating that information to the students, I am the one who is retaining the most.

Relating this to student learning is easy. If the students are asked to search a topic, and give a presentation to the class, the chances of them retaining that information is much greater since they are the ones who will be teaching the material to their peers. I can remember having to give a presentation in high school about Zachary Taylor, former president of the United States, twelve years later that information is still stuck in my head.

I really have learned a lot from this class. I think that I have learned most about myself and my own weaknesses in teaching. I can now take what I have discovered into the classroom, (hopefully I have a classroom in the fall) and give my students a more diverse education. I realize that my current teaching situation puts me behind the preverbal eight ball, since I basically start at the same time as the students and have very little prep time for my classes. That being said, I think that it is important as an educator to take the ideas of design from this class and begin to allow my students more freedom to explore topics while in my classroom. Last but not least I just want to take minute to thank Punya and Mike for all they brought to this class and the fact that you have opened

my eyes, not just the good and bad examples of design but to my own teaching and where I need improvement.