

Framework for Accessing Creativity

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For this final individual project I analyzed an assignment from my 2006 teaching experience in the Masters of Arts in Educational Technology program with a new framework I've created thanks to Punya Mishra, Mike Deschryver, the class discussions during CEP818 and the books Sparks of Genius. This is an attempt to explain and apply that framework to an assignment from that teaching experience so that I can leverage what I've learned and apply it to my upcoming experience in England in 2009.

David Wong was the lead instructor for the courses in the program I was an instructor for in 2006 and his research interests are focused on how aesthetics can affect instruction. Dr. Wong pushes for his third year Masters of Arts in Educational Technology to create digital images that mimic the design of advertising in attempt to push an educative message through the medium in a compelling way. The resulting product he terms i-Images. As an illustration, an i-Image created as an example by Dr. Punya Mishra, an MAET professor, depicts a tree with the text "A tree is made up of air" and elaborates in smaller text below "Most of the mass of a tree comes from carbon in the air through photosynthesis". The image illustrates a compelling scientific fact that engages people's curiosity about science. It is not meant to be educative in any strict sense, but is way to titillate a person's curiosity on the subject of science.

At this point let me introduce my framework and main question which concerns "How to be creative with the: Medium, Tools & Content (as an) Instructor, Student and Individual?"

I feel often when working with a student who is an educator, six key pieces come into play that are all interconnected. As instructors, we push for creativity with the content (the student's area of expertise), the medium (image, video, essay) and the tool, but don't keep a clear link to how this is affected by the current state that the individual is in; as a student, an educator and an individual. Often a very creative person, who is does very creative work as an instructor and teaches their content with a creative flair, is stymied by their ability to work with a medium or a tool, thus their creativity as a student completing the assignment is stymied. In the reverse, someone who is skilled with the tool, or familiar with the medium, may be unable to be creative with there content as an instructor. I theorize that if any of the three areas of content, medium or tool are not well addressed from the perspective of the student, the educator and the individual, the assignment will be less effective or down right frustrating. It's a delicate balance.

Here is a brief matrix that I believe helps address how an assignment lays out in the framework.

	Content	Medium	Tool
Student			
Educator			
Individual			

Using this matrix, when developing an assignment, I would have to look at the different intersections of how the student fairs with the content, medium and tool (the assignment expectations). Also if the student as an educator has clear idea of how to leverage their content, the medium and tool in an instructive setting. Lastly

how the individual fairs with ideas about the content, the medium and tool, whether for instance they have creative talent with writing or video (medium) as well as their personal beliefs (such as religious or philosophical) impact the content they are teaching.

At this point, we can move on to one assignment from my experience in 2006. It was to create an image that is related to your content area as a teacher. The focus was to make the image aesthetically pleasing, message heavy and presents the content in a way that is thought provoking and delivers the message effectively. On top of that (and a departure) the students were to create iterations of the image as it is being developed, export the images into a movie and add narration describing the iterative process that they went through, from a content, medium and tool viewpoint, wearing their many hats.

The original assignment was for students to create basic i-Images. This was supposed to help them work with the tool (image editor) and content (how to simplify complex messages) and the medium (creating images that deliver the message effectively). As instructors we took the assignment and expanded on it, making each student create an iterative work with narration by recording the process that they went through to create the i-Image. By doing this, we were trying to be creative in how to use the tool in a different way, making it more pedagogically useful to us and embedding a different way to model the flexibility of the software. We also wanted to change the content of the assignment, which traditionally was about creating a basic image about a content area into an assignment that forced the

student to be more reflective on the process of distilling their message, working with the medium and using the tool.

This one assignment fits into the framework of “Creativity with the Medium, Tool & Content” perfectly. It is a creative use of the tool, which allows different content knowledge about the tool to be introduced without it being the main component of the assignment. It is a creative use of the medium, allowing students to play with ideas in a medium that is very familiar to them (we showed off different examples of i-Images). It was a good entry point into aesthetics and how to deliver your message most effectively. It also led to discussions about choosing the right medium for different messages and audiences. It also allowed us as instructors to get the first hand account of the creative & technical process that the students went through to create the image, allowing us to see the work that went into creating the i-Images even if the student didn’t possess the talent/experience with the tool or medium.

By expanding on the assignment, we provided the students the opportunity to illustrate the pieces that we often don’t see with a finished piece of student work, the process of creativity, from all the viewpoints of my framework. This allowed the students who were ineffectual with medium and tool, to still share their ideas as a student & educator about content and how they had considered using the medium and tool effectively. From a grading standpoint, this model was much more robust than the normal final product review process that many classes tend to lean towards.

Not all assignments from 2006 were this effective. Many missed the mark completely based on my criteria outlined here. I'm happy to say that as I enter into planning for the summer of 2009, to be armed with the framework I've developed in CEP818, so that I can address the whole student, as an educator and individual, as well as student, with all three areas of content, medium and tool.