Shifting Ethos in the Face of Digital Reformation: Putting the Person Back in Personalized Learning

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My capstone project morphed and transformed as I planned and implemented the project. On January 17, 2017 a personalized learning micro-conference was held at Kennesaw State University’s Bagwell College of Education in the iTeach department. It was a one day event for teachers and administrators to come and engage with one another while exploring the meaning of personalized learning and/or refocusing their efforts in personalized learning. The tagline for the micro-conference was “Putting the person back in PERSON-alized Learning.” The goal was two-fold: first, have teachers connect with one another to enrich attendee’s professional learning network (PLN) and then to focus on student-driven learning within the paradigm of personalized learning.

Planning for the micro-conference began in November of 2016. The director of iTeach, Stephanee Stephens, and I began a dialogue regarding the need to reach out to teachers and give them a refresher ofnpersonalized learning. Many of the school systems in the Atlanta metro area had provided some professional development regarding personalized learning, and we felt reaching out to teachers to invite them to a one day conference focused on students in a personalized learning environment would be valuable.

We discussed securing sponsors for this event. Eventually, Discovery Education and Ippolito’s Ristorante sponsored the event. Discovery Education provided content, presenters, a keynote speaker, and give-a-ways. Ippolito’s Ristorante provided food and pizza boxes for our green-screen movie studio workshop. These sponsorships were secured in late November and early December.

We developed a flyer to send out via social media to invite people to attend the conference; the goal was to get this flyer circulating on social media, on KSU iTeach’s wiki, and emailed to district leaders by December 10, 2017. A Google Survey was created to collect participant attendance information. The flyer went out by the deadline; however, we did not get much interest in the conference at that point. With teachers wrapping up first semester, we decided to keep publicizing the conference. In the beginning of January we began to have people registering. Upon reflection, the date January 17, 2017 was not a good day to have the conference. It was the day after Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, which the schools were closed. Initially, we thought that would be a good to hold the conference the day following a holiday because it was a short week, and it was the first day back from a long weekend which can often be slow for both teachers and students. However, what we failed to think of in picking this day is that many of the metro districts had professional development days in which students were out of school and teachers were already committed to professional development at their schools or districts. When planning for a conference in the future, I will make sure that the timing is better. I think by holding an event on a full week of school will give teachers security in knowing that their lessons do not have to be rushed or worry the students will not receive the instruction they need to make progress on the curriculum. Also, setting the day of the event in the middle of the week will allow teachers to start the week preparing students for their absence and allow teachers to finish the week with their students. Additionally, I would move this event out of January and into early February because it gives us more time to publicize the event after the manic rush of the end of 1st semester.

Securing the keynote speaker was an important part of organizing the conference. Discovery Education agreed to help us secure a keynote speaker. I met with Sonya Glaser in January and asked if we could get Dean Shareski as our speaker; however, he was not going to be in the Atlanta area at the time of the conference. We discussed some options and decided since that part of our goal was for teachers to harness technology we would do the same and asked Mr. Shareski to be our keynote speaker via Skype or another digital platform. Another problem we ran into was that Mr. Shareski was not available in the morning due to his travel schedule. He had a narrow window on time to present between noon and 2pm. Initially this felt like a major stumbling block in our plan, but once Ms. Glaser and I talked it over we were able to design an agenda that worked for our speaker and accomplished some of our goals more easily than if the keynote had been first thing in the morning. Ultimately Dean Shareski agreed to present to our conference at 1pm via Google Hangout.

In addition to helping to secure the keynote speaker, Discovery Education hosted multiple sessions for teachers to learn about implementing technology into the classroom. Ms. Glaser and I planned out Discovery Education’s sessions; these included: virtual reality field trips, a Discovery Education blog feature “Spotlight on Strategies” (SOS) session, and presentations on their Tech Book products. Once these sessions were agreed upon I was able to plan the remainder of our sessions. With the keynote presentation being in the afternoon, we used the morning to set the tone for our day which was connecting like-minded educators in order to share experiences with personalized learning and technology.

In the weeks leading up to the event, I prepared for the logistics of the event. Rooms for the event were secured in late November, and then in early January, I verified the room reservations and assigned rooms and locations for the presentations including the kick-off and the keynote presentation. As these items were completed an agenda was created and finalized with all the session names, times, and locations.

A week prior to the conference, I began to formalize ways to collect data after the event. Primarily, I developed a Google Survey to collect answers to the questions I had created and the presenters from Discovery Education wanted answered for follow up. Additionally, I wanted to get some unstructured feedback, so I used an application called Recap to ask attendees an open-ended question: What did you learn from today that you will implement tomorrow? The responses were recorded on the app either with voice only or by video with audio.

While the conference did not go off without a hitch, it did run smoothly considering this was my first attempt at organizing and hosting a full-day conference. In hindsight, I would recruit more assistance in planning and developing the conference. While I had some good ideas, when I have another person to discuss ideas with the revised versions are almost always better than my original idea. One of these ideas was a strategy for facilitating PLN development by giving people five playing cards to collect others’ names and contact information. I think my idea was good, but in execution it did not work out like I had expected. I know there were some connections that could have been made that were not because the medium, the playing cards, were awkward and my directions for them were not clear.

Another item I would improve upon if I were to do this type of project again is getting good formative feedback throughout the conference. I used a Google Survey to collect summative evaluative data, and I used the Recap App to collect some formative data at the end of the conference. Next time, I will collect more formative data periodically throughout the conference while participants ideas and thoughts are fresh in their mind. By making this change, I think the quality and accuracy of feedback would improve and be more actionable.

For the next project that requires visual media such as advertising flyers and emails, I will incorporate better visual design strategies. My flyer for the event was overly busy and confusing for people to find all the important information. The other printed and electronic media I used, an agenda, map, and playing cards, did not have the same theme to link them together. This hodgepodge of media added to the confusion.

Working with adult learners is different than working with young learners; however, all learners need strategies to help them gain knowledge and meet learning targets. Next time I organize or help to organize an event this I will clearly state learning targets. I may also provide information or strategies that explicitly address knowledge acquisition to attendees. There are two reasons to provide this information: first, it is good modeling and second, it will help attendees identify important information they may want to take care to retain.

Overall, organizing the Micro-Conference was a great experience. I feel that I have accomplished something significant with my Capstone project. Also, having the experience of putting together an event like this is an asset in my professional experience as a technology coach.

Throughout the process of planning and implementing this event, I have tried to keep the standards established for Instructional Technology Coaches foremost in my mind. Using the standards as a guideline, I have attempted to meet them every step of the way. The first standard of the Professional Standards Commission (PSC 1) sets the standard for “Visionary Leadership.” The personalized learning conference I organized and hosted demonstrated my knowledge, skills and disposition to inspire and lead a shared vision for the use of technology in a student-driven, personalized learning classroom. By providing teachers with technology tools they could use immediately in their classroom and framing the use of those tool as a means to engage students in their own learning process supports transformational change. Additionally, by connected like-minded educators the change goes beyond just their classroom and connects professionals together share ideas and the vision we shared through this work. Providing teachers with skills and strategies to develop personalized learning with students demonstrates leadership of PCS’s Standard 1 and ISTE’s Standard 1 for coaches: “Shared Vision Candidates facilitate the development and implementation of a shared vision for the use of technology in teaching, learning, and leadership. (PSC 1.1/ISTE 1a). My knowledge of personalization of learning and classroom technology implementation were critical to setting up with conference with the right sessions to convey the shared vision was critical in the success of the conference. While developing the program and sessions for this conference I had to utilize my own skills with personalization and technology. The agenda and the sessions were developed so that attendees had the ability to use choice and voice in all their session; also, attendees drove the learning within the session as all sessions were set up for a mini-lesson and then provided time and materials for attendees’ explorations while receiving support from the session leaders as needed or just-in-time. Finally, the disposition to communicate a shared vision requires adherence to the vision, a consistency. This conference was developed with the sole purpose to support personalized learning regardless of the various outside influences trying to push forward a message not aligned with personalized learning and student-driven instruction.

Upon reflection, my Capstone project also addressed PSC Standard 5 Professional Development. Specifically, this project is an example of an application of Standard 5.2.

Candidates develop and implement technology-based professional learning that aligns to state and national professional learning standards, integrates technology to support face-to-face and online components, models principles of adult learning, and promotes best practices in teaching, learning, and assessment. (PSC 5.2/ISTE 4b)

The micro-conference project was a professional development event that focused on integrating technology to support face-to-face learning as well as learning that takes place online. For example, the attendees came to Kennesaw State University (KSU) to attend the professional development event. While at the event they learned about a variety of face-to-face technology integration tools and strategies to take back to their classrooms such as green screen video techniques, integrating digital media into the classroom, and strategies for integrating technology with students at all levels. Additionally, participants were involved with online components of instructional technology. Discovery Education provided instruction on how to access their digital learning platform as well as their online textbooks. Also, our keynote speaker utilized an online platform to deliver his speech which allowed the participants to communicate with him through a backchannel.

The event was created for adult learners and the format of the conference was developed with adult learners’ needs in mind. However, I also wanted this conference to model techniques for teachers to use in their classrooms as well. A significant tenant of personalized learning is that students get to have choice and voice in their learning. Keeping this in mind, the sessions were set up for learners to rotate stations as they felt they had mastered the information being presented. This allowed for all participants to learn from all the stations but take extra time to develop a deeper understanding of topics that were important to them. While this was good modeling for the classroom, it also addressed what we know about adult learners: adult learners cannot be rushed. Providing a flexible station rotation model meant that teachers could learn on their own timeframes rather than a start/stop style that convention workshops use. From our feedback, this was one of the aspect of the conference that participants liked the best.

The combination of addressing both Standard 1: Visionary Leadership and Standard 5: Professional Development focused me in the two areas that I want to concentrate on in the future. Providing a vision for teaching and learning and providing the professional development to achieve that vision is the path I would like to take with my coaching. This Capstone project allowed me to experience leadership in these areas.

#### References

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