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Summary of NEXT Conference 2017

I attended the NEXT Conference on Friday, February 24, 2017. NEXT is an acronym for New Explorations in Teaching with Technology. This is the second annual conference, and it was again held at The University of Akron. The theme of the 2017 conference was *Exploring What it Means to Open the Boundaries of Education and Research.*

Welcome Session

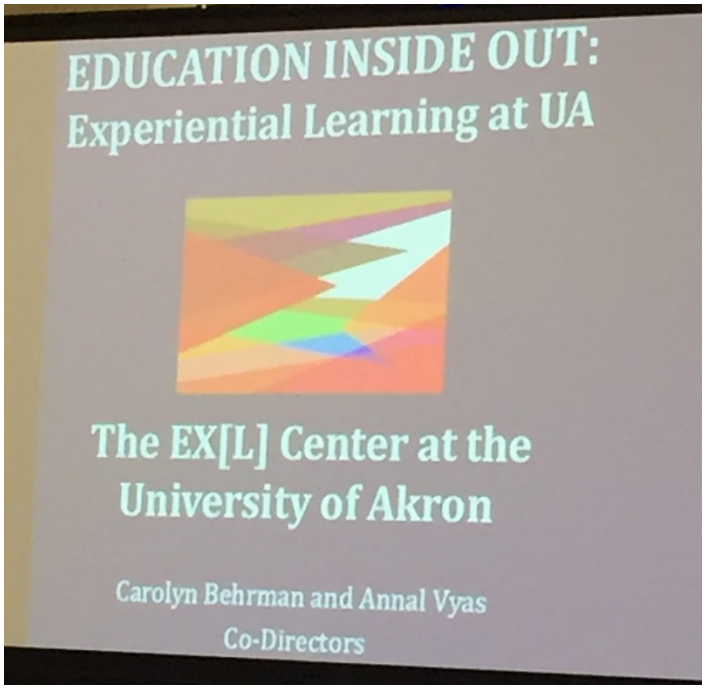
The day opened with a fun challenge that exposed the audience to the learning tool named "Kahoot." Kahoot is a game-based learning platform. Participants download the app to their phones or go to the site on their computer and enter the specific class game code. Once everyone is connected, the fun begins! Our use of Kahoot was a trivia quiz on the history of Quaker Square, the location of the conference. Introducing the conference in this way was fun and effective, especially for audience members who have never heard of Kahoot, which included me. I was excited that the introduction to the day included a learning tool that was new to me.

Annal Vyas speaking, with Heidi Cressman seated at the table.

First Two Keynote Speakers

The NEXT Conference had three keynote speakers, and several concurrent sessions on different initiatives in education. The first Keynote Speakers were Annal Vyas and Dr. Caroline Behrman, co-directors of the EX[L] Center for Experiential Learning at The University of Akron. The EX[L] Center

welcomes students and faculty to come with ideas of ways to promote experiential learning through entrepreneurial ideas and collaboration with the community. Dr. Behrman and Mr. Vyas described what the EX[L] Center does and gave examples of the projects through the EX[L] Center.



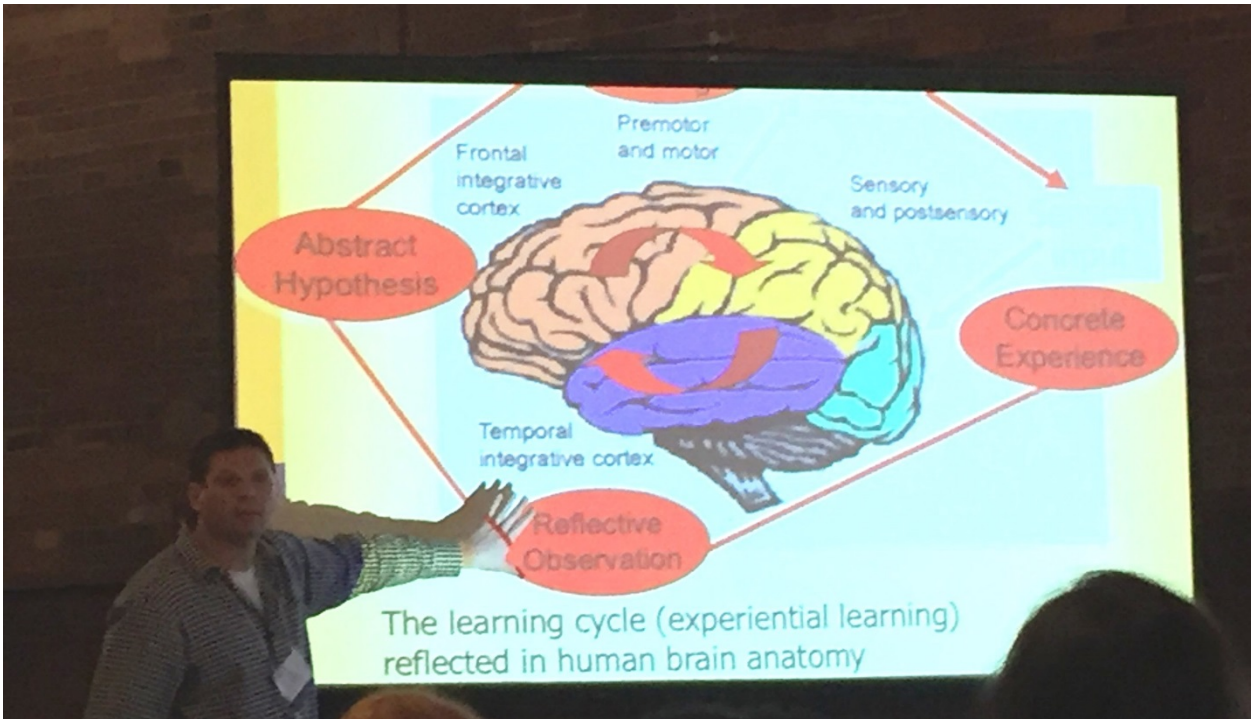
The second keynote speaker was Heidi Cressman, the Director of Women in Engineering at The University of Akron. Women are still much outnumbered in engineering fields, yet their abilities and grades are on par with the male students in their programs. Her presentation was on the mission of the Women in Engineering program and the need to continue to encourage women to enter any of the many disciplines in the field of engineering.

Crash Course in OER Session

After the keynote speakers, I attended the session *Crash Course in OER: Creating Dynamic Courses that Increase Engagement and Decrease Cost to Students.* This was another new educational resource for me. I had never heard of Open Educational Resources (OER), which are teaching and resource materials in the public domain that have been released under an open license. One non-profit, *Creative Commons*, has the goal of providing free copyright licenses with different levels of conditions. This allows creators to share their work under conditions they choose, and the public to use creative work under those designated conditions. The 5 Rs of OER are: Retain, Reuse, Revise, Remix, Redistribute. I think the concept is excellent: the teacher knows what she wants her students to learn, and she can use free resources, and parts of free resources, to help her students learn. She in turn can allow others to use in their classes what she has synthesized for her own. The teacher must verify the validity of the resources, which many OER sites are doing through peer review of the resources being made available. The session gave many resources for teachers to explore to expand their use of Open Educational Resources in their classes.

Metacognitive Practices

The next session I attended presented the insights of Dr. Alan Snow, who teaches Biology at The University of Akron Wayne College. Dr. Snow's presentation included his use of Learning Capture software, which can record classroom lectures to be made available for students to review outside of class. Dr. Snow used metacognitive practices in his biology classes to help his students learn how they learn, and he shared interesting statistics. In one hour, 65% of lecture material is lost in students' memory, and attention wanes approximately every 10 minutes for students sitting in a lecture. This means that the professor needs to re-energize the lecture about every 10 minutes to keep students engaged, and resources students can access outside of class are valuable to student learning. Dr. Snow also made the point that failure is important to learning. He uses this concept by giving his students quizzes with no materials to assess where they were at in their learning.



Dr. Snow used the diagram above to illustrate what parts of the brain are involved with different learning tools. The top red oval was not available on the projection screen; Dr. Snow is discussing how Reflective Observation affects student learning in this photo.

Facilitating College Student Success

Dr. Nicole Hunka, an Associate Professor at The University of Akron in the Applied General and Technical Studies, did a study with her classes on goal setting and motivation. From the Social Cognitive

Theory of Albert Bandura (1986), Dr. Hunka proposed that goals lead to self-efficacy (the belief in the person's ability to succeed in a situation) and motivation. Goals must be specific, challenging, and realistic. Dr. Hunka found that self-monitoring plus consistent feedback on progress leads to self-efficacy and motivation and behavioral changes. Using the acronym WDEP, Dr. Hunka helped the participating students answer questions to help them progress:

W – identifies a goal – what do you want?

D – what are you doing to achieve the goal?

E – self-evaluate, assessment on progress towards the goal

P – develop a plan to accomplish the goal

I was very impressed by Dr. Hunka's commitment to her students and her time investment in each one of the students in her class. She responded to each student personally in the way that would best motivate the student to continue to progress in reaching his or her goals. Many college graduates with whom I have had conversations comment how a professor in college was instrumental in helping them find direction and focus in accomplishing their degree goals and finding a meaningful path once they graduated. Dr. Hunka is one such professor whose work will positively affect her students for the rest of their lives.

Third Keynote Speakers: Surviving the Coming Zombie Apocalypse

Photo from the home page of the course *Surviving the Coming Zombie Apocalypse*

The conference hosted special guest speakers from Michigan State University who developed an interactive online course, *Surviving the Coming Zombie Apocalypse*. In the words of the course's professor, Glenn Stutzky, "We all hope we would be the person who would not leave anyone behind, but

we really don't know. In times of catastrophes some people find their humanity, while others lose theirs."[1]

The course focuses on how and why humans behave as we do during catastrophes. The course immerses students in "survival groups" which are put into simulated situations where they must decide how to respond. Students must work as a group to survive.

Professor Stutzky and his course development team developed a new approach to teaching online that they are calling MOLIE. This stands for Multimedia Online Learning Immersive Experience. Students begin by being put into survival groups, and they get bits of information, some of it garbled, and some in puzzles that must be figured out. Videos are used to describe the situation. The group decides on a course of action, and the course continues from there. After the Zombie Apocalypse segment, the course looks at other historical disasters where students discuss and apply what they learned and are learning.

The course has won numerous awards particularly for the way it engages students and immerses them in the topic they are learning in "real time." It also uses tools for the students to show learning outcomes on the topic of the course. It is now open to the public to enroll as a non-credit course.

The promotional video about the course can be found on the home page of the course's website, http://zombie.msu.edu/. Another video about the course by Professor Glenn Stutzky can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aTA6Kw_0UGM.

Keep Your Lectures OPEN with H5P

This session introduced H5P, an acronym for HTML 5 Package. From the https://h5p.org/getting-started webpage, H5P is defined as "a plugin for existing publishing systems that enables the system to create interactive content like Interactive Videos, Presentations, Games, Quizzes and more."[2] H5P is an example of an open-source tool so that professors can create (as well as reuse and share) interactive HTML 5 learning resources. The presenters explained what H5P is and showed examples of H5P content that could be used in classrooms. This is a very promising tool to enhance student learning. I hope to learn more about it when Brightspace learning environment is implemented on campus in July 2017.

Conclusion

In summary, I believe the NEXT Conference is that it has much potential to be a very valuable conference. I am planning to be part of the steering committee for the 2018 NEXT Conference to assist with the planning and organization of the conference and continue to learn more about incorporating technology into education.

[1] Stutzky, Glenn, zombie.msu.edu.
[2] https://h5p.org/getting-started