Walk a Mile in Students' Shoes – An Approach to Faculty Development on Integrating Web-Based Collaborative Learning into Instruction

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ABSTRACT
This presentation focuses on teachers' experiences and perceptions of their assuming the student role during an intensive faculty development workshop. The workshop, ITESM Summer Institute, hosted at the University of Texas in Austin in June 2001, was a three-week cross-institutional and cross-discipline professional faculty development workshop on cooperative and collaborative learning attended by faculty members of ITESM (Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education System) from throughout Mexico. This presentation: (1) provides information about the workshop program, activities, and participants; (2) examines and discusses workshop participants' feedback about their learning; (3) discusses implications for future faculty development studies.

Keywords
Web-based learning, collaborative learning, faculty development, technology integration, students' perspectives

INTRODUCTION
Integrating technology into curriculum has received increased attention over the past decade (National Science Board, 1992), as have faculty development and the integration of technology into teaching and learning. (Shapiro, 1999; Frayer, 1999) Nancy Shapiro discussed how learning communities could be extended "beyond classroom walls" while "challenging the separateness of the curricular and cocurricular." She said, "This integration requires collaboration among administrators, faculty, and staff responsible for the academic and social dimensions of the undergraduate experience" (Shapiro, 1999, p. 110)

Resistance to change is common in faculty development and is especially acute when technology integration is at stake. In their discussion of resistance to faculty development, Turner & Boice (1986) suggested viewing resistance "constructively," distinguishing active from passive resistance, and utilizing "objective analysis" rather than "emotional reaction."

This ITESM Summer Institute was a cross-institutional collaborative effort between ITESM in Mexico, the University of Texas at Austin, and the University of Minnesota. Hosted by U.T. Austin, the intensive three-week professional faculty development workshop, which emphasized the integration of technology into teaching, was attended by 48 ITESM faculty members from throughout Mexico.

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT
To enhance student learning, Frayer (1999) suggested encouraging faculty to network and learn good practices from colleagues; stimulating faculty to refine their learning goals in relation to technology; providing faculty resources and "technology-enhanced pedagogical strategies"; and rewarding successful practices as key strategies for creating a campus culture conducive to assisting faculty integration of technology into instruction. As a faculty developer, Frayer (1999) said that she found that faculty were rethinking their teaching and learning process through the implementation of technology integration. A few approaches mentioned as catalysts to spur goal reevaluation includes school-wide integration, online courses offerings, summer institutes for faculty, and roundtable discussions.

The ITESM Summer Institute sought to engage teachers in intensive learning and hands-on processes, to encourage teachers to examine the relationship between knowledge and the social-emotional aspects of learning, and to recognize and experience the role of technology in learning. ITESM, Mexico expected its faculty members to demonstrate progress in their instructional design utilizing strategies learned, resources explored, and realization of the changing roles of teacher. As the catalyst for changing teacher practice, the workshop provided participants – who were from across Mexico – the opportunity to network with and learn from colleagues, to redefine their instruction and learning goals, and to integrate technology into their curriculum. These workshop goals mirrored Frayer's (1999) strategies for spurring goal reevaluation.

SUMMARY
This presentation, based on a preliminary study, explores the perceptions of ITESM (Mexico) faculty members' experiences in assuming the role of student in an online collaborative environment where cooperative and collaborative

teaching and learning strategies and technology were emphasized. Through hands-on activities and collaborative learning experiences, participants explored three major aspects in the workshop – cooperative learning, collaborative learning, and faculty development – while assuming the role of student in the online learning environment.

Participants' daily workshop reflections, two end-of-workshop surveys, and the researcher's observation journal were used as data sources to illuminate participants' experiences of and insights into "walking a mile in their students' shoes," as well as their perceptions of the effectiveness of the workshop.

The workshop was geared specifically to assist participants in learning strategies in the development of Web-based collaborative learning courses and institutional action plans. Various hands-on activities – both face-to-face and online – were employed to engage participating teachers. These activities included cooperative-learning, collaborative-writing, WebQuest, rubrics design, collaborative learning project design, and institutional action plan design. Social learning, group dynamics, and the interplay that occurred among different cultures and minds were reported as highlights of their learning experience as students in this collaborative learning.

Among 48 participants, 15 respondents reported that prior to the workshop they were not familiar with the rubrics design, but that after the workshop, participants reported that they will use the rubrics they designed at the workshop as an alternative assessment tool for peer and product evaluation in their future courses. Another 25 respondents reported coming to the realization that course design strongly influences students' learning experiences. While a well-planned curriculum is essential, flexibility and on-going student support and feedback throughout the process are equally crucial. Superficial interactions--rather than meaningful and constructive learning--may easily occur in the online learning environment, some participants concluded. They indicated that instructor and facilitator feedback is even more important in the online learning environment than in face-to-face settings.

As administrators and instructors, respondents thought that students' needs are sometimes easily forgotten and that instructors sometimes lose perspective and fail to take into account students' needs when setting course requirements and goals. By assuming the student role, participants experienced first-hand what online learning entails, how to effectively collaborate with others, and what they should be aware of when designing a course utilizing online learning or collaborative learning strategies. They reported that many teachers tend to focus on cognitive and task aspects of learning rather than socio-emotional learning aspects. After this workshop, respondents reported gaining a better understanding of time constraints and other personal aspects of the student learning experience.

Future studies may focus on how these faculty members change their teaching practices, implement various strategies learned directly and indirectly from this experience, and how realizations gained in this workshop impacted their post-workshop course designs.

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