April 28, 2012

Dear me:

Here I am writing a memory, an experience, an adventure...the results of working hard. Time passes by and WOW, it has been a year! A year of challenges, achievements, and growth. Do you clearly understand that things happen when you least expect them? I know you do! Wasn't it you the one telling me not to do my Master's Degree? Yes, you were. In spite of that, one day, you finally surrendered to something you understood was going to be beneficial for me. I took advantage when you changed your mind, and I started my Master's Degree. That's why I said things happen when you least expect them to.

I decided to pursue a dream. No, let's not call it that because it wasn't. I decided to love the idea of having something to dream of...a dream to pursue. It was opening my heart and mind to new opportunities, those that are thrown at your door as an invitation, a flyer, a magazine, or a newspaper.

Since it was a tough decision, I decided to study something I was passionate about, something I could use inside and outside of my classroom. I can imagine you reading this and saying the word...technology! You know me so well. Do you remember that class I took in college called Educational Technology? I bet you do. That was the first thing that came to my mind. I started researching on the Internet with very low expectations of finding a university with a program like that. Do

you remember how I couldn't find a university in Puerto Rico with an appealing program in Educational Technology? I never found it, but I found something else. I did! :) Now everything started to make sense. I was excited! It took me one week to be part of the certification program, and a month to be part of the MAET program in Michigan State University.

Since I've had to reflect on four of the courses I've taken, today I want to talk to you about one of the latest ones: Learning Technology by Design. I can anticipate that I have learned many things. The connection between design, technology, and learning is so powerful and deep that it incites an action and reaction from the teacher. I learned to thoughtfully work on my designs (classes) through McCloud's six steps.

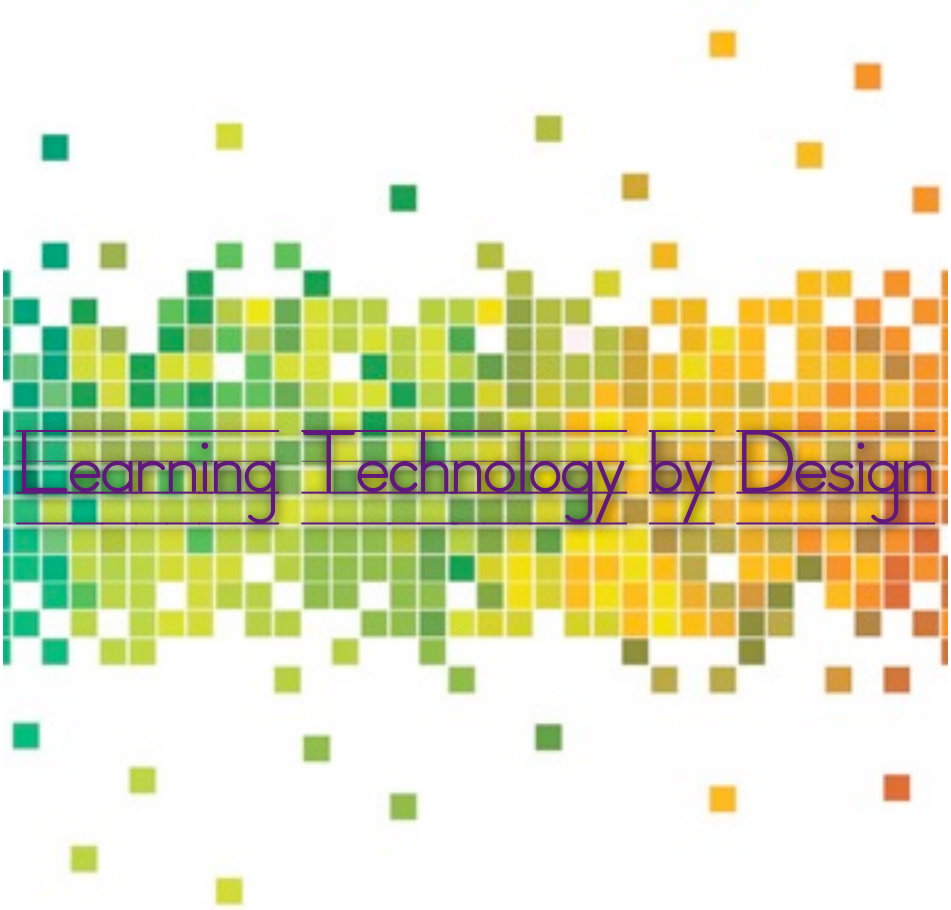
These steps included many interesting points on Idea/Purpose, Form, Idiom, Structure, Craft, and Surface. Maybe you do not understand what all that is right now. And sadly, I can't continue with this letter. Now, it is time for me to start writing my own newsletter, magazine, or perhaps flyer about experiences that will endure forever. Do you know why? Because I want to use them to reach the lives of others by providing help and the example of becoming a better teacher and co-worker. I hope that one day a copy arrives at your door...

Sincerely,

Karla Diaz

experience news

BY:
KARLA DIAZ



Designing Learning Experiences

Centered on Success

Being a teacher is not an easy task when you really care about your students learning development. Technology is here and the technological generation is breathing in our classrooms. What are we going to do about it? John Dewey said: *"If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow."* Therefore, I decided to go after knowledge, strategies, ideas, techniques, tools, motivation, experiences, and many other words that describe my desire to become a better teacher for this generation. Moreover, help my fellow teachers.

What will you do?

April 2013

I have something to offer; there are changes to be made, and facing the educational challenges, a difference I will make! -Karla Diaz

Index

McCloud's Six Steps

Understanding Comics, 1994

1. Idea/ Purpose

Everything that comes to your mind to design something (impulses, content, emotions, etc.) Why do I want to do this?

2. Form

How do you want to deliver the content?

3. Idiom

Select the art, genre, vocabulary and language that you want to use to develop your design.

4. Structure

Time to arrange everything. Is there something missing? Do I need to take something away?

5. Craft

Construct, invent, and apply your knowledge. Get the work done!

6. Surface

Appeal to your audience with the superficial aspects of your design.

Design is not the narrow application of formal skills, it is a way of thinking.

— Chris Pullman

Learning about Design

During the course *Learning Technology by Design*, I learned six elements of design based on McCloud's point of view. As I was going through all the steps, I realized that when we are designing something, we usually tend to focus more on one area instead of creating a good balance among all the steps presented.

Are the six steps useful?

I consider the six steps a useful guideline. Once you learn the six steps, you are conscious of many areas that you need to take into account when designing something. With the Idea/Purpose, you are not simply designing something because you want to. This means that you have established a purpose; you are to create something with a reason...thinking on someone. That someone is the user. The idea/purpose is a commitment. What you are to develop has to meet or exceed your expectations.

I don't think that design needs theory, but I think designers need theory.

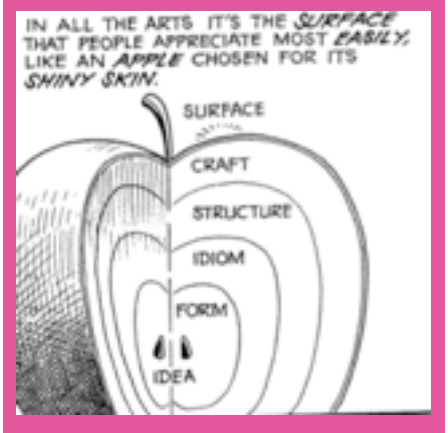
— Johanna Drucker

Good design is obvious. Great design is transparent.

— Joe Sparano

Good design is a lot like clear thinking made visual.

— Edward Tufte



Once you know what you want to do, it is important to work with the Form. The form works with the delivery methods to be used to represent the idea. I think that sometimes step 1 and 2 could happen simultaneously. When it comes to Idiom, the designer has to be very selective. The designer has the opportunity to select the appropriate and pertinent genre, language, and vocabulary for his/her audience. The structure works with the content. Sometime it's difficult to determine what things to add or to take away. When talking about craft, I think of it as a big opportunity to apply all your knowledge and be as creative as you want. The last step is Surface...the final result, what people will see first. As for me, I always tend to care a lot for the aesthetic part of my designs. What about you? This does not mean that it is the only important part. However, McCloud made a great metaphor with an apple. Do we cut an apple to see if its good and then we buy it? No, we look for the

A design isn't finished until somebody is using it.

— Brenda Laurel

Great thought! However, do you think it is finished if the user finds it hollow, with no meaning and purpose, perhaps no structure at all?

The only important thing about design is how it relates to people.

— Victor Papanek

Do you agree?

prettiest one, we rely on the appearance. What about getting the best apple and when you start eating there is no flesh? It is a hollow apple. I think that metaphor nicely explains what all these stages are about...making a design that is good, useful, appropriate, pertinent, attractive, and meaningful from the inside out.

I learned that instead on focusing in just one area, I need to carefully think on all the steps to create something well elaborated and worthwhile. Users don't deserve to bite a hollow apple if I, as a designer, can offer something solid and tasty.

Who this applies to?

It is simple; this applies to everyone who designs something. As a teacher, I decided to take advantage of these powerful guidelines to improve my designs (classes) and the way I use technology in my classroom.

Design and Teaching

As this technological generation emerges, teachers need to face the challenge of integrating technology in their classes to appeal to the interest of their students. Technology itself will not solve any issue in the classroom. The use of technology in the classroom needs to be the result of a well elaborated and thoughtfully designed plan.

As a teacher, I decided to present technology to my students with a purpose. In my classroom, we don't play games just to have a good time. We surely have a great time, but the purpose behind any activity is for my students to practice, explore, write, recreate, repeat, draw conclusions, understand, etc.

After learning about the importance of the content of this class, I am aware of the connection between teaching and design. A connection that not only assures fun, but significant learning experiences.

McCloud's Six Steps

for Technological Teachers*

1. Idea/ Purpose

What is the content? What are your goals and objectives?

2. Form

Considering your ideas, what do you think will be the best way to deliver the information? What technologies will help you? It's time to make your plan!

3. Idiom

What is the vocabulary? What is the language? Do you need to choose a genre? Which one?

4. Structure

Plan the procedure of your class. Where/when technology will take place? Is there something that you should add? Take away things that might not fulfill your purpose.

5. Craft

Create all the materials you need and/or set links. Materials: papers, posters, flash cards, presentations, videos, interactive games, etc.

6. Surface

Do you think that the final result will appeal your students' interest? If not, fix it!

Do you feel like changing the order of the steps will be a good thing to design your class? Do it! Why not?

*These steps have been adapted by the writer of this article for educational purposes.

Creating a Web Site

Is it a useful tool for a teacher?

Web sites can fulfill many purposes. They are a very good tool for teachers. Web sites can be developed for the use of students (primary to high school), parents, and/or teachers.

How long does it take to create a web site?

There is not an exact number of days, or hours. Definitely, creating a web site takes time and requires effort. Don't expect to finish a web site in a couple of days. As I mentioned, it takes time! And remember that you want to show your students a *good design*.

My Web Site

I created a web site named "1st Grade Phonics and Grammar". I design it for students, parents and teachers. I was thinking that teachers can

use it as a resource in their classes. Parents can use it to study or review skills at home with their child. Students can use it at home, and/or in the classroom. Although I chose to have different audiences, I decided that the appearance of the web site was going to be directed to students. I integrated McCloud's steps while working on my web site.

McCloud's Six Steps

for teachers designing a web site*

1. Idea/ Purpose

What do you want to do? There is a list of ideas at the bottom of the page.

2. Form

Which web site will fit your ideas better? (Weebly, Word Press, Google Sites, etc.)

3. Idiom

What language are you using? Think about your audience!

4. Structure

How will you distribute the pages and subpages in your website? Is there enough information? Is there to much information?

5. Craft

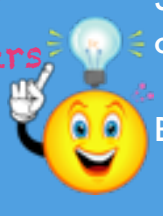
Construct your pages, look for appropriate pictures and other resources.

6. Surface

Choose an attractive and appropriate layout, font and colors for your audience. Make sure that you attract their attention!

Hint: Test it! Select some users to receive their feedback on the web site.

Web Site Ideas for Teachers



- Web Quest
- Skills to cover over the year
- Blog for parents
- Blog for students
- Place projects & assignments
- Readings for students
- Class News
- Videos for students
- Teach about a special topic

*These steps have been adapted by the writer of this article for educational purposes.

5 TIPS FOR WEB DESIGN

1. Choose an appealing theme and layout.
2. The background and font color should be a perfect match. Don't write with a light color on a light background!
3. Make sure that the links are working properly.
4. Font and color size must be appropriate for intended audience.
5. Be creative!

Promote group work in your workplace. If you don't have a reason, create a project!

Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.

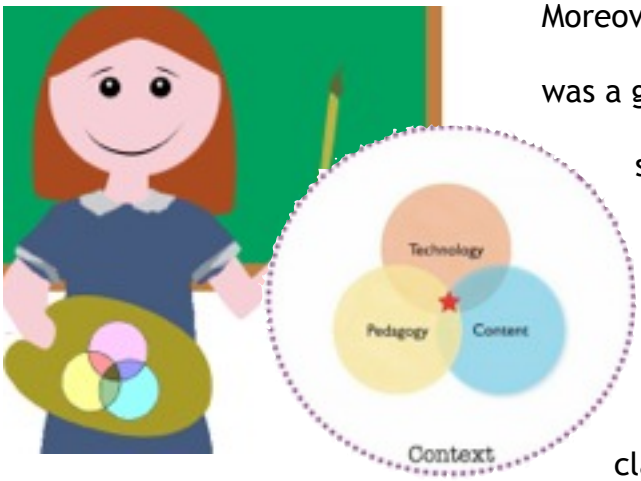
- Henry Ford

Other Learning Experiences

Group Learning

For many people, working in groups is something terrifying. Working in group requires commitment and responsibility. During the class (CEP 817), I had the opportunity of working with amazing people eager to learn and succeed. We were asked to complete various assignments and constantly provide feedback about individual assignments to each group member. During this time, I learned to be open to suggestions, reflect on my work, and share thoughts.

This great experience motivates me to emulate this dynamic in my workplace. I had the opportunity to apply this dynamic in my school since I had to test my Big Kahuna web site with a co-worker. Although I am creating the website with the idea of sharing it with my immediate co-workers, I didn't think about giving them the opportunity of being part when editing the web site. Therefore, I am looking forward to apply everything I learned during this process and contribute new learning experiences in my workplace.



Moreover, the forum was a great place to share ideas and receive feedback from other classmates.

Having the opportunity of reading what my classmates had to say about my understanding on the readings, was a great moment to reflect on my individual learning experience.

TPACK Connection with Design

I learned the importance of TPACK during my first course in MSU: the importance of creating (or can I say *designing?)* a meeting point between the pedagogical, content, and technological knowledge.

I think as we evaluated TPACK in the past, and did the same with design, many can agree with this: design is an excellent approach to create meaningful learning experiences based on the TPACK framework. If you know how to use technology properly in your classroom (based on TPACK), then design knowledge will help you create meaningful and appealing tools for your students.

Individual Learning

Dr. Seuss said, "Think left and think right and think low and think high. Oh, the things you can think up if only you try!" That quote is so true! Working in groups can be a great experience. However, I believe that learning starts individually. Sometimes we tend to limit our thinking and reception capacity. And yet, we need to teach that to our students.

During this course, I have learned many things through the readings posted by the instructors. Readings were followed by assignments and questions related to the topic that helped reinforce what was read and learned. As I was going through the brainstorming process for my final paper, I remembered and made some connections with the famous TPACK. Is it pertinent when talking about design? Is it relevant to design? I think it is! What do you think?

Value of Design in Education

Learning about design helped me understand that designing a class is not far from designing a web site, creating a story, or even making an advertisement. Design is everywhere and possibilities are endless. I believe that using this approach in my classroom will maintain a great balance in all my teaching procedures, while my students and I enjoy every learning experience.

Conclusion

This course offered many important ideas, concepts, strategies, and tools with one purpose...instruct teachers that are willing to become good designers. I want to continue applying everything that I learned during this course. I look forward to helping other teachers become good designers along the way. That they understand, as I did, how this could change the way they see their planning.

I want to design learning experiences that endure forever! What about you?

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