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ENGAGING THE NEW LEARNER! OR WHAT IS MULTIMEDIA ANYWAY?!

As I excitedly presented "Engaging the New Learner" or "What is Multimedia Anyway?!" to professors during the College Educators Development Program Phase 4 Western Region Conference, I noted that educators are very resourceful (as if that was ever doubted)! And, I further noted that educators underestimate how resourceful they can be (if only because they have not been asked to define what multimedia really means)!

By way of introduction to the topic, I asked my audience three questions about multimedia:

1. What is *multimedia*? (Hint: It is not *just* PowerPoint and Java Applets!)
2. What is it used for?
3. What does it accomplish?

Through discussion, we agreed that multimedia is a variety of methodologies—e.g., PowerPoint, Impatica, overhead acetates, whiteboard, chalkboard. We also agreed that multimedia is bi-directional, there to assist the teacher in teaching and the student in learning. We concluded that *multimedia* is a potentially valuable tool for engaging new learners, as well as retaining them in more ways than we have ever engaged and retained them. The bottom line is a win-win-win situation: we have students in the classroom, students want to be in the classroom, and administrators have student numbers about which to boast!

And so the definitional statement was written: "Multimedia is the use of a variety of methodologies to assist the teaching and facilitating of learning for the purpose of engaging and retaining learners." Yet, no matter how focused the definitional working statement might be, it was not a sufficient resource with which to send these college educators away. Educators are "do-ers." In order to make the definition come alive, and make it practical and relevant, a brief 20-minute "cell physiology class" was presented spontaneously, demonstrating multimedia and active learning techniques, as just defined by the audience. Attendees, teachers of various disciplines, were asked to participate and observe, and then to take note of how many multimedia methods were used during the presentation.

At the end of our "science class," the question was asked: How many multimedia methods were employed? One seasoned professional noted that I had used 10 techniques. As a group, we began to list them. According to our group, methods included: PowerPoint, sound, drama, show-and-tell props, overhead transparencies, flipcharts, textbook referencing, whiteboard, in-class assignment, analogies, demonstrations, humour, urgency, and role-playing.

As a group, we added up these techniques, 14 in all. I began adding to the list: questioning, lecturing, group work, web-based learning, coloured handouts, photographs, electron micrographs, recognition learning aids, application to the real world and field of study, review and wrap-up, homework and reading assignment. Again, as a group, we found the *grand* total was 25 techniques.

As one of the attendees commented, we seldom dig deeply enough into our resource portfolio to determine or recognize the *best* means to present a concept to a class. Maybe that is because we are too busy or too concerned about content or too anxious about the need for the electronic sophistication that usually is implied. Another participant shared that even though science was not her discipline, she understood what was being presented. A class of learners will demonstrate a range of learning styles, from the tactile to the auditory, the visual to the traditional textbook reader, the assignment-oriented to the small-group learner. As educators, we often have a preferred teaching method; but as teachers, we are very adaptable and flexible. It is easier for us to add to our teaching resource portfolio than for students to try new learning styles to adapt to us.

Returning to our definitional working statement, we see the potential to engage more students as we make multimedia work *for us* and as we make multimedia work *for the student*. If we, as trained professionals, introduce a variety of teaching techniques into our classrooms, our students will see us as understanding their learning styles. We become the students'

champions! They will see how they can use their learning styles to their advantage, not only when we faculty draw them out and give them legitimacy, but also when we use different teaching methods to introduce other class concepts and validate the learning styles of others.

Finally, all attendees were challenged to return to their classrooms with the promise to try at least three new multimedia methods. Each was asked to evaluate the effectiveness of each technique employed. This was to be a *personal* evaluation, as multimedia must work *for us* to our advantage and *for the students* to theirs. After ascribing a level of expected teaching/learning effectiveness on a scale of 5 to 1, teachers would now have a new arsenal of resources to add to their individual resource portfolios.

I called this the MEEE generation!

- If we are Motivated in our teaching, our students will likely be Motivated in their learning.
- If we are Excited about our teaching, our students will likely be Excited about their learning.
- If we are Enthusiastic about our teaching, our students will likely be Enthusiastic about their learning.
- If we are Engaged in our teaching and facilitating, our students will likely be Engaged in their learning. And if engaged, then they are more likely to stay with us longer—maybe even return for lifelong learning opportunities!

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