

# Integrating the Institutional Learning Cultures of Communication, Technology and Adult Learning

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The recent issue of *Adult Education Quarterly* features an article entitled "Learning, Culture, and Learning Culture" that best captures my professional journey of the recent months. In this article, Jacobson notes, "Learning cannot take place in isolation: entering into meaning systems shared by others requires entering into relationships with others... learning is not merely a condition for membership, but is itself an evolving form of membership... identity, knowing, and social membership entail one another" (p.21).

Being awarded both the Distinguished Teaching Award and the Regents' Distinguished Professor of Teaching and Learning has caused me both personal and professional reflection. On the surface these awards are a gratifying validation for my choice and progress in my chosen profession. However, on a deeper level, these awards are a culmination of the relationships that I have had in this process of progressing in my profession. I chose to join the faculty of Kennesaw State University because the mission was teaching, service and research, in that order. Blending the vision of a chair and faculty member has allowed for a different perspective for these awards. The value in receiving these awards is enhanced by what I can give back to the students, faculty, staff, institution, and my two academic disciplines of Communication and Adult Education. This status report reflects what I have chosen to give back to the stakeholders of education. The giving back could not have occurred without the direct help of all these educational stakeholders. The next sections of this status report reviews the background of winning the award and the emergence of the institutional vision for the award. Additionally, my vision of working with the other system-wide recipients of the award and my resulting professional development will be discussed.

## **Background of Winning the Awards, The Emergence and Implementation of the Institutional Vision**

In early July, I received a phone call from Dr. Ed Rugg announcing that I would be named the Regents' Distinguished Professor of Teaching and Learning for Kennesaw State University. I was extremely honored about receiving this award on the heels of winning the Distinguished Teaching Award for Kennesaw State University. The Regents' Distinguished Professor of Teaching and Learning is an award granted that is system-wide for twenty-nine institutions in the system have identified teaching first in their mission. Each of the institutions was given funding with the understanding that there would be an institutional matching fund to enhance teaching and learning on the campus. The recipient would act as a collaborative/consultant for using the funding at the institution. I also was given a short window of time to map out a plan for implementing this on our campus. Being both a chair and faculty member gave me an intriguing perspective on the implementation of the funding. Having just been through the accreditation process, having a communication course with a technology com-

ponent added to the core and having concern over the impact of technology on adult learning, I did the logical thing... I asked for collegial assistance. As I noted earlier in Jacobson's (1996) article learning cannot take place in isolation. The learning culture is enhanced by collaboration. So I set forth to collaborate both nationally and institutionally. What would enhance learning and teaching at KSU? What would be useful besides a series of interesting speeches and workshops led by the recipient of the award (of course these would be interesting)? What would integrate my philosophy of teaching as "connectedness"? I started phone calling furiously. Nationally, I called Dr. Roy Berko at the National Speech Communication Association. I explained that I had a budget to begin to lay the foundation for a project that would meet the teaching and learning needs identified at my institution.

Dr. Berko relayed that after being through the accreditation process this year, several institutions in the Southeast were encouraged to increase communication across the curriculum. Having just been added to the Core Curriculum as an institutional option ourselves, I asked for some names of leaders in the field that might be of assistance. Dr. Berko gave me the names of Dr. Mike Cronen of Radford University, and Virginia and Dr. Sherry Morreale of the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. These colleagues would become key players in my emerging proposal for a Performance/Presentation Enhancement Center at Kennesaw State University.

Both Cronen and Morreale have been leaders in developing Communication Across the Curriculum programs. Such programs have been implemented over the past twenty-five years, however, in the last five years data has been collected by Cronen and Morreale which supports the usefulness of such programs. Much of their work has been published in the journal *Communication Monographs*. Dr. Berko gave me Dr. Cronen's home number. I was worried about calling him at home on summer break, but Dr. Berko assured me that Dr. Cronen was dedicated to any project which enhances communication skills of students. I called Dr. Cronen's home and asked to speak with him. His spouse shared with me that he was not home at the time but would happily call me back. I asked if it was a problem calling at home and she shared "You have called the right man. Dr. Cronen will help the communication cause day or night." I share such detail because I learned so much about people's dedication to learning through this process of planning a center. I have been in awe of the energy and dedication across disciplines and institutions alike. The power of the learning culture is alive, well and humbling. Both Dr. Berko and Dr. Cronen sent me packets of research articles on the design, implementation and research supporting "Communication Across the Curriculum" programs. These programs focused on the teaching of communication, but did not include a technology component which was the second piece of the puzzle. These centers were usually housed in departments and used technology for self-directed learning only. The part I was looking for was to link the

communication skills enhancement with the new presentation technology. I was also looking for ways that students could meet in groups in a safe environment, have internet connection to work from notebooks (laptop computers), and have some staff available to help them with the design and implementation of their projects.

Step number two was the technology piece of the process. I called Dr. Martha Myers at KSU and discussed emerging ideas. She did a national search of programs that might combine communication skills with technology presentation software. Dr. Myers reported that this was a new area on academic campuses and added that she would like to assist in the design and implementation of such a center. Because of the collaboration of so many professionals, in a short turnaround time, I was able to conceptualize a project that would enhance teaching and learning and meet a real need that surfaced from the SACS accreditation process.

The Performance/Presentation Enhancement Center idea was presented to Dr. Rugg. I envisioned the center as being a "communication and technology across the curriculum" facility. It would be staffed with both communication and technology assistants that would help students, staff and faculty with presentation skills, group projects and using presentation software to enhance presentations. Dr. Rugg listened to my presentation, added to my ideas, and shared it with Dr. Straley. She added her ideas and the Performance/Presentation Enhancement Center was inaugurated. Dr. Rugg presented the idea to the System Vice Chancellor and the green light was given to the project. The Performance/Presentation Enhancement Center has been given an institutional home in the redirected Instructional Resource Center at KSU. As Dr. Rugg and I discussed, this center is designed to prepare students for both the learning and workforce environment. Dr. Rugg envisions this center as more than a writing, communication or audio visual center. Rather, this center attempts to meet the demands of the workforce for both developing the professional communication skills and technology skills of our students, the future employees of the community. Users of the facility will have a place for the design and implementation of communication and technology presentations of all varieties. Additionally, this facility would be available for classroom use for such classes as the new Core COM 109 Principles as Human Communication, which uses presentation software as part of the focus.

Because of the collaborative decision-making of many colleagues, my ideas as both a chair and faculty member were enhanced to further meet the needs of our students, staff and faculty. This initiative has underscored the power of the teaching and learning culture in my disciplines and most importantly at our institution.

### **The Emergence and Vision System Wide**

In a memo dated November 20, 1996, Dr. Linda S. Williams, Faculty Development Coordinator for the Board or Regents, called for a sharing of what was being implemented at each institution by the Regents' Distinguished Professors of Teaching and Learning. Additionally, she called for volunteers to take a leadership role in organizing the winners of this award.

In January, I will be meeting with Dr. Williams to both promote and document the progress of this system-wide award. First, I will be presenting to her the progress of the implementation of the center. Secondly, I would like to start a data base of the philosophy of teaching. These data would also address teaching methodologies (assessment, lecture notes, and syllabi), and reports of the projects that were implemented by the twenty-nine recipients of the Regents' Distinguished Professor of Teaching and Learning. Since this in the first year of the awards, this would act as a

baseline for the long-term effects of the awards at the institutions. Also, these data would provide the underpinnings for papers, articles and panels at national conferences, which would showcase the innovations in teaching within our system. This data could also provide a more positive perspective on the Post-Tenure Review process at the teaching institutions by providing concise guidance in professional development.

Additionally, I suggested that we showcase the recipients at the Teaching and Learning conference in April. The twenty-nine winners will be at the Board of Regents office on April 21, 1997, presenting their institutional initiatives. Since the KSU Teaching Conference is April 17th and 18th, a plan to design a symposium of the recipients featuring their teaching methodologies, philosophies and institutional initiatives has begun. Since Kennesaw State University has such a strong commitment to teaching, it would be a powerful academic event if we could implement such a symposium of the first recipients of the Regents' Distinguished Professor of Teaching and Learning.

### **Faculty/Chair as Lifelong Learner: My Professional Development as a Distinguished Professor**

The collaborative nature of the professional development section of my journey continues. While chairing this Communication Department and leading several directed studies, I had a powerful, productive, tiring fall quarter. As a recipient of the Governor's Teaching Fellowship, Dr. Tricia Kalivoda of the University of Georgia kindly redirected my curriculum to include a crash course in technology and learning methodology. Besides making numerous speeches on teaching and workshops on communication. I have been traveling to both the Adult Education and Communication national conferences.

I attended the American Association of the Adult Education Conference November 1-2, to learn about developments in adult education and technology. I attended, at the request of President Siegel, the Students in Transition conference sponsored by Dr. John Gardner and networked with faculty concerning the campus technology center concept. November 22nd to the 25th, I attended the National Speech Communication Conference in San Diego, California, where I attended short courses by Dr. Mike Cronen and Dr. Sherry Morreale. I also attended short courses on assessment communication skill enhancement of students. While on the West coast, I visited the animation headquarters for Dreamworks. I was given a tour of the technology for graphic artists. I negotiated a possible mentorship between Kennesaw State University and Dreamworks.

This has been a five month update of my journey as a Regents' Distinguished Professor of Teaching and Learning. None of this would have been possible without the collaborative willingness of the many stakeholders in the process. •

Jacobson, W. (1996). Learning, culture and learning culture. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 47, 15-29.