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LRC 576 – Teacher Research  
Assignment: Quest for the Question  
February 7, 2012

1. Describe:
    - a. Name and the actual setting (classroom, tutoring setting, teacher lounge, etc.) including individuals who play central roles in the setting and/or tension.
    - b. Reflect on what (the tension) you *have* sensed or have been aware of previously and *now* are consciously noting/attending to in this setting. Those tensions inconsistent with your expectations or sense of reality in the setting (Odell, 1087).
    - c. Record your reflections and observations over several days (these can be informally recorded as notes to yourself). Note the dates you were consciously attending to or noting the “tension.”
    - d. Review your entries. What patterns emerged about/around the tensions that might warrant further inquiry?
  
  2. Write a vignette, which describes the “context” for your “research tension” using your journal notes. Include all the key players involved in the “research tension.”
  
  3. Frame your “research tension” or your “research moment” into questions that will guide an inquiry. Raise many questions (at least 10 (total) overarching and sub-questions).
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- 1a. The classroom will be LRC 320 Teaching with New Technologies, which is an online course in Desire2Learn (D2L) taught by Dr. Betts at the University of Arizona. There are 60 students enrolled in the course. Most of the students are juniors or seniors in college. There is one, Teaching Assistance and I am the Preceptor for the course.
  
- 1b. The course is constructed and taught differently from other online courses offered at the University. Some of the students are struggling with the navigation and format of the course. The technology that the students are dealing with in the course is frustrating for them. Some students do not grasp the concept or the intent of objectives for the course.

1c. I have been facilitating the course for 4 weeks. I am available to the students via email and office hours, both virtual and on the ground. Some of the issues I am encountering include:

- Course navigation (not being able to find the content) (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> week)
- Technology issues (not being able to create and upload the webpage or find the virtual office hours) (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> week)
- Understanding course objectives (not being able to figure out the objectives of the course and knowing how to accomplish the goals of the course) (All 4 weeks)
- Confusion with group assignment (not being able to figure out the group dynamics and the assignment goal) (3<sup>rd</sup> week)

1d. Some of the patterns that emerge are:

- Confusion about course navigation
- Frustration over technology issues
- Lack of understanding about course objectives and course goals
- Confusion about group assignment and group projects

2. The Vignette:

The online classroom can be a foreign place to student who are accustom to learning in a traditional classroom. It can be a frustrating experience for students who do not understand how to navigate around an electronic environment and may feel isolated by the experience.

At the University of Arizona, the course management system used to deliver online content in called Desire2 Learn (D2L). It is a powerful learning environment, but has a steep learning curve for both faculty and students. There are many ways for the D2L courses to be constructed and this can be challenging for all students who are uncomfortable in online courses.

Dr. Betts LCR 320 course has a visual interface guiding students into the course material. The course has a nice look and feel, but might confuse students who are not familiar with this type of online course. Some students have commented that they do not understand how to access the course content, as the CONTENT link that students usually use has been deleted in order for students to access the content from the visual image. I did not realize that students would have trouble finding the content through the visual cues until office hours.

Most of my observations about this course will be from email correspondence and office hours. Most of the time in office hours is spent helping students activate their website area, create content for the website and uploading the content to the server for the first time. We are in the 4<sup>th</sup> week of the course and approximately

15% of the students in the class have come to me for one-on-one help with this process.

Once I help them through the technology issues, many of the students have trouble grasping the concept of the course objectives. They understand the exploration of technology and are excited about learning how to master different technologies, however they are unclear about the content that will be produced with the technology.

The other questions that arise during office hours are about the discussion groups. Some are unfamiliar with discussion groups and don't realize that they have been assigned to 3 different groups with different people for a different purpose. Others are frustrated because they are having trouble contacting their group members, while others are not sure how to conduct a group project in an online course.

I am helping Dr. Betts in this class as a preceptor. Which means that I am assisting with the technical aspects of facilitating the course. Through my observations I would like to help design this electronic environment so that students are less confused and are able to achieve the learning objectives with less frustrations. My philosophy of the online classroom and any other classroom has always been content before technology. So how can we use the technology in a seamless way to deliver the content without the technology getting in the way of student success?

3. Some questions that pop out at me are:
  - How can we overcome technology preventing student success in the online classroom?
  - How can the design of the online course help guide students to the content?
  - What are some strategies we can use in the online course to help guide students through the technology in order to accomplish the course goals?
  - How can we clearly explain the course objectives and how to achieve them to students in an online course?
  - How can we help students navigate the group assignments in the online course?
  - What can we do to help students be successful in an online course?
  - What are some technologies we can use to facilitate a change in the online classroom?
  - How can we get students to build a community and help themselves and each other in the online classroom?
  - What are the most effective strategies to use communicating with students in the online classroom?
  - How can we encourage students to search for the answers to issues before coming to office hours?

#### 4. Research Questions:

- How does the online discussion help to achieve the course learning objectives?
- Does the building of community in the online course help to achieve the course learning objectives?
- Were there other forms of communication used to build community besides the online discussions? If so, what were they and were these communications helpful in achieving the learning objectives for the course?
- Which module online discussion was the most helpful to achieving the learning objectives and why?