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## Seasoned Teacher, Innovative Techniques

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# Seasoned Teacher, Innovative Techniques

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When I applied for the Teaching Innovation Institute (TII) through UK's Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) –long before the world changed due to the global COVID-19 pandemic–my primary goal was to gather tools, skills, and innovative teaching methodologies that would lead me to a revitalized chapter in my role as a teacher. I was ready for an infusion of new ideas and energy, having been on the faculty at the University of Kentucky in the Department of Theatre and Dance for twenty-three years. After serving as chair of our unit for 12 years, I returned to the faculty in 2016 and felt that I was at an impasse in my teaching. I needed to reinvigorate my pedagogy and shift beyond my “old dog” methods of a seasoned teacher and learn “new tricks” by incorporating innovative techniques into the classroom. My goal was to find ways to increase my understanding of the ways that Canvas can be used to create robust course material and incorporate online technologies to enhance student learning outcomes.

TII launched in February 2020 and from the initial session its focus on implementing technology in creative ways was evident. Our cohort was composed of faculty from a wide variety of disciplines across campus. We were quickly made to feel welcome to try and fail, with a large safety net provided by the CELT staff. Handed our new iPads during the first meeting, we began to learn a variety of

ways that they might be incorporated into our classrooms. Google Suite played a big role in our initial workshops where we explored applications like Google Jamboard and Slides which could serve as creative, collaborative programs for virtual assignments and visual discussions. Other sessions focused on platforms like Microsoft OneDrive and Canva, but there were also small group discussions to encourage (rare) cross-disciplinary conversations between faculty to codify and clarify best practices in the classroom.

Being part of the TII cohort last year felt like a kismet when the pandemic hit, and we all left the classroom and entered the Zoom room. By March 2020 when the world shifted, TII had presciently led several workshops that were lifesavers when we shifted into a new modality of teaching during COVID-19. I limped through the end of spring 2020 semester, trying to keep my teaching robust amidst an ever-changing landscape and significant student despair. I could not have navigated it without the ongoing support of the CELT staff who I had come to know through the Institute.

I used the summer of 2020 to regroup and spent the break focused on getting up to speed with all the tools available through CELT, using the “Teach Anywhere” online courses, virtual office hours, and resources to completely change the way I create and launch Canvas shells for my courses. The instructional designers and pedagogy experts I worked with to discuss rubrics, explore Canvas design elements, and set up Canvas Scheduler groups were technical, pedagogical, intellectual, and at times emotional lifesavers.

I developed a Silent Film project that became one of the most successful projects that emerged from my experience in TII for my TA 120 - Creativity and the Art of Acting course. TA 120 is a connected course for non-majors and is an option for the UK Core Arts & Creativity. Due to the pandemic, I revamped the course and delivered it in a hybrid model for fall 2020. Acting pedagogy has always been an in-person, experiential field, thus, many instructors in the field of acting were completely flummoxed as to how they might shift their courses to an online modality during the pandemic. Thanks to TII and personal instruction that I garnered, I confidently set out to overhaul and create a robust acting course that could easily adapt to the new COVID-19 restrictions.

The Silent Film project assessed student understanding of several methodologies they had encountered including a late 20th Century acting technique called the Delsarte Method. This physical acting technique was instrumental in the early acting in Silent Films. Students viewed Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin videos, as well as early films by George Méliès, then worked in Microsoft Teams to write short, silent film scripts, inspired by their current experiences in the COVID-19 pandemic. Students’ first charge was to create an outline and storyboard for their film. They worked collaboratively (virtually) to create their storyboards using Google Jamboard on their iPads. Once they cast the roles and rehearsed their scenes (all done with masks and socially distanced) they filmed and eventually edited their short movies using their iPads. Eventually they layered in music (one group wrote and performed an original, silent film inspired piano score) and we premiered the films on a large screen in the Singletary Center.

I have now successfully incorporated many Google Suite applications into my classroom, including Jamboard, Google Docs, Google Slides, and Forms. I have witnessed students navigate all of them

with ease and confidence. I also used Canva (quite tentatively and before I felt completely comfortable with it) as a platform for a visually collaborative project and the students loved it. Although only a handful had used Canva prior to that assignment, they found it to be very user friendly and were enthusiastic about the outcomes. These experiences encouraged me to be willing to try certain technologies and methods even before I felt complete mastery of them, knowing that my students were willing to experiment with me along the way.

In short, my experience as a participant in TII was invaluable. It completely transformed my “tool kit” and, somehow, reduced my anxiety when approaching new course preparations to almost zero. I benefited from not just the materials and technologies that we were exposed to, but the relationships with the CELT staff that I developed through the process.

#### Media

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