

FUND FOR INNOVATIVE TEACHING

Next-Generation, Knowledge Practice Learning Faculty Development (Pilot Project)

Executive Summary

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Overview: Between April 2, 2017 and March 31, 2018, I used the Fund for Innovative Teaching (FIT) to learn more about how to equip faculty with the skills needed to embrace next-generation and knowledge practice learning. I examined teaching strategies, learner needs, and changes to the economy and its requirement for work/life ready graduates and an innovation enabled workforce. I was also intrigued to evaluate the impact of technological determinism in shaping how teaching and learning is framed in the context of work/life readiness preparation. And, I was especially interested in understanding how knowledge practice learning could better support work/life readiness for Liberal Arts students.

I set seven outcomes for the project and divided the project into three phases. Phase one used Patton's (1997) utilization-focused evaluation method to assess next-generation technologies and teaching strategies. Phase two included the redevelopment of one course and two course assignments using either new technologies or new teaching strategies. This phase also included a pilot test of a promising experiential learning system called Riipen. Phase three was used to analyze phase one and two, as well as deeply reflect on my findings to propose recommendations UFV may want to consider. All but two of the seven outcomes were achieved successfully.

It would be wonderful to report the FIT project was a complete success, but that is not the case. However, as Bohm & Deal (1995) remind us "Leaders learn most often from their experiences – especially their failures. Too often, though, they miss the lessons. They lack the reflective capacity to learn on their own..." Bohm & Deal, (p. 174). The outcomes from my project are not what I had expected or hoped to find but are in many ways much more insightful and applicable for future innovations.

The phase one deliverables were accomplished. Literature reviews were completed and shared. Next-generation technologies were tested and time-on-task was evaluated. I discovered that complex learning object systems like Articulate Storyline are almost impossible for individual faculty to incorporate into their current workload, however, I discovered a variety of low cost, low skill digital technologies that could better support faculty.

Phase two saw the success of course and assignment redesigns, as well as the engagement of Indigenous students as co-researchers in an evaluation process that produced insightful feedback for UFV. However, the pilot test of Riipen was not successful and as a result the FIT project failed to deliver a support system to help faculty with creating and managing experiential learning. On a positive note the project uncovered a number of faculty at UFV with a passion and awareness for the need to increase the work/life readiness of its graduates. Through these discussions it became apparent that UFV needs to clearly define what it considers experiential learning, and it needs to invest in research that measures its impact on student development towards work/life readiness. My tumultuous experience in Adult Education and return to Communications renewed by passion and commitment to supporting students (especially in Liberal Arts) to become work/life ready. Overall this phase affirmed for me that next-generation and knowledge practice learning has a greater impact and higher chance of success if faculty first have an experiential educator mindset.

I was reminded to return “home” to theory and practice in adult learning and student development. Mezirow back in (1995) suggested that the day would come when adult learning theory, in particular transformative learning, would become critical to the survival of people and, in turn, the reshaping of the traditional view of higher education. Through this FIT project I can appreciate that this day has arrived.

Phase three remains incomplete because of the late start to the Riipen project and its projected promise that did not materialize. On a personal/professional level, various opportunities related to my long-standing work with BCCAT and my discussions with Tom Carey from BCAIU have presented themselves. These opportunities have the potential to change how I frame my research and work going forward. As a result, I have not yet produced a project plan because to be as forward thinking or as strategic as possible consultation with stakeholders is needed. I have started this process but it will require additional time.

Findings: This project had both success and failure – all of which were excellent learning opportunities. The failures clarified for me that the definition and application of the terms next-generation and knowledge practice learning are being used as part of the discourse on innovation in higher education and are often promoted as the missing ingredient in teaching and learning. I also found technology infused courses, problem-based teaching strategies, experiential learning and/or work integrated projects being championed as the solutions for knowledge transfer between student learning and workplace application. While useful these tactics are also short-sighted.

What I had overlooked or underestimated going into the project was the fact that the majority of faculty have very little, if any, training in adult learning or student development theory and that it is much easier for institutions to provide them with additional tools, services, or programs aimed at increasing experiential learning than it is to change pedagogical values and individual knowledge structures. The majority of faculty “often misunderstand experiential learning as a set of tools and techniques to provide learners with experiences from which they can learn.....In fact, experiential learning is actually a philosophy of education based on what Dewey (1938) called a theory of experience” (Kolb & Kolb, 2017, p.17). It is not just a program or a service. It is a way of framing teaching and learning that if absent will cause any innovation aimed at increasing knowledge transfer to fail.

I am not suggesting that technology and programming are not important, but if UFV is to meet the challenges of creating an innovation enabled workforce and graduates that are socially and globally responsible then it first needs experiential educators that: 1) apply the cycle of learning to student development; 2) embrace knowledge transfer to work/life application; 3) develop student capacity for experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting; 4) embrace balancing student success with failure to stimulate innovation or creativity; 5) encourage portfolio thinking and development for all students; 6) label skills (not content) students develop as a result of engagement in their discipline; and 7) illustrate the expansion and interdisciplinary occupational pathways available for students. With an experiential educator mindset faculty would be well positioned, within their current workload, to tackle next-generation and knowledge practice learning as part of a deeply embedded practice of experiential learning. And while this might sound straight forward it is in reality complex to implement – yet I believe achievable.

Recommendations: The full report provides detailed recommendations. However, five significant recommendations for UFV to consider are: 1) formalize a community of practice to help continue the dialogue around defining and measuring experiential learning; 2) develop a strategic experiential learning plan that is holistic and framed with a student development lens; 3) reconsider teaching and learning strategies, career advising and preparation for Liberal Arts students that provides greater awareness of occupation pathways, interdisciplinary collaborative opportunities, and engages faculty and community partners as mentors/advisors; 4) support research designed to measure the impact of experiential learning efforts and student work/life readiness; and 5) explore external funding opportunities and collaborative partnerships to grow an experiential educator mindset and foster greater student workplace capacity building efforts.

UFV has a great opportunity to set themselves apart from other institutions, especially if they embrace knowledge practices, experiential learning, and work/life readiness development for Liberal Arts students. UFV can build off some of their dynamic faculty who already embrace being experiential educators, their experience with Indigenization, and their forwarding thinking new portfolio requirements for the BA and BGS to be innovative and address the challenges facing students as they move into the workplace. The next step is to strategically connect and measure teaching and learning practices, experiential learning projects, and portfolio learning to intentional student development, as well as career development needed for creating work/life ready graduates and an innovation enabled workforce.