

Application of the Learning Trifecta

by Patricia Benke



Patricia Benke, Certified Core Adjunct, Criminal Justice

Professor Benke participated in the Online Teaching Professional Development program as part of the National University System Innovation Grant. In this program, faculty participants piloted a course called Enhanced Teaching & Learning Strategies that consists of engaging online teaching practices using Blackboard tools.

The course presents teaching strategies using the Trifecta of Engagement model in which students need to be engaged with: (1) their course content, (2) their peers, and (3) their instructor to be successful.

Faculty provide evidence of how they applied the Trifecta of Engagement model when teaching a real course through case studies and presentations.

I. Preliminary Observations

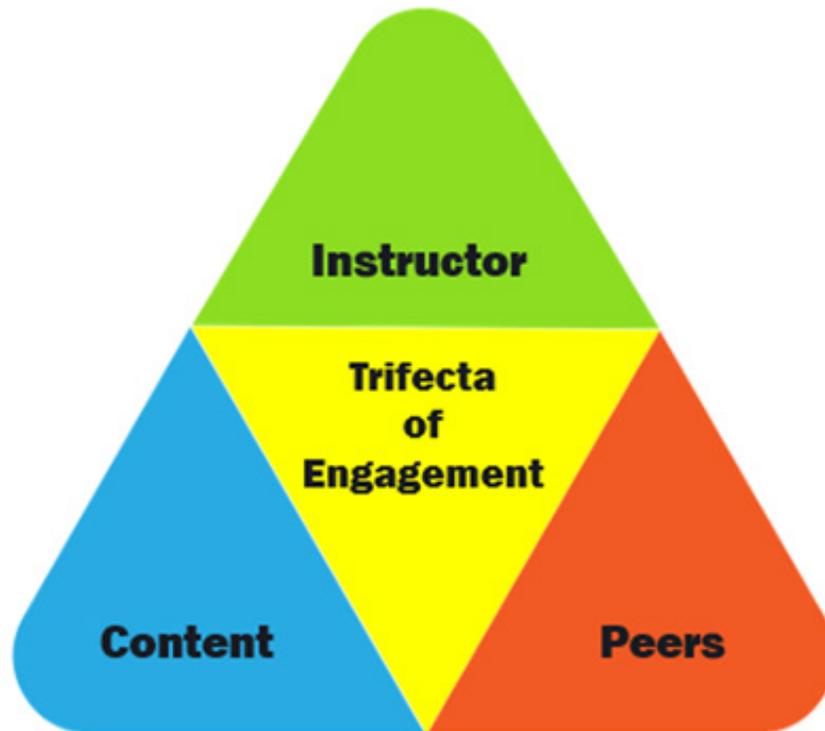
In order to determine how the course can be brought more into line with the Trifecta of Learning, it is necessary to first understand the substance and procedures of the course. At the outset several challenges are presented.

- 1) **The class is quite large**, nearly 28 students. It is possible I may lose several students but I anticipate not many will drop the course. What I decide to do is going to have to be molded to the number of enrollees.
- 2) **The substance of the course is complex**. There is much to cover, in particular there are two substantive areas combined. The general approach taken by the text and existing materials in the course require students have deep knowledge of substantive crimes and the investigative techniques needed to solve the substantive crimes. For example to understand the crime of robbery there needs to be knowledge of the elements of robbery: a taking of personal property of another by force or fear. Only with such knowledge does the investigator know what to look for and who to look at. How then is the best way to draw students into such a vast array of matters to be covered?
- 3) **The length of the course** is only four weeks.
- 4) This is a limited amount of time.
- 5) **The shell for the course needs upgrading**. For example there are 8 Discussion Questions for Week One, way too many. I edited them out.



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II. Goal One: Connection with my students and engaging them in the course

Plan: increase chats to twice a week due to the size of the class. Idea is to open possibilities to talk directly to my students. Only one chat is graded. The first chat of the week is ungraded to encourage students to simply come into the chat and talk about the course.

I have decided that with the size of the class and amount of content, I need to send multiple communications out to each student.

How it is working out: My students very much appreciate the extra time with them, particularly since there are new types of assignments. It was immediately noticeable to me that the Journal and Group Project were very new. When several students expressed stress with a different kind of assignment, I scheduled an extra Chat and that went a long way to help students feeling stress or those confused by having a group assignment. (Group Assignments are attached)

I was very pleased that then I took extra time to explain the group assignment and they understood it. They began *immediately* talking to their group members in the middle of the chat! They were excited and I loved that Leaders in the groups immediately formed and took over contacting. I assigned 5 students per group and they may prove a bit too big but I will see.



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Several of my students were nearly overwhelmed that they were going to work in a group. They have never had that experience in an online class at National. I was very surprised that despite how simple it was, and how easy the groups could communicate, they were frightened about it and commented how this course was so “different” than the others they have had. That’s when I scheduled the extra Chat and it helped.

I had the same experience with the Journals. They are a brand new assignment type. But the students are now entering great comments and revelations.

Both of the new activities Journal and group, discussed through Chats, greatly increases meaningful feedback with my students.

III. Goal Two: Provide more opportunities for engagement peer to peer - getting students exchanging ideas with each other.

Plan: The course, through Discussion Boards, already requires students engage with two peers in two different entries. I review them closely and try to communicate with each student and comment at times on the entries. But I don’t like the interfering in discussions. Also the discussions between students are limited.

The chats, on the other hand, allow students to communicate on a broader level. Still is it limited as the chats are often run more by me than the students. In light of these limitations I wanted to find a bigger group for student participation. I decided I am changing the term paper requirement to a group assignment. The students will be randomly sorted out into groups of 5 and will require a brief presentation for the class in the last Collaborate meeting of the month. The assignment will be written and graded via a rubric. I am crossing my fingers that students will like the assignment. I am giving them a great space to select what they want with the help from me. I will ask the students to report to me the second chat as to what they selected and how the student assignments are divided up.

How it is working out

Students in the extra chat caught on quickly. They are truly excited to be doing a joint project.



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IV. Goal Three: Students reflecting on their own work

Plan: I will institute a Reflective Journal. Entries are at a minimum each week and a general entry at the end of the course. This is a graded activity.

I intend to offer an alternative way in one of the weeks for students to do a film activity in place of a written assignment.

How is it working out: Students have adjusted to the journal and are reflecting on what they like and find challenging about the textbook and assignments.

V. My Conclusions:

I was very surprised there was initial fright from the students especially about the group projects. Several students commented, "I've never had to do anything like this before!" They required a lot of one on one reassurance this was going to be fun! And I adjusted my grading around it to assure them. My extra chats have definitely helped them. They also allow other students to pitch in and help as well.

A lot more TLC is needed.

The Journals were also commented on a "different". The fact students mentions how "different" this course is from others they have taken makes me feel I've been successful!

I have had to look closely at the added work for the Journal and the Group Assignment. Our classes are only one month and adding even one assignment may seem overwhelming to a student. There's a lot more that can be added but this first time with such additions I want to see how they are working.

I adjusted the dates assignments are due. I have given students until Sunday at 11:30 to finish the week's work rather than the traditional Saturday night.

I am looking forward to seeing how this class does. They seem to love the new tools we have added. I find I am very excited for the students and for me!

Please see the spontaneous Journal entry #1 of my student Dominique. It was totally unsolicited comment on the new changes and additions!

The shells showing the new assignments are attached.



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11/2/2017

Reflective Journal

Our criminal investigation course, is different from any others I have had in the past at National University. Peer interaction goes beyond discussion responses and weekly collaborate sessions. In addition, it is my first course at National that requires a group project instead of a term paper. Although I was concerned about group participation from peers affecting my personal grade, my concerns were addressed in this week's collaborate, leaving me excited to see what this assignment will bring. However, I do support Ceylon's idea of having 1-2 group members presenting the final project during the last session. Rather than every member presenting, and having to take a short intermission in switching from student to student. In a previous course, possibly your criminal ethics course you taught in August, the first collaborate every person got on their microphone to say a short introduction of themselves. Over an hour and a half was spent going from person to person just for them to briefly say their name and a short sentence about themselves.

The textbook is extremely interesting in my opinion! It showcases photos of crime scenes, and in many of the chapters breaks down picture by picture of what you should be focusing your attention to. I must admit, it makes me connect with my inner Olivia Benson (Law & Order: SVU). No two crime scenes can ever be the same, but the primary objectives of investigation and legal requirements help to guide the investigator in a successful investigation. I always thought the investigation process was solely scientifically driven, but I can now understand how it is both an art and a science. Crime shows have always been a personal favorite of mine, although my career goals are not in forensic science or investigation, I am excited to explore the realm and compare what I thought I have learned from television.

