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CREATIVITY AND COLLABORATION IN THE ONLINE CLASSROOM**Abstract:**

Online and collaborative learning have been identified as driving trends in higher education today (Johnson, Adams, Becker, Estrada, & Freeman, 2014). Over 6.7 million students have taken at least one online class, more than 32% of all higher education students (Allen & Seaman, 2011). However, many students report dissatisfaction with content, process, and lack of engagement, especially when online learning is a static, instructor-led discussion (Adams, Defleur, & Heald, 2007). Fredericks (2004) posited that student engagement facilitates success and retention. He identified behavioral engagement with academic and social activities, emotional engagement with positive and negative reactions to people and activities, and cognitive engagement with reflective and integrative thinking. Creative and collaborative assignments by nature can engage students on behavioral, emotional and cognitive levels; their increased engagement leads to improved learning outcomes.

Done appropriately, online education can be an engaging, creative venue for teaching and learning with the proper tools and supports. Contrary to popular misconception and fears, online learning can be creative, dynamic student experience. This session will present one assignment that actively engages student creativity resulting in a practical classroom tool for special education teachers. Students are required to create a Parent Newsletter to provide information about the teacher, his/her classroom procedures, and resources for families. They then share and critique each other's work in small, online groups with clear documentation of everyone's participation and responses. Using peers' feedback, students can refine their newsletters and submit it for final grading; an additional benefit is they have ideas and templates to write future newsletters for their own classroom. Students report that they use these newsletters in their own classrooms.

Going beyond their role as content experts, online instructors can promote creativity and collaboration through a judicious mix of lectures, video clips, assigned readings, and discussions. Assessment of creative and collaborative assignments can also pose challenges, as aesthetic quality is often very individualized. How does one compare works from Mozart to Rodin to Chagall?

Although creative and artistic endeavors cannot be evaluated with the same kind of metrics that multiple choice tests can employ, rubrics with general descriptors of gradations of quality can be useful. Furthermore, providing examples of weak, acceptable, and exemplary products can also provide guidance on grading criteria. The rewards of creative and collaborative assignments far outweigh the challenges of assessment and evaluation.

Keywords:

Creativity; Collaboration; Online education;

JEL Classification: I23, I29, I21