



SABBATICAL LEAVE REPORT

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PROJECT SCOPE

I applied and was accepted to the Masters of eLearning program at Cal State East Bay where to date, I completed six courses, two in Fall 2021, two in Spring 2022, one in Summer 2022, and one in Fall 2022. I am currently four courses away from completing the degree and maintain a 4.0 GPA. During my sabbatical leave in Spring 2022, I completed OTL 603 - Tech Tools for Online Instruction and OTL 605 – Designing Curriculum for Online Instruction.

At the start of this endeavor, my goals for the program included:

- Identify current and developing online technologies and platforms used to create innovative online curriculum and performances for theatre
 - Expand current curriculum to include more innovative online content
 - Develop better strategies for creating and producing theatrical works in a virtual environment
 - Incorporate strategies and technologies to create more equitable learning and performance experiences and to improve access and educational opportunities for students in the performing arts
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SPRING 2022 COURSES

In the spring semester of my sabbatical, I completed two courses. Below are details about that curriculum and my reactions to that experience.

OTL 603 – Tech Tools for Online Instruction

In this course, students explored various different learning management systems and platforms to deliver courses. None were as advanced and as user-friendly as Canvas. Many were geared more for K-12 students and felt dated and less advanced than those introduced by the instructional technologists at Ventura College. Although interesting, I hoped for more useful tech tools and other technologies geared to students in higher education.

OTL 604 – Designing Curriculum for Online Instruction

In this course, students focused on curriculum development and course design. For the Masters in e-Learning, students are required to design a course as a part of the capstone project. In this course, we started the design and development phase. I chose the THA V17A History of Musical Theatre I to use for my courses. This is a new course not yet offered at VC that I plan to launch in Fall 2023. In Appendix A, you will find two assignments from the course. The first explains the pedagogy approaches and

principles behind the course design. The last is an outline for two modules using those principles and identifying objectives, activities, resources, and assessments. Due to the training/professional development I received from Quality Matters and POQR, some concepts added to the strong foundation I already possessed. For instance, locating all materials before building the module saved time and made alignment easier. In addition, creating assessments became clearer with all components in place. (SEE APPENDIX A)

IMPACT ON VENTURA COLLEGE/VCCCD

In the semester I started the program at CSU East Bay, I finished training to become a member of the institution's POQR reviewers. To date, I have reviewed two courses and am currently in the process of finishing certification of one of my own courses to be offered in the CVC-OEI.

Serving on the Executive Council of AFT 1828, I used my knowledge and experience from the coursework to advise on articles and terms related to facilitating teaching in online education. Whenever there were issues, I used resources CSU East Bay introduced which proved invaluable when supporting arguments and providing evidence that empowers faculty to meet the needs of our students and creates a fair and just working environment.

IMPACT OF PROJECT ON VC THEATRE ARTS & STUDENTS

When I returned in the fall, I started using what I learned over the three prior semesters and started redesigning the two asynchronous courses that I teach, THA V01 Introduction to Theatre and THA V28 Introduction to Cinematic Arts. As previously mentioned, I am in the final stages of certifying THA V28 for the CVC-OEI and will apply the feedback I received to prepare THA V01 for the same process. I will use the pedagogy I learned to develop THA V17 History of American Musical I.

OTC 605 Educational Planning and Development for Online Programs provided a roadmap for how to build back from the impacts on enrollment from the pandemic. From the content, I understand the importance of branding and started working with marketing to create a new marketing campaign for VC Theatre Arts which focuses more on what we offer students and our community rather than what we do. In addition, it provided me with multiple tactics for program rebuilding as I create new curriculum and initiatives.

The most important assignment I completed was over this past summer, OTL 606 Research in Online Teaching and Learning. For my research project, I studied the impacts of using creative dramatics theories in online courses to foster inclusiveness for students with disabilities. From this research, I learned invaluable insights into design approaches that allow students with disabilities (SWD) to retain their privacy. From my research, I learned that SWD fail to request accommodations for fear of being stigmatized, cannot financially afford the tests needed to diagnose a disability, or find the process of applying for accommodations too laborious (Gierdowski et al., 2021).

For a full set of best practices discovered in my literature review, turn to Chapter Three in my paper I included in this report, which is located in Appendix B (p18). For the complete bibliography of sources, see page 21 of Appendix B.

IMPACT ON INSTRUCTOR

I am now much more mindful about how I design and deliver content for students in Theatre Arts. In addition, I will continue to incorporate the techniques I learn to grow the program and to add online components to courses that is supported by the most relevant practices and learning theories. What I am learning about working with students with disabilities continues to impact how I engage students both online and in person. My approach to encouraging students to ask for help has improved tremendously. Over the fall semester, more students disclosed to me privately about their needs and I was able to accommodate their unique needs. In addition, I am able to offer suggestions for student success within the Department of Performing Arts.

FUTURE OF THE PROJECT

Once I complete the masters at CSU East Bay, I plan to continue with a PhD in some aspect of online education. In addition, I plan to continue my role as reviewer for VC's chapter of POCR. Most important, I plan to continue to incorporate what I learn into the design of my asynchronous and hybrid courses.

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APPENDIX A

ASSIGNMENTS

OTL 604 – Designing Curriculum for Online Instruction

**Instructional Models, Design, and Strategy for Musical Theatre History –
Ancient Greece to the Golden Age of Musicals**

Nathan Cole

Online Teaching and Learning – CSU East Bay

OTL 604 - Designing Curriculum for Online Instruction

Dr. Karen Yoshino

March 24, 2022

1. Introduction

For the capstone project of the Masters of Science in e-Learning at CSU East Bay, I plan to build a fully online version of THA V17A, Musical Theatre History – Ancient Greece to the Golden Age of Musicals. As a survey course, it will cover the origins of the art form, the prominent artists who promoted and advanced it, and the various genres of musical performance that influenced and inspired its evolution. In addition, it will explore the diverse styles within musical theatre developed during its progression.

Because the course will serve as a foundation for majors in the Musical Theatre Performance program and students seeking a general education credit in fine arts, it is necessary to select a model and choose learning theories and strategies that will serve both types of students. Therefore, I two models that will allow flexibility and picked theories and strategies that will hopefully provide rich learning experiences that appeal to both sets of students. One misconception I've heard from students is that history courses tend to feel dry or students are forced to learn useless facts. To challenge this, it will be important to foster a learning environment where the content touches on students' prior knowledge, and cultivates an appreciation for the rich history of musical theatre and how it continues to shape the art form today.

2. Design Model

After considering the variety of models presented in the second week's module, I will implement aspects of Jerold Kemp's Instructional Design Model and Backwards Design to serve as the framework for the course. First and foremost, I am a theatre director. Although trained as an actor, the majority of my career includes the direction of dozens of shows both in the professional and educational arenas. In my training, we learned to simultaneously look at the

small moment and the overarching story. In other words, we look in two places at once. This process also informed my acting training, which serves me well when asked to give up the leadership role of director. For instructional design purposes, both models contain fundamental principles that reflect this concept, which will serve the two populations of students learning about the history of musical theatre.

As Instructional Design Central (2022) points out, Kemp's model defines nine specific steps where the instructional designer is encouraged to work in each simultaneously, or in a specific one when necessary (para 22). It's about what is needed in that instant. This coincides and resonates with my way of approaching the creative process. After all, designing a course is much like crafting a performance experience. This non-linear fashion still maintains a system, but allows the instructor to focus on what is important in the moment, keeping the whole course or learning module in mind as the design progresses. The glue stabilizing the circular pattern within the model is the various stages of evaluation and implementation that occur in the planning, design, development, and assessment of the course (para 22). These same actions occur in rehearsals for a play when a director works on a scene or. By substituting the word *moment* with *module* or *activity*, one sees how the model starts to function like the directing process.

One stage in Kemp's model expresses the need to "design the learning strategies so that each learner may master the objectives" (Instructional Design Central, 2022, para 25). Although broken down in more detail in the next section of this paper, it is important to keep in mind that each student within the two groups will come to the course with varied skills and possess diverse educational goals. Students seeking a general elective will likely fall into the *present or future patron* category, although some could become *practitioners* if inspired by the content and activities in the course. Others will be Musical Theatre Performance majors, so the class will

serve as a foundation for the remaining courses within the program. It becomes vital for students to understand the significance and the history of style to successfully perform a musical.

Considering most actors get little say as what works companies will produce, what styles or periods the works will originate, it becomes imperative that musical theatre performers attain a working knowledge of each to maintain a vibrant career. Therefore, defining the term *mastery of the objectives* must include outcomes for both distinct groups.

The second model I find useful for designing the Musical Theatre History course is Backwards Design. Starting with desired results is something I previously learned from @One and Quality Matters, both professional development I completed to become an online course evaluator. In addition, backwards design was a featured module in a professional development course titled Cultural Curriculum Audit I completed this past summer. A key component to determining desired results or outcomes is the categorization of course content into three clearly defined areas – *worth knowing, important to know and do, and enduring understanding* (Wiggins and McTighe, page 2). Again, depending on the students' educational goal(s), identifying these components of the course will aid me in engaging both audiences. Stage two of the Backwards Design model asks instructors to determine assessment methods that serve as evidence demonstrating that students achieved the predetermined objectives and outcomes (Wiggins and McTighe, page 5). Since I plan to include numerous projects that synthesize the concepts and theories of the varying periods and styles of musical theatre, this allows helps to formulate the assignments in more meaningful and effective ways. In turn, the assessments will inform the learning experiences and the instructional strategies, which as it happens, serve as stage three in the model (Wiggins and McTighe, page 7).

The backwards model is very similar to how directors work with actors to achieve a desired effect or feel in a moment or scene. First, when directing, I determine the desired outcome or result for a scene and how it needs to fit into (and inform) the overall structure of the story. Next, I assess the student actors' skill set and then establish the best way to approach that particular rehearsal. In an educational environment, I must interject the three areas of content mentioned in backwards design while working with the student actor, making them a part of the rehearsal process. Reworded, I must teach rehearsal or acting theory that I want students to carry to future projects while simultaneously crafting the moment. I work with actors to identify what is important to know about the character, story, and/or method to achieve the best performance for that moment in order to achieve it. Simply stated, to be an effective educator and director in a student production, I must ask "what is the desired outcome?", "what are the resources (actors, budget, production elements)?", and "what is the best path to get there?".

3. Learning Theories

It would be foolish to exclude the learning theories of the man known by many in theatre circles as one of the founders of creative dramatics. Therefore, the first two theories I will incorporate into Musical Theatre History I spring from Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory (Loveless, *15 learning theories in Education*, 2022). Cognitive load theory centers around the idea of that overloading a student's short-term memory limits their capability to effectively learn (Loveless, *Cognitive learning theory*, 2022). Hence, I plan to scaffold concepts (new information) slowly throughout the course and require students to apply that knowledge in a variety of ways in different assessments as the course progresses. By using the information more than once, the concepts become a part of a student's working memory, easy to recall as a practitioner creating a musical theatre work or a patron enjoying a performance. Like

knowledge-based schemas, certain behavioral schemas will improve as students learn appropriate audience etiquette when watching performances through attending live productions and/or viewing their peers' presentations.

A constructivist learning theory, situational learning theory, will be implemented these same critique assignments, in the assignment where students create a lyric for a musical, and in low-stake formative assignments. Originated by Jean Lave, situational learning theory centers on the idea that students learn more from activity rather than instructors presenting abstract concepts. As learningtheories.com states (2021), "knowledge needs to be presented in authentic contexts" (para 3). Many of the assessments in the course will place students in the role of creator in some fashion to make the content relevant. For instance, by placing themselves in the role of librettist or composer, students will come to appreciate the difficult task creators of musicals endure from concept to the fully mounted production. Because learning activities will occur in the course with some happening outside the course, the mix allows students to learn from not only their peers, but makers and theorists of the art form.

4. Instructional Strategies

At this stage, I plan to include two small group projects as formative assignments. As briefly mentioned in the prior section, students will work in teams to develop a lyric (and possibly a simple melody) that reflects the style of music or story elements from a specific time-period. By scaffolding the project throughout the semester, students will develop the necessary skills and learn the pedagogy needed to support each stage. In addition, they will create a technical design concept (set, costume, lights, or media) based on the same research and preparation. In order to successfully achieve the skills from these assessments, I will incorporate collaborative learning and small group work strategies into the course. By starting with formative

assignments smaller in scope, students will foster confidence and learn accountability, both important skills necessary for careers in the theatre. Assessments might include discussions about module content or small group studies where students explore musical theatre performances currently produced in our local community and across the nation. Although detrimental to the theatre major, those students seeking a simple general education credit will learn a stronger appreciation for the collaboration that occurs to create a musical theatre performance.

By breaking down the various stages of the projects, one might also see elements of self-directed learning and the symposium. Each group member will be responsible for independent research that adds to the project as a whole, and a short presentation will conclude the project, summing up the various parts. The course ends with a discussion that requires students to reflect on the various styles and their prominence in what is produced in musical theatre today. I might tie this back to an earlier discussion where students explore what's currently produced, the locations a style seems increasingly successful, and/or what styles stand the test of time. Maintaining the idea of symposium, the course will include clips from live recorded productions. Students will categorize elements of style from the clip and discuss elements that might (or continue to) appeal to a modern audience. These discussions will evolve into students attending and critiquing a live performance.

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Nathan Cole

THA V17A

Musical Theatre History I

COURSE OUTLINE

16 WEEK SEMESTER						
MODULE	LESSON/ TOPIC (Week Three)	OBJECTIVES (Week Three)	ACTIVITIES (Week Three)	SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT (Week Four)	FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT (Week Four)	LESSON PLAN (Week Five)
ONE	Art and Its Relationship to Musical Theatre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine the characteristics of the various types of fine and performing arts and their relationship to the art form of musical theatre Interpret the historical, cultural, political, social, and aesthetic aspects of early musical theatre. 	<p>TEXTBOOK READING:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction – “Let’s Start from the very beginning <p>VIEW:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is Art” Lecture Types of Music, Opera, and Theatre Companies Reviews of musical theatre productions, operas and operetta currently (or recently) produced <p>WATCH:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Video Clips that explore or explain a variety of fine arts including slam poetry, street performers, Cirque de Soleil, etc. 	<p>GRADED - “What is Art?” Quick Quiz (Objective One)</p> <p>GRADED - Discovering Musical Theatre Works Around Us Discussion: This assignment is the first step in building students’ skills in interpreting the historical, cultural, political, social, and aesthetic aspects of early musical theatre. (Objective Two)</p>	<p>GRADED - Discovering Musical Theatre Works Around Us Discussion: Students will locate reviews or marketing materials for musicals, operas, or operettas currently produced within the community or state. From the reviews, they will interpret the historical, political, social, and aesthetic aspects of the musicals, operettas, and/or operas and describe their relevance and validity to a modern audience. (Objective Two)</p>	

MODULE	LESSON / TOPIC (Week Three)	OBJECTIVES (Week Three)	ACTIVITIES (Week Three)	SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT (Week Four)	FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT (Week Four)	LESSON PLAN (Week Five)
NINE	The Golden Age and the Art of Design in Musical Theatre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze performance practices, style, and techniques of a variety musical theatre works during its early evolution. Categorize the elements of early musicals and analyze the key artists and personnel who created them. Identify a range of musical theatre works by historical period, genre, significance, and literary roots. 	<p>TEXTBOOK READING:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chapter 14 – Rogers and Hammerstein?? Chapter 15 – <i>After Oklahoma!??</i> <p>VIEW:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Articles about the style and artists of the Golden Age of Musicals <p>WATCH:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Video Clips of Rogers and Hammerstein productions (from the time period and modern interpretations) Clips from Golden Age Musicals from film and live productions Clips of Interviews with various designers (students will have the option of which area they are interested in exploring) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GRADED - Elements and Principles of Design Quick Quiz (Objective One) NOT GRADED - Golden Age of Musicals Ed Puzzle: This quiz will occur in parts and be embedded into the videos in the modules. Students will <i>identify a range of musical theatre works by historical period, genre, significance, and literary (Objective Two)</i> GRADED - Flip the Design Discussion: Students will choose a contemporary musical created within the past twenty years (from the stage or from film). Students will create a new concept and <i>categorize the elements of early musicals and analyze the key artists and personnel who created them as support for</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GRADED - Flip the Design Discussion: Students will choose a contemporary musical created within the past twenty years (from the stage or from film). Students will create a new concept using characteristics from a style or period presented in previous modules (Objective Two and Three) GRADED - Musical Theatre Design Project: Create a design concept for the musical they created in previous projects and apply the elements and characteristics from a specific style or genre. Students will categorize the elements of early musicals and analyze the key artists and personnel who created them. (Objective Two and Three) 	

				their new creation. (Objective Three)		
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APPENDIX B

RESEARCH PAPER

OTL 606 Research in Online Teaching and Learning

**Creating Inclusive Environments Integrating Drama Therapy
with Effective Practices for Online Collaboration**

Nathan Cole

Online Teaching and Learning – CSU East Bay

OTL 606 – Research in Online Teaching and Learning

Dr. Melanie Shaw

July 29, 2022

Chapter One: Introduction and Background

With the sudden shift to remote instruction to accommodate the COVID-19 lockdown, teachers scrambled to adapt face-to-face materials to asynchronous and high-flex modalities. This practice, known as emergency remote teaching (ERT), served as a band-aid for the crisis (Bashir et al., 2021). In addition, providing emergency accessibility and accommodations stretched campus support services beyond capacity (Meleo-Erwin et al., 2020). As a result, most students were adversely affected by this quick transition. However, students with disabilities (SWD) were one of the hardest affected populations in education due to COVID-19, and they continue to face additional barriers as a result (Department of Education, 2021).

Congress strengthened the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 by adding additional protections that included legal accommodations for SWD enrolled in public colleges and universities by passing the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 (Gin et al., 2022). With this, the nation continues to see increased SWD enrollment in higher learning institutions (Smith et al., 2019). However, in 2020, one in three students reported negative experiences with accessible content in courses and technical support from their institutions (Gierdowski et al., 2021). In the face of this adversity, SWD continue to choose online courses due to the flexible time commitments for studying and course engagement, along with the absence of a specific place they must report to take a class (Kotera et al., 2019). Most importantly, according to the EDUCAUSE 2020 Student Technology Report, most SWD refuse to apply for accommodations for fear of being stigmatized by peers and faculty. In addition, many lack the financial means to acquire a medical or customary diagnosis, or the process to apply at their institution is too laborious and not worth the effort for the quality of services they may receive (Gierdowski et al., 2021). To add further disparity to their situation, if they feel uncomfortable about disclosing their disabilities, SWD are less likely to use accommodations (Mullens et al., 2021).

Using the Garrison, Anderson, and Archer advanced theoretical model of Community of Inquiry, Ngubane-Mokiwa and Khoza (2021) stated that social presence is a critical element to learning through distance education. Students become more easily engaged and develop the necessary skills to express disagreement, share new knowledge, and explore fresh and differing concepts when working collaboratively with other students and the instructor (Ngubane-Mokiwa et al., 2021). For this reason, most learning theories and strategies include some form of collaboration because it leads to deeper learning (Cherney et al., 2017). Yet, SWD often face skepticism from their peers when they disclose a non-apparent disability or their peers lack the appropriate training to create a truly inclusive learning space (Smith et al., 2019).

Institutions of higher learning never meant for emergency remote teaching (ERT) to become a permanent condition. The intent was for all modalities to return to their original format once the crisis passed (Hodges et al., 2020). Unfortunately, Ventura College (2022) reports that fully online offerings will increase by 45% in Fall 2022 compared to the fall before the pandemic. In addition, a 3% decrease in registered SWD enrollment within online courses occurred between the fall semester of 2021 and the spring of 2022 (Ventura College, 2022). With the increase in online offerings at Ventura College, instructors will continue to encounter many students with disabilities enrolled in their courses. Disparities in course design that adequately engage SWD and encourage their success will continue to exist due to a lack of appropriate online pedagogy by faculty teaching asynchronous online courses (He et al., 2022).

Problem Statement

With a 45% increase in online course offerings planned this coming fall, Ventura College and the college district have yet to require faculty who received training in ERT to adequately educate themselves about online pedagogy that supports students with disabilities. Moreover, they have yet to

provide sufficient support for faculty to develop these skills (Hodges et al., 2020). Although many scholars propose collaboration as an essential part of social learning and promote it as a means to engage SWD, it poses many obstacles (Kotera et al., 2019). Most college faculty are unfamiliar with assistive technologies and the accessibility features of online tools and software (He et al., 2022). The problem is that most scholars who publish about collaboration in online courses fail to address best practices and strategies for supporting SWD to work with others (or vice versa) in a virtual or asynchronous modality. He et al. (2022) posited that many instructors lack the knowledge to adequately support SWD when assigning collaborative activities. SWD worry about judgment by their instructor or peers, which causes anxiety (He et al., 2022). If students drop our courses due to this anxiety, colleges and universities cannot empower an entire community to become thriving and productive citizens. This sentiment appears at the center of most institutions' mission statements. If postsecondary schools and scholars neglect to develop effective ways to support SWD in the collaboration process, instructors will continue to design barriers in their courses that exclude a population that continues to feel isolated.

Purpose

This qualitative action study aims to explore the effects of blending the best practices for design, organization, delivery, and support of collaborative activities with drama therapy theories and activities on the retention and success of students with various disabilities enrolled in asynchronous online courses. Through this evaluative action study, students enrolled in sections spanning the entire academic school year (fall, spring, and summer) of the course THA V17A Musical Theatre History: Greeks to the Golden Age within will complete two anonymous surveys. Three crucial factors dictate surveying over a three-semester period in all sections. First, the course's initial offering is scheduled for the 2023 spring semester, but new courses require time to build popularity to grow enrollment. Offering the

course in the fall allows time for marketing and to engage with the Counseling Department to alert all advisors about the new course, its activities, and content. Second, survey courses in Theatre Arts at Ventura College declined due to the COVID-19 pandemic averaging fifteen to twenty students (Ventura College, 2022). Finally, in association with the fact that nearly half of SWD fail to register with disability services on college and university campuses (Gierdowski et al., 2021), it is pertinent to survey a more significant number of students to produce an adequate sample size. The first anonymous survey will consist of multiple-choice questions to produce qualitative data at the beginning of the semester. Data topics will include students' prior experiences, satisfaction with completing small group projects in virtual courses, and record the number of students who wish to identify as possessing a disability, and if disclosed, identify the type of disability. The second will consist of a series of open-ended questions to document qualitative data that will reflect the positive and negative impacts on SWD experience and satisfaction with collaborating and completing group projects within the class.

Key Terms

Hyflex

A hyflex classroom blends in-person students, synchronous students reporting on video conferencing software (Zoom or Blackboard Collaborate), with students attending asynchronously (Li et al., 2021).

Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT)

The face-to-face mode of teaching is temporarily changed to remote delivery methods (learning management systems, software, online learning tools, etc.) and strategies due to a crisis situation like a pandemic, natural disaster, etc. It may incorporate asynchronous, hybrid, or blended learning practices (Hodges et al., 2020).

Disability

The term disability evolved over the past decade to refer to more than just the physical and mental process of learning. It encompasses a variety of conditions that may affect students in diverse ways.

Disabilities may involve any one or more medical, psychological, physical, sensory, or cognitive impairments and manifest as challenges in various aspects of functioning and daily life, such as learning, problem-solving, depression, interpersonal relationships, communication skills, adjustment to new situations, anger management, substance use, and other impairments (Meleo-Erwin et al., 2020, p.2).

Collaborative Approach

Students work with one or more students in activities and group projects to comprehend course content, problem-solve, and develop new approaches for investigation and solution (deKlerk et al., 2021).

Theatre

The performing art that involves a *reenactment* by characters (played by human beings) carrying out actions on stage that combine to tell a story. The audience and actors pretend the events onstage occur for the first time. It requires four elements; a performer, a place, an audience, and a story (Hischak, 2019).

Drama Therapy

Interactive therapy that fosters friendship and collaboration by combining patients and medical staff playing, creating, and role-playing to break down societal roles, status, and separation amongst the group (Bourne et al., 2020).

Survey Course

An introductory course that contains content full of general information that leads to more in-depth courses offered by the institution. It is usually for students new to a discipline (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022).

Chapter One: Conclusion

A case study on the effects of blending best practices in design, delivery, and support for collaborative activities with drama therapy techniques will aid instructors in multiple disciplines in higher education to increase retention and success in their online asynchronous courses. The college will benefit from this study because the finding will open doors for the further development of resources to support SWD in their educational endeavors and surpass the minimal requirements for access and accommodations mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act (Gin et al., 2022). Multiple learning theories and strategies encourage some form of collaboration to engage students in an online learning environment. The study's most significant impact will serve SWD by creating a more inclusive environment where they feel comfortable contributing and interacting with their peers without fear of ridicule or judgment. The effect will increase both retention and success for all populations of students.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This purpose of this study is to prove that by blending learning theories and activities from drama therapy with best practices for online collaboration, instructors will foster inclusive online environments where students with disabilities (SWD) may academically thrive and attain their educational aspirations. In order to achieve a meaningful body of literature, research topics included the barriers SWD face at the course and institutional levels, best practices for delivering and supporting collaborative projects in a virtual classroom, the technology required to support SWD, and methods for fostering instructor and peer relationships during the process of collaboration. This review represents a collection of best practices and pedagogical approaches from a diverse set of disciplines from across the globe. DeKlerk et al. (2022) stated the purpose of online learning is to remove challenges and provide open avenues for students with disabilities (SWD) to reach education and career goals in an all-encompassing manner to accommodate diverse needs. This statement illustrates the primary objective for this literature review and study.

The Learning Environment for Students with Disabilities

Accommodations

While federal disability laws require access to courses and content, they fail to increase SWDs' ability to learn or address emotional health support (Terras et al., 2020). Smith et al. (2019) claimed the current processes used to validate a student's eligibility for accommodations on postsecondary campuses lack equity and inclusion. The group speculated this occurs because students requiring accommodations must self-advocate. Although Terras et al. (2020) found self-advocating empowering, Smith et al. (2019) argued that many SWD are ill-prepared or ill-informed to initiate a request adequately. Moreover, Smith et al. (2019) explained the problem is compounded for students with mental illness because requesting accommodations causes them more distress than other groups

studied. In addition, Smith et al. uncovered students who feel intimidated by this process or who face opposition from instructors will often “negotiate” or “downplay” their needs (para. 8). This results in insufficient accommodations.

Consequently, students experience less anxiety and discomfort when opportunities to present accommodations occur in private settings (Smith, 2019). Therefore, incorporating ways for students to disclose disabilities privately is paramount. Terras et al. (2020) found that students with learning disabilities, mental disorders, and ADHD required more accommodations based on course content. This outcome was opposite in students with visual impairments or chronic health conditions. Significantly, researchers in the same study discovered that students with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) often request the most accommodations (Terras et al., 2020).

The Diverse Population of SWD

According to the 2020 Student Technology Survey conducted by EDUCAUSE, mental health disorders were the most reported disability, equaling 82% in the study (Gierdowski et al., 2021). Similarly, Smith et al. (2019) stated 39% of the sample set of students reported experiencing mental health issues, a prevalent condition amongst their specific population. In the same study, Gierdowski et al. (2021) discovered learning disabilities were the second highest reported disability in their sample set, with 72% of students disclosing the condition.

Interestingly, SWD report they experience less judgment and stress in online courses (Mullen et al., 2021). Mullin et al. (2021) explained the control over the learning environment alleviates the stress of SWD and inspires self-esteem and interpersonal relationships with peers. Less social pressure is crucial to the academic success of students with disabilities, and online classrooms provide that safe space (Kotera et al., 2019). Furthermore, by incorporating theories from drama therapy into the online

classroom, students self-reflect on ways to improve performance rather than an overabundance of instructor criticism (Mehta-Diston, 2018).

The Online Classroom

As Ngubane-Mokiwa et al. (2021) explained, the instructor sets the stage for the learning experience by organizing and managing the content and activities. In this process, Mehta-Diston (2018) stressed the importance of instructors maintaining high expectations when working with SWD. Instructors should set goals that challenge students but are manageable with few barriers (Mehta-Diston, 2018). He et al. added that curriculum must be sequential and interactive (He et al., 2022). Instructors must create and actualize activities that encourage collaboration and dialogue among all students (Ngubane-Mokiwa et al., 2021). Onogimesike and Angba (2020) expanded on this notion by encouraging instructors to develop an obtainable curriculum that adapts to the student's individual needs. Like Onogimesike & Angba, de Klerk et al. (2022) and He et al. (2021) suggested varying the speed of content delivery. This aids in meeting individual needs and abilities. Simply stated, instructors must prepare content delivery in numerous ways to accommodate diverse disabilities (Ngubane-Mokiwa et al., 2021).

Concerning course materials, de Klerk et al. (2022) indicated the importance for higher education institutions to develop learning spaces that utilize inclusive learning technologies such as universal design and assistive technology. Instructors must explore how a diverse population of students might use course materials and identify any barriers, making content accessible and free from requiring the assistance of others (Onogimesike & Angba, 2020). He et al. (2022) advised providing directions in a written and oral format, along with supporting images and examples. He et al. championed the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) because it requires various ways to engage students, suggests faculty present content in multiple modalities, and necessitates numerous means of

assessing outcomes. Another essential aspect of UDL is creating modules into small chunks, allowing SWD to follow the course more easily (He et al., 2022). Adding another layer of inclusion, Onogimesike & Angba (2020) recommended that websites used to support assignments or deliver content be accessible. In the course, de Klerk et al. (2022) suggests instructors design common support materials like video lectures and study materials, so students feel their presence. Also, faculty should include aspects to modules that mentor students on working in groups to complete group projects. As Bourne et al. (2020) recommend, becoming familiar with a group over time offers insights into communication styles and needs.

Collaboration

Most researchers from the literature promoted the use of collaboration as a fundamental teaching strategy to engage students. From their findings, de Klerk et al. (2022) suggested that a collaborative approach to course design is key to creating an optimal learning environment for SWD. He et al. (2022) advocated student-centered and active learning approaches when designing courses. Correspondingly, Kotera et al. (2019) claims online courses that center on collaborative activities produce greater satisfaction. Bourne et al. (2020) reinforced these recommendations by explaining how working in groups helps students to stay healthy, find and receive support quickly, and develop interpersonal relationships that lead to lasting friendships. More insightful, SWD report that interactions with their classmates help them to manage anxiety and frustrations (Kotera et al., 2019).

By collaborating, students experience differing viewpoints and diverse cultures (de Klerk et al., 2022). Most important, Mehta-Diston (2018) maintained that activities in drama provide different opportunities for SWD who struggle with writing to grow self-esteem. Theatre activities and play rely more on doing and independent work. Self-expression increases creativity, self-confidence, and peer cooperation (Mehta-Diston, 2018). Moreover, a playful approach allows SWD to receive support in new

ways (Bourne et al., 2020). Therefore, it provides SWD with a social education. In support, Ngubane-Mokiwa et al. (2021) clarified a distinct difference between discussion and discourse. Discussion involves a social aspect, whereas discourse encourages community of inquiry and uncovers misunderstandings or conflict. This “subjective dissonance” is vital to the intellectual development of our students (Ngubane-Mokiwa et al., 2021, para. 10).

As Ngubane-Mokiwa et al. suggested, collaborating in online courses helps SWD to grow as individuals. Terras et al. (2020) insisted that self-advocacy and self-determination are qualities SWD must possess to transition into, adjust, and succeed in higher education. Ngubane-Mokiwa et al. (2021) affirmed students must take responsibility for the learning and lead their own inquiry. To develop skills in leadership, Mehta-Diston (2018) asserted that drama nurtures SWDs’ self-confidence by providing alternative rewards rather than praise and positive assessment scores. In drama therapy, the line between faculty and student is relaxed, creating a learning environment where individuals feel free to play and allow creativity to come to the surface (Bourne et al., 2020). These types of activities encourage familiarity between the instructor and students. Most important, they allow the instructor to adapt the course to the needs of the students (Smith et al., 2019).

To benefit working in groups in virtual environments, faculty should consider activities and methods of communication that include both synchronous and asynchronous components (Ngubane-Mokiwa et al., 2021). Numerous scholars strongly recommend faculty training to help instructors develop these inclusive environments (Smith et al., 2019). He et al. (2022) suggested incorporating student mentors or leaders who consist of upperclassmen from underrepresented populations that score high in a class. These mentors could serve as role models to motivate students to learn when completing experimental assignments (He et al., 2022). Nonetheless, He et al. stressed training in pedagogical approaches, working with students with disabilities, and assistive technology. By comparison, in a theatre-based curriculum, the instructor guides students in peer activities and

independent projects that allow numerous ways to assess knowledge and provide feedback (Mehta-Diston, 2018).

Technology

The technology and tools faculty incorporate is vital to creating an inclusive environment (Ngubane-Mokiwa et al., 2021). Technology increases learning independence for SWD because it expands opportunities to receive an education, tailors the rate of learning, and simplifies communications and interactions with instructors (de Klerk et al., 2022). Therefore, deKlerk et al. insisted postsecondary schools commit to *technology inclusion*, which consists of assistive technology and digital devices explicitly refined to a disability. With collaboration and group projects, instructors must pay close attention to the technology they incorporate. Blending the use of video conferencing, blogs, and webinars disturbs the norm of discussions creating more evolved discourse (Ngubane-Mokiwa et al., 2021). With this stated, He et. al. (2022) urged the use of closed captioning and subtitles to remove barriers when utilizing video tech tools or software. Onogimesike and Angba (2020) encouraged instructors to identify the most effective tools for quick, short communications compared to longer, more complex ones when working on larger projects (, 2020). Equivalently, Strauß & Rummel (2021) suggested using group awareness tools and adaptive prompts to hinder students from social loafing and free riding off others. Conversely, Smith et al. (2019) warned against any method or tool that might create unnecessary anxiety or stress. In opposition, Strauß & Rummel (2021) affirmed that group awareness tools work to alleviate anxiety and stress. Hadwin et al. (2018) suggested scripted support that could be tailor-made to fit student needs, although SWD are not mentioned to better serve group work.

Instructor Presence

Although technology might engage and enhance instruction, it cannot replace the importance of instructor-to-student engagement (He et al., 2022). Students participate in more significant ways when the instructor exudes positive attitudes toward working with SWD and possess appropriate knowledge of assistive technology (Ngubane-Mokiwa et al., 2021). Faculty reported positive attitudes toward providing SWD accommodations, yet students described instructor refusals to convert materials into accessible formats and denying the legitimacy of disclosed disabilities when surveyed (Smith et al., 2019). To battles these issues, many higher education institutions offer professional development to educate faculty about accommodations for SWD, but few volunteer to attend (Mullin et al., 2021).

Peer-to-Peer Relationships

Not surprisingly, SWD face less prejudice and ignorance in interactions with staff from offices of accessibility than when working with faculty and peers (Smith et al., 2019). In addition, the Kotera et al. study (2019), SWD reported difficulty working with diverse groups who did not share the same disability and cultural experiences. Worse, Smith et al. (2019) stated that SWD report peers were the least respectful about accommodation needs, and therefore, SWD felt less comfortable disclosing their disability to that specific group. To alter this, SWD feel inclusion must include social and cultural aspects in an online course (Mullin et al., 2021). Mehta-Diston (2018) argued by nurturing self-confidence with theatre activities, SWD might overcome these obstacles.

Offering a different view, Ngubane-Mokiwa et al. (2021) advised faculty to find ways to build trust and community within the online classroom by incorporating icebreakers and practices to break down social barriers. Similarly, He et.al (2022) suggested instructors create activities for students to get to know one another *before* embarking on group work or a significant project. Researchers in the study found that pairing and small group work seemed to work best for this (He et al., 2022). However, both

approaches could create environments for open and free discourse among diverse students (Ngubane-Mokiwa et al., 2021).

Planning for Accommodations

Though design and environment are essential, Terras et al. (2020) insisted instructors must comprehend the needs of diverse disabilities to design fully inclusive, accessible courses. For instance, learning disabilities affect how a student's brain processes information, adversely shaping how the individual learns to read, write, speak, and problem-solve. However, it does not reflect the student's intelligence level. Assistive technology helps to alleviate the effects of many learning disabilities (Terras et al., 2020). ADHD, another common disability, affects a student's executive functions, meaning the ability to organize, plan, focus, and process effects before acting on instinct. Students with this disability benefit from accommodations that aid with organizing and time management (Terras et al., 2020). Students with mental health disorders report excused absences for treatment, alternate testing, extended due dates, and increased counseling and advising aid their educational endeavors (Terras et al., 2020). Visual impairments require screen readers, alternate formats of textbooks like Braille, speak letters, screen magnifiers, and technically enhanced mouse or text cursors that alter color qualities and edges for ease of reading (Terras et al., 2020). He et al. (2022) advised instructors and students to use closed captioning and subtitles in all media and video conferencing software to assist students with hearing impairments.

Breaking Through Institutional Barriers

According to Gierdowski et al. (2021), community college students report disabilities more than four-year university students. In their study, they learned one-third of students state they possess more than one (Gierdowski et al., 2021). SWD deserve to explore and challenge their beliefs about knowledge

and their abilities through new educational experiences (de Klerk et al., 2022). Yet, in her research, Mehta-Diston (2018) discovered that SWD are asked less frequently about their aspirations after completing their degrees. Therefore, institutions of higher learning must develop inclusive policies that trickle down to all individuals and areas, no matter how minute (Onogimesike & Angba, 2020).

Gierdowski et al. (2021) advocated for robust professional development and support for faculty. Smith et al. (2019) found that private settings in accommodation requests to faculty were inconsistent across institutions and claims a system without documentation is the only inclusive system. Furthermore, postsecondary institutions must provide SWD with the necessary equipment, such as laptops, tablets, and internet access, like hotspots, to successfully attend and fully participate in online courses (de Klerk et al., 2022). Most important, the Associated Press reported in 2019 that the demand by college and university students for mental health resources outpaced available resources. As a result, students wait over the recommended time to receive care because the increase before the pandemic overloaded staff (Meleo-Erwin et al., 2021). With high numbers of students experiencing mental health issues, postsecondary institutions must increase mental health services (Gierdowski et al., 2021).

Conclusion: Literature Review

Students with disabilities (SWD) require “purposeful and intentional support” (Terras et al., 2020, para. 2). This chapter reflects best practices and pedagogical approaches to collaboration and working with SWD from instructors, scholars, and researchers of diverse disciplines from around the world. Collectively, they stipulate faculty pay careful attention to course design, the learning environment, and how they use technology and tools to create a collaborative and playful community of learners. Instructors must remain cognizant about the difficulty of identifying disabilities in our classrooms since many are non-apparent. Therefore, creating an inclusive environment requires faculty to become knowledgeable about the barriers SWD experience, how to implement collaborative student-

centered design that is both accessible and supportive, and ways to provide opportunities for students to interact and work with a diverse population. Subsequently, institutions of higher learning must develop robust opportunities for faculty to receive training about assistive technology, accommodations, and methods for cultivating inclusive environments. Vital to the academic success of students with disabilities, faculty must make an unyielding commitment to attend. Without these elements working in harmony, the possibility for an all-inclusive environment that celebrates diversity and promotes student equity becomes impossible.

Chapter 3: Outline of Best Practices

Online courses provide a safe haven for students void of the stress from judgment by instructors and peers. If authentic collaboration is to occur, instructors must incorporate key pedagogical approaches and design to create an inclusive environment where collaboration may flourish among all students. Below is an outline of best practices pulled from the literature review.

- I. The instructor sets the tone for an inclusive environment
 - A. Students feel less anxiety and embarrassment when they are able to request accommodations in private
 - In the course orientation and syllabus, point students to the Educational Assistance Center (office for accessibility) for assistance with accommodations
 - Inform students the EAC does not disclose their disability to instructors and that all approved accommodations are emailed privately
 - Without specifically stating “disability”, create a question in student orientation survey where students may disclose a disability if they wish
 - B. Instructors should design their courses using Universal Design in Learning (UDL)
 - Create multiple modules rather than a few large and cluttered ones
 - Keep modules short and manageable
 - Vary assessment types and lengths
 - Ensure pages in the LMS, course documents, and websites are screen reader friendly (headings and sequencing, captions, font type and size, etc.)
 - Make sure all images within the pages LMS and supporting documents include alternate text descriptions of important images, graphs, and charts

- Use color appropriately for students with visual impairments (dark colors, contrast, etc.)
 - C. Instructors must allow for flexibility in scheduling to accommodate diverse conditions and encourage self-discovery through reflection and assessment
 - D. Teach students to support one another when problems arise, but instructor presence is very important
 - Create supporting documents in multiple formats that include video so students may see and/or hear you
 - Create check-ins for projects throughout the weeks like a discussion or assessments where they submit small components that lead to the larger project
- II. Collaboration for SWD
 - A. SWD thrive under conditions where they experience less anxiety
 - B. Collaboration provides a social education
 - teaching students about conflict/resolution
 - aids in intellectual development
 - Incorporating a sense of “play” into group projects means less writing and more doing
 - C. Icebreakers: Present opportunities where students can meet and interact with group members on assignments
 - Create synchronous and asynchronous opportunities
 - May be written (in the discussion board or chat) or recorded using video conferencing or chat software
 - 1. a live Zoom or Microsoft Teams meeting that is recorded

2. Discussion where students post WhatsApp or Flipgrid videos

D. Create “Groups” in Canvas discussions to allow for privacy

- Find ways to train students to create an inclusive environment
- Remind students that there is more than one way to meet to work on projects and to respect boundaries. We must respect that each student comes with different circumstances. Therefore, allow synchronous and asynchronous meetings to occur when meeting for projects
- When video conferencing, remind students to use the closed captioning feature
- Assign students to record the meeting and to send a link to the discussion
- If students decide to meet in person, ask all group members to take notes and to post their notes to the discussion
- Ask EAC for resources

III. Technology/internet for supporting collaborative projects and designs

- A. Encourage assistive technology (AT) and arrange for group members to learn about a specific program when working with a student who requires AT to participate
- B. All technology and websites incorporated into projects and assignments must be accessible and inclusive
- C. Use a variety of tools to communicate and differentiate which are best for quick communications and those that should be used for larger discussions/work sessions
- D. Use closed captioning and subtitles for video conferencing software, videos, and other media content
- E. Use group awareness tools (if available) responsibly and tailor the scripting to fit the specific needs of the students in each specific section

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