Re-imagining Stretch Writing

Project Objectives
There were three main objectives for this project:

1. Create pathways for students to critically read and analyze the concepts they are introduced to.
2. Enhance student participation in discussions of texts towards enhanced comprehension.
3. Improve student writing

Project Description
With the support of the Beck Grant and the insight gained through the Five Gears Faculty Learning Community, this project focused on redesigning the 113A and 113B, the lowest level Stretch (first-year) Writing courses, to provide scaffolding for the Stretch curriculum. There were three main areas of development in this regard:

1. The Five Gears for Activated Learning were used to redesign course outlines for 113A and 113B. This redesign assisted me in creating steps to student learning that connected the student learning outcomes for each section of the course to the activities, assessment, and the Five Gears for Activated Learning. This explicit design aided my instructional delivery in making the connections and also augmented student learning. This allowed me to create steps to an assignment in a way that would make meaningful connections for students. For example, instead of creating a generic ethnography assignment, I created an ethnography assignment that would focus on the same film that students would write about for their essay. That created a pathway for a deeper analysis through peer group work, allowing students to be completely prepared with all of the supporting data for the actual essay assignment. Students were also able to be active participants in
the course by knowing why I had created each assignment and activity in the course. It enabled students to link the activities with the expected learning outcomes.

2. New instructional videos were created to enhance student learning, and Zaption quizzes were integrated into all instructional videos. Zaption also allowed the professor to analyze student viewing of flipped materials. Flipping the writing courses allowed me to spend more time on writing activities and class discussions of texts, but the challenge remained in motivating students to watch the videos. Zaption quizzes were integrated into the videos and additional restrictions were placed on the videos. Students could rewind, but not fast forward the videos. They had to watch the videos in their entirety, and detailed analytics were provided by Zaption.

3. Poll Everywhere was used to enhance student engagement in course discussions, and also used for quizzes and course check-ins. Students were quizzed on reading materials via Poll Everywhere, but they were also able to answer and ask questions anonymously about readings, about the course, and about me. I scheduled course check-ins throughout the semester where students could ask any question about the course or assignments anonymously.

4. Graphic syllabi and course project assignments were created to enhance student understanding of expectations. Making expectations explicit was one of the main goals of this project. Additional resources were hyperlinked into the graphic assignments such as technical support and the Oviatt Library’s Creative Commons.

5. An etext was created for 113A. The etext guides students through the assignments, creates steps connecting the smaller assignments to the essay assignments for each progression of the course and provides questions for reflection on texts. It organizes all of the readings, peer reviews guides, outlines, and provides a self-assessment form for students to review their writings before submission.

Evidence of Project Implementation
The project was implemented over the entire 2015-2016 academic year. The etext, completed over the spring 2016 semester, will be implemented in the fall 2016.
semester. The course outline for 113A and the course outline for 113B illustrate the redesign according to the principals of The Five Gears for Activated Learning. The graphic syllabi for 113A and 113B indicate the overall trajectory of the courses. The graphic assignment pages for Project Space, Project Web, and Project Text were created for 113B. Additional instructional videos were created such as one for Thematic Analysis, focusing specifically on the text used in 113B. Zaption quizzes were integrated into all other instructional videos used for both 113A and 113B. Examples are the Ethnography lesson, Project Space lesson, Summary Writing lesson, Topic Sentences lesson, and Outlining lesson.

Procedures Measuring Project Objectives
One of the tools I used to measure the outcomes of the project is the Writing Self-Assessment Form. Students are required to fill out this form before submitting each major essay assignment. Another tool I used was Zaption-Integrated quizzes and Poll Everywhere quizzes and course check-ins. Poll-Everywhere's anonymous surveys were also used to gauge student questions, comprehension, and feedback about the course and instruction. Graded essays were also used to measure improved student writing.

Project Results
Anecdotally, students were much more involved in class discussions because they were motivated to keep up with the reading and instructional videos by frequent Poll Everywhere and Zaption quizzes. Using the Poll Everywhere platform for course check-ins allowed students to ask any questions about the course anonymously. I was surprised to find that some students did not know how to access their graded essays and comments on Moodle. Finding out these types of student challenges early on allowed me to assist students with important course information. It continued to be an important tool to connect with students throughout the course.

Enhanced student engagement with the materials and creating a space for self-assessment allowed for improved student writing. In the absence of identical data from previous years, it is impossible to gauge how the instructional materials assisted students outside of witnessing the anecdotal growth, enhanced comprehension, and progression in writing.
Student Learning Reflections

Students connected to the course material and often wanted to relate the material in the course to current events in the Black community. They asked engaging questions about systematic oppression and were able to make connections in a way that I had not previously seen in 113 courses.

Explicit planning and design has helped students stay on task and understand why I choose the materials and activities that I do. It allows them to be active participants in the course organization. My explicit delivery of instruction and organization of the course helped students feel valued. 100 percent of the students surveyed in the 113B course expressed their satisfaction with the connections made between the student learning outcomes, and the texts and activities chosen because they felt valued by me. In addition, during the course check-ins, students indicated their desire to participate in civic matters, particularly related to current events and the Black Lives Matter movement. This signals a heightened awareness of the larger concepts of the course.

Future Plans

In addition to the implementation of the eText in the fall 2016, I also created time slots to discuss each one of the instructional video concepts in class, following feedback from students. I will utilize the supplemental instruction time (061/062) to have the students make time lines for their essays (113a) and projects (113B). Time management is still a challenge for the students. I plan to continue redesigning the course outlines according to the Five Gears for Activated Learning as time allows. Eventually, I would like to create similar eTexts for 114A and 113B.