A Review of Flower Darby's Key Takeaways

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by Arushi Manners, the Teaching & Learning Centre

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With the rapid switch to online learning, Flower Darby is quickly becoming a household name, at least across teaching and learning centres in higher education. The Teaching & Learning Centre was delighted to welcome Flower for our Teaching & Learning Day Fall 2020 conference, where we learned more about Small Teaching Online. In this article, we highlight our key takeaways from Flower Darby's keynote presentation and offer some follow-up resources.

Our focus for the day was to share knowledge around improving engagement, learning, and assessment in our virtual classrooms. Implementing 'small' evidence-based strategies in online teaching and learning is one way to keep students motivated and engaged in their learning, while also ensuring that faculty are not overwhelmed as we pivot into a new virtual experience.

Flower referenced a modified Community of Inquiry framework as a way to foster belonging in virtual spaces. The modified framework is grounded in 'emotional presence.' Flower calls for harnessing the science of emotion, quoting Sarah Rose Cavanagh, "emotions and cognition are intertwined." Flower's suggestions for incorporating the science of emotion into our teaching include:

- **Bring your passion to create the atmosphere**
  We can influence the energy levels in our online classes when we bring our own passion into the teaching. Shift gears from auto-pilot into intentional and passionate teaching by asking: what fires us up in our work? One way to do this is by infusing our writing with more enthusiasm, conveying warmth in the tone of announcements, course updates, whole class feedback, and so on. By the principle of 'emotional contagion,' when we are warm and passionate, we positively affect the emotional wellbeing of our students.

- **Create emotional hooks in course content**
  Emotional appeals work. Faculty can leverage these 'emotional hooks' in their online

classes by using multi-modal ways to present information, adding relevance and authenticity to course content. Flower gives us some examples: using a capturing image where one would typically use a text description, asking the author of a text to read it out and giving students access to the recording, presenting case studies in an interesting way by telling stories about the characters involved. Flower gives a nod to the social-affective researcher Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, co-author of the paper 'We Feel, Therefore We Learn.'

Centring emotion in our online classes can help facilitate durable learning experiences for our students. Borrowed from Michelle Miller, Flower leaves us with the analogy of a closet to describe our long-term memory. As experts in our subject-matter, we have a well-organized closet system in our brains, but our novice students do not have the same structures. While we cannot install this closet structure for our students, we can help them build their own organizing structures by activating prior knowledge, and helping students create cognitive connections by providing a framework. Flower modelled these two approaches in her presentation by asking us at the beginning to think about one word that describes how we feel about online teaching, and by providing a roadmap for the duration of her keynote; demonstrating the importance of modelling best practices in our teaching and learning.

Flower makes reference to the following resources for further exploration:

- Darby, F., & Lang, J. M. (2019). *Small teaching online: Applying learning science in online classes.* Jossey-Bass. Available through Seneca Libraries at https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.libaccess.senecacollege.ca/lib/senecac/detail.action?docID=5780349
- Cavanagh, S. R. (2016). *The Spark of Learning: Energizing the College Classroom with the Science of Emotion.* West Virginia University Press. Available through Seneca Libraries at https://libaccess.senecacollege.ca/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=1350065&site=ehost-live&scope=site
- Miller, M. D. (2016). *Minds Online: Teaching Effectively with Technology.* Harvard University Press. Available through Seneca Libraries at https://libaccess.senecacollege.ca/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=868677&site=ehost-live&scope=site
- Teaching in Higher Ed Podcast
- Articles by Flower Darby in the Chronicle of Higher Education
  - How to Be a Better Online Instructor. (2019, November 8). *The Chronicle of*

Higher Education, 66(10), A4. Available through Seneca Libraries at https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A609856826/AONE?u=king56371&sid=AONE&xid=2cc784cb

- Faculty Focus
- Flower Darby's Twitter account

Watch Flower Darby's keynote now:

"Small Teaching Online: Improving Student Engagement, Learning, and Assessment" keynote by Flower Darby

We've highlighted our key takeaways from Flower Darby's keynote presentation and offered some follow-up resources in the "A Review of Flower Darby's Key Takeaways" article.

View the December 2020 issue of the Academic Newsletter.

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