Empowering Creativity in Education: EduMAX 2020 Report

by Justin Boudreau (School of Community Services), Jason Dojc (School of Marketing), Linda Facchini (the Teaching & Learning Centre), and Shahrzad Farzinpak (School of International Business and Management)

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On October 13 and 14, 2020, four Senecans attended Adobe's annual EduMAX event, an international gathering of post-secondary administrators, faculty, and staff to explore creative ways of incorporating digital literacy across the curriculum.

Read how they've been inspired:

Jason Dojc (Professor, School of Marketing)
In kindergarten, we expressed ourselves creatively: draw a picture, build something out of blocks, paint, play games, etc. We learned by expressing ourselves creatively in different media. But the further we go in education, the more book reports, essays, case studies, and papers we're asked to write; we implicitly learn that the written word is privileged among all other formats of communication. But in today's social media era, we're getting used to expressing ourselves in a multitude of formats be it videos, memes, infographics, animated GIFs, emojis, or a combination of formats. So why do we educators restrict ourselves to assigning written work?

At Adobe EduMAX, we were exposed to a Vincent Fu, a med student creating a digital literacy curriculum for other med students. We were given a history assignment to create an app prototype that walked a user through the history of civil rights in the US. Another assignment asked us to create a two-page magazine spread on astronomy. Until now, the barriers to creating these formats were cost or requiring extensive training. Now, one can become rudimentarily proficient in Adobe Spark (the entry-level application to create graphics and simple videos) in less than a day. I created these videos for my students in Adobe Spark. So why not give your students exposure to multiple means of expression in their assignments?

Justin Boudreau (Program Coordinator and Professor, School of Community Services)
I was truly moved to be a part of Adobe EduMAX 2020. I honestly went into this two-day workshop with very little knowledge and skills in the digital world. This conference quickly became so much more than just information about Adobe and digital literacy tools. It became more about education innovation, creativity, and adaptability in our changing world. This immediately captured my attention, and I was fully invested for both days.

I had a fundamental shift occur in my approach and thinking about learning in the digital platform. I admit that I had some deep resentment to the switch that the pandemic had forced. I felt that I was doing a good job in my online classes, but after this conference, I was pushed to do more and be better. However, the "do more" element was unlocked with the change in my attitude. Once that changed, I completely looked differently at the tools of Adobe, the innovative ways to engage the online learner, and the vast potential that we all have now. This I am truly thankful for.

I connected to our keynote speaker Cathy N. Davidson. Her words captured my attention and challenged me to start this process of change. I had no idea what I was getting into by attending Adobe EduMAX 2020, but I am certainly glad I did. I implemented change immediately in my courses. I found new and digitally-creative ways to engage my learners. This proved to have an immediate, positive impact on my classes. Students became as excited as I was about the changes I made following EduMax2020.

Linda Facchini (Professor, Faculty Development, the Teaching & Learning Centre)
This was a truly inspiring event and I am very grateful to Seneca for having the opportunity to attend. Two messages from the Day 1 presentations resonated deeply with me. First was the idea that the goal of technology in education is to enable human interactions, not diminish them. To me, this provides a powerful guiding principle for selecting and employing technology tools in our courses.

The second takeaway was the ability of multimedia to empower students to tell their stories and share their knowledge in a way that is meaningful to them. On Day 2, I was able to explore this concept further in one of the hands-on Faculty Development workshops. In this exercise, we examined how students could use Adobe XD to design a simple mobile app to educate and inform about a racial or social injustice issue. Here is my attempt at the assignment: Orange Shirt Day.

I am most excited about the possibilities of combining digital literacy skills with authentic assessments, and I look forward to exploring this further with Seneca faculty.

Shahrzad Farzinpak (Manager of Academic Programs, School of International Business and Management)

This two-day conference sparked so many ideas! What I found particularly interesting was the message that was put across in almost all the presentations, indicating how the use of technology and tools can actually humanize the whole learning process. From the way it can facilitate the path to new education ("one-to-many" to "many-to-many"), to the power of digital storytelling; how using visual and auditory tools can bring to life the more formal learning; how it can help students to integrate and internalize the learning in ways that are personally meaningful, reflecting their unique background and making their message more powerful and resonant.

What stayed with me the most was the idea that we, as educators, need to be proactive in closing the digital divide between our students' day to day experience and our educational practices.

I look forward to incorporating these takeaways by championing them within our programs, and encouraging the creation of communities of practice that will enable us all to fully utilize the resources that being an Adobe Creative Campus offer. Thanks to Seneca for making it possible!

Get all the event highlights here: Addressing the digital divide and building digital literacy: A recap of EduMAX.

Did you know? Seneca is Canada's first Adobe Creative Campus and offers all students and faculty free access to software.

View the December 2020 issue of the Academic Newsletter.

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