



OLC RESEARCH CENTER FOR DIGITAL LEARNING & LEADERSHIP

DIGITAL ACADEMIC REVOLUTION MENTORSHIP COMPETENCY

#2 THE CONVERSATION:

Viewing Instructional Design & Pedagogy as a Holistic Unit
Transformative Teamwork in a Learn by Doing Approach –
Student Turned Mentor & Mentor Turned Student

BY MARTIN MEHL & LUANNE FOSE | NOVEMBER 2016



KEYWORDS

[Digital Academic Revolution](#) | [Luanne Fose](#) | [Instructional Design](#) | [Martin Mehl](#)

PREAMBLE

The in-depth segments of the Mehl/Fose research from motivation to conceptualization to adaptation through adoption and diffusion are featured in a multi-part series by the Online Learning Consortium Research Center for Digital Learning and Leadership. The Digital Academic Revolution: Mentorship Competency Series shares with OLC members the “inside scoop” and transparency of digital mentorship competency in teaching and learning.

The following is the [second article](#) in the Digital Academic Revolution: Mentorship Competency Series by Martin Mehl and Luanne Fose. It is a *transcribed* conversation between Luanne and Martin about their experience collaborating as a research team and the conceptualization, implementation, and assessment of the Digital Commentary Grading Project (DCGP) that they conducted at California Polytechnic State University (San Luis Obispo) during the 2015-2016 academic year.

This **CONVERSATION** reveals their journey of fusing into a single, passionate academic unit, working effectively as instructional designer (Luanne) and pedagogue (Martin) joining forces. Both of them share their personal points of view on the motivation, formidable personal triggers, and uncanny timing of the project. They also reflect on the tangibles and intangibles of mentorship in post-secondary education and its symbiotic relationship with effective technologies.

STUDENT TURNED MENTOR

Martin Mehl: Luanne, now that we’re obviously getting started on our writing, would you mind sharing with me what sort of was “the trigger” that got you started on this project?

Luanne Fose: Well, it’s interesting that the impetus for this project goes back to many years earlier in my own life as a graduate student. However, back in January 26, 2015, I read an article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* entitled *Could Video Feedback Replace the Red Pen?* (Kolowich, 2015) The article intrigued me because I had been working with faculty on creating podcasts and screencasts in my role as an instructional designer but I hadn’t given any thought to the concept of using video screencasts for assessment of student work. When I read the article, I thought back to when I was an



Assistant Professor of music theory and music technology and how very much I hated marking papers with red pen. I would do practically anything to avoid it. I tried green pen, purple pen, anything that might make it seem not so traumatic to the student who was going to receive back my evaluation. Somehow I thought that maybe a different color than red would help them feel better or something. That red pen was just too much!

MM: Why did you hate it that much?

LF: Well, it went way back to when I was a doctoral student at the University of North Texas. I took a graduate course for music theory/composition majors, which focused on composing in the style of Mozart. Initially, I was really excited about the course because the University of North Texas had access to the original scores of Mozart for a few months and students in this course were allowed to hold the scores (carefully, of course) and review Mozart's notation to see how he actually developed his musical ideas. Most people think, largely due to movies like *Amadeus*, that Mozart wrote music automatically without any need for correction. Granted, he did that better than other composers (Beethoven's scores were a mess of corrections) and obviously, by anyone's standards Mozart was truly a musical genius, but it was evident by looking at those original manuscripts that he did make mistakes, cross them out and experiment with other ideas as he was creating a musical work.

As an assignment in the class, we were supposed to compose a string quartet in the style of Mozart after meticulous study of his scores. I worked diligently on mine and turned it in for evaluation. When the professor returned my work to me, it was covered -- I mean every measure was covered -- in red pen scrawl, circled notes, indecipherable comments. It was just so overwhelming when I looked at it! I definitely felt like a failure and that was an unusual feeling for me since I was an excellent student. I had done really well in the previous fugue class, composing in the style of Bach, but I couldn't get past the sight of all that red pen. I was really overwhelmed by the red pen and I wanted to just quit right then and there. I thought to myself, "I need to drop this class because otherwise, I am going to fail it." I'm a perfectionist and I had never had an "F" on any assignment before.

As luck would have it, for some reason on that day there was another musicology professor, Dr. Deanna Bush, in the classroom with us, who was seated right behind me. She was one of my favorite musicology professors at UNT and she leaned over, looked at my paper with all that red ink and then she looked at the expression on my face and she said, "Wow, Luanne! Can I Xerox that?" And I responded, "What?" And she said, "I want people to see this. If YOU, who is such an exceptional student, can get this much red pen feedback from Dr. _____, none of the other students will ever be discouraged with whatever feedback they receive!"



MM: So basically, if other students see a massacre, they no longer worry about small darts!

LF: Exactly! On the one hand I thought, “Geez, I don’t want other people to see my awful paper here, and on the other hand, the way she said it was reinforcing to me that I was actually a good student – that this was just the tough breaks of being a doctoral student and having to go that extra mile to be really exceptional. So her response really changed everything for me that day and actually for the rest of my life. Looking back, I am so happy that she was there that day and counseled me that way because it gave me the guts to just go ahead and “buck up” and do it again, and deal with the pain.

“What if back then, the professor who had given me such a severe evaluation with all those red marks, would have had video assessment? And what if he had reviewed my string quartet and played it at his piano and had talked in a screencast about it without all that red pen?... What kind of impact would that have had on me compared to the red pen massacre?”

MM: But the inspiration came from her words and her encouragement, not really from the sheet of paper itself, right? So the red marks didn’t actually have the intended effect. What it actually did is it caused you to see a professor being a mentor to you, seeing your reaction and seeing what it did to you, and knowing how to encourage you at that moment. That had much more of an impact upon you than the actual red pen evaluation, right?

LF: Correct. I had sort of forgotten about that incident, which actually happened 25 years ago. However, when I read that article in the Chronicle of Higher Education (Kolowich, 2015), that incident came back to me. I thought, “What if back then, the professor who had given me such a severe evaluation with all those red marks, would have had video assessment? And what if he had reviewed my string quartet and played it at his piano and had talked about it without all that red pen? What if he had explained to me why my composition was not in the style of Mozart with some musical illustrations at the piano? What kind of impact would that have had on me compared to the red pen massacre?”

MM: Instead of it being a blood bath of red pen, he/she could have mentored you by using video assessment, correct? It was a severe admonishment that could have been avoided. Did you ever think of what might have happened if Dr. Bush not been in the class mentoring you that day?



LF: It's hard to say. I have a lot of tenacity, but I also know it would have taken me a lot longer to get over the incident because I had never experienced feedback that was so... what I thought was severe. Obviously, I learned from it as a student and a future teacher. I want to be the kind of instructor that mentor's students. With video assessment I can help a student understand without projecting upon them a feeling of being insufficient... of being a failure. I can show them what needs to be changed with a softer, more effective approach that is just all-around more congenial. Trust me, red pen is not congenial! [Laughs]

MM: Well, certainly not even professional really. Because honestly, if you were looking at it being a trigger, wouldn't it be fair to say that that incident was more like a traumatic event?

LF: Most definitely!

MM: Sometimes a trigger ends up being something that is done through a severe or traumatizing event. Red ink can certainly be a trigger to a certain extent. When you're looking at the red ink, it doesn't have the intended effect of motivating you or affecting change; it most likely has the effect of shutting you down. In that incident, it was like you were being stabbed in your proverbial academic heart!

LF: Total discouragement, yes.

MM: It's great that you turned it into what it is now. You took that adversity and put it into the category of what you DON'T want to do as an instructor.

LF: You know, besides it changing me as a student, it ultimately changed me as a future teacher. Dr. Bush truly was an outstanding mentor. She served as both an inspiration and lifeline guiding me through my doctoral dissertation challenges.

MM: That's a very powerful trigger. If you think about how many other grad students may have actually gone through that in our generation where there wasn't a computer, there wasn't that interaction. There was basically just the hard copy coming back at you to try and digest with all the red marking. I think generationally that is who the current instructors are... that is, who, for the most part, are actually standing in the front of the university classroom as far as faculty at mid to senior level status – that's who is teaching today's college students.

LF: That's true.



MM: And in some cases, it might even be where some faculty instead of thinking about what impact it had upon them as students to receive red pen feedback, actually view it as more of a sort of “rite of passage” saying to themselves, “Well, I had to go through the tough love so I’m just going to pay it forward and my students will have to ‘take it’ even if it doesn’t have the intended effect.”

LF: [Laughs] Yeah, I never felt like “paying back” my students with adversity, but you know many of us who obtained our doctorates experienced those well-known “hoops of fire” that some academics want graduate students to go through.

MM: I guess the question really is, “Did you take adversities... did you learn from them and make them into something that could be more positive, more encouraging, more mentorship-oriented?” If you did that, then it was very powerful trigger with a constructive outcome.

MENTOR TURNED STUDENT

Luanne Fose: So, what was your trigger, Martin, in wanting to be involved in this project?

Martin Mehl: I had spent some time reflecting on my impact and interactions with my students as I was working on my 10-year lecturer range-elevation review, taking stock of who I am and how I got here. I took pride in the fact that I had these queues of students waiting to talk to me outside of my office, because I thought, “I’m connecting and I’m really making an impact,” but I also took stock on what they said after they left my office. Sometimes they would walk away saying, “Oh, that made perfect sense, Professor Mehl, when I was sitting down with you, but I wish I had recorded that.” Or two minutes after they had left my office saying, “What was that again that we just talked about?”

And so that was my first sort of trigger moment, identifying that I am not making a more succinct, clear, or efficient impact when I am really aiming for mentorship. I realized that I did spend a lot of time trying to connect with my students at different levels, even back when we were experimenting with podcasting technology in 2006. However back ten years ago, I was looking at it from a pure lecture substitute perspective, not from a pedagogical, grading and mentorship perspective, which really is the missing link.

I consider myself to be very technologically savvy, but I realized how I was actually still approaching things as “old school,” where I collected physical “analog” papers, sometimes to superficially guarantee attendance. Maybe I did that because I wasn’t quite ready to test if the perfect attendance in my classes was based on my quality of



teaching, or simply because they had an actual deadline of submissions they had to turn in. Now, I know that the attendance was genuine, but it is scary to test those waters.

I also realized that the students handed in their projects with the perception of *“done and won.”* Particularly as a communication scholar I need to prepare my students for the fact that the performance part starts right after you actually hand in the (presumably) finished paper; however, the presentation -- the audience persuasion -- all that is actually the next part of the process. The reason why I noticed the discrepancy, or even a disconnect, is when I annotated the work heavily after a speech (often with red ink), after research, after whatever it is the students were working on, I was thinking about the constructive criticism, the actual changes and transformations that I wanted my students to go through and refine and those ended up on paper but not in the hearts of my students.

“... but when I would watch the student after physically giving the assignment back to them in class, the first thing would be ‘Zoom.’ (...locating their grade)”

In a hard copy format, it felt like I was doing a good job. I even made it legible and cohesive and put all this effort into assessing a paper that may have been an hour’s worth of work on my part, but when I would watch the student after physically giving the assignment back to them in class, the first thing would be *“Zoom.”* And when I say, *“Zoom,”* it’s the habit of a student scanning to determine *“Where is the grade?”* And then *“What is the grade?”* And I knew that was their main motivation, because I purposely wouldn’t even publish grades on the course portal until after I had returned the papers in person.

My mantra was *“Don’t look at the grades until you see the document so you know why you received a particular grade!”* It was really important to me that they grasped *“the why”* -- not because I wanted to self-indulgently show off with an attitude of *“I am such a great instructor and see what I can justify,”* but more so that the student would not become discouraged or disappointed or frustrated that it’s a letter grade of a *“D”* or it’s a *“C”* and not understanding why. Yet, when I handed it back to them, it’s zoom to the grade. Zoom -- *“is it what I hoped for? Sweet!”* -- no annotations will be reviewed; or zoom -- *“it’s worse than I hoped for! -- now I will pester my professor, because why bother reading what he said when I can do it one-on-one in an office hour? After all, he is so much better in person one-on-one!”*

So, when you ask about the trigger, I think what I kept trying to accomplish is to actually connect to my students and I realized that my red ink was creating a red barrier, a red fence, and building a wall between my students and me. Instead of it actually building a bridge or a connection, it ended up creating a wall. And I noticed whenever we were



talking during office hours... that was when we were taking down the wall... that's where we were taking the bricks down one-by-one. But that was being done inside the physical brick and mortar and I'd end up being in my office for four or five-hours daily post-lecture connecting and clarifying issues with my students.

LF: But that gets to be such an ordeal for you as a caring, mentoring professor to have that many students in line during office hours...

MM: Well, I have to admit I was looking at it going, "Geez, maybe I am not clear in my feedback?" Or "Maybe I'm not making sense in what I'm writing on their papers?" And ultimately what I noticed was that my top students felt obligated to come and see me and really comprehended that I cared, but the students that I really needed to reach, weren't coming to see me. They may have been discouraged by the long-line, the red-ink, or they may have been discouraged because I was frustrated by the time I finally did reach them. They may have never even felt like they should show up, because they felt discouraged, unappreciated, insecure, unhappy, and maybe even angry and so they just wanted to give up.

Communications is a very personal field of study because I'm not telling my students who they are, I'm telling my students who they are going to be. The whole matter is so delicate. If I do make the wrong mark or do screw up on the commentary, I might scar them for the rest of their personal and professional life, because I only have a one-time shot to chisel this down and make sure I get it right. You shared earlier how that could go very, very wrong. And so a student might look at it and read it and re-read it, and I may not have even had a chance to explain it, so then the student might easily jump to conclusions. In the end, that whole method is not sufficient and really not satisfying.

I really connect with my students even though I teach 10-week GE classes with students who are not even in the major, and I also stay connected with my students ten years later still. There are many students that ask for advice -- true life advice on negotiations, salaries, life choices, things that are important to them. They come back to me because they trust me and I trust them. When they come to talk to me later on I have no idea what grade they received in my class. I have no idea because it's not important to me. I care about them succeeding. That means sometimes I write a reference letter and I pull up their transcript and right before I write the recommendation they might confess, "Well, you do know that I had a 'C+' in your class" and I would usually reply, "I didn't know that, but I could tell you cared. You did your best so just because you didn't have an 'A,' it doesn't mean that I didn't care about you." I also have to insert here that I possess high academic rigor and uphold to high academic standards; therefore, I believe that mentorship also means modeling, and modeling means being competent, which sometimes can be intimidating and it can be put off students to some extent.

“I often think about how the classroom is *training*... outside of the classroom is *refinement*. So, technically, what you should get is the foundation in the classroom and then after that, critical thinking – that’s what education should be.”

LF: I think that goes back to what we both feel as teachers about grading in terms of that a student would say to us, “Well, you know I got a C+” in other words, this is how they think we value them in or de-value them. We give them a grade and in their mind, that is our estimation of them and for both of us, that is not true! We are both mentoring faculty types who want to see our students improve, but the grade does not reflect what we feel about them. However, it does sometimes reflect how they feel about themselves and how they think we feel about them, which goes back to the Mozart composition example I shared with you.

MM: That’s a really good point because honestly, the value I’m putting on my student is not the letter grade. The value I’m putting on my student is about their potential. If I don’t view every single student having the capacity to succeed and yes, to you success might be a “C” because it’s not your thing, but for you that’s a victory, whereas somebody else success is an “A.” I often think about how the classroom is training... outside of the classroom is refinement. So, technically, what you should get is the foundation in the classroom and then after that, critical thinking -- that’s what education should be. It should be that I don’t push my views on a student and say, “Throw it right back at me so you can get an ‘A’.” I’m giving them a foundation – a common core so to speak – that’s why I can completely relate to the whole common core concept for primary and secondary education of providing them with something that is fundamentally important, but then letting them figure out how to apply it. That in a nutshell is post-secondary education, where mentorship really creates the next step to success.

That’s what I really like about teaching Communication Studies -- we train trainers, educate educators, manage managers to be the best that they can be. My job is to get that out of you in whatever way that might be. But if all you do is memorize, master, and then regurgitate by throwing it up on an exam to just forget it 5 minutes later, then that is exactly what you did – you threw it up and you’re over it! That’s not what should happen. What should happen is that you worked so hard that you have a permanent little scar from the hard work and permanent pride that you learned it, you earned it, and now you’re making an impact. That’s what I view my role to be, so when you asked me, “How do you feel about this article?” and I’m considering that I have students lining



up for my office hours, I'm exhausted, and I have tried my best while I keep telling students, "You know, your time management might be off," or "You're not being the most efficient with your time," or "You're not being the most productive," and I'm looking at myself thinking, "I'm being a little hypocritical here! I always tell my students that I value pro-active and pro-fessional behavior, but I want to get rid of procrastination. I'm not being the most productive and I'm not being the most efficient, and I'm not being the most powerful I can be because while I'm working hard, it's Band-Aids, Band-Aids, Band-Aids and not impact." I mean, it's basically that I take little steps, which I can possibly put a Band-Aid on, but what I want is to stitch them up and allow them to heal!

The stitch up and heal is when you give them feedback -- it's really assertive, and it's really powerful, and it's really personal, and sometimes it can be really ugly, so what I need to make sure is that I balance softening the blow. Sometimes I explain the punch more thoroughly, sometimes I qualify the hook, but ultimately I need to be accountable to my students. And what that means is that the student needs to know that I care. Sometimes I probably care a little too much because I can't turn it off. And that also means that if I get an email in the middle of the night, I probably reply.

You're not as good as you can be when all you do is basically try to rip yourself apart. I mean that's the equivalent of self-destruction by definition. So it has to be a situation where "How can we accomplish all that... reaching the students, being approachable, being caring?"

*"Teaching is a **lifestyle** in that you don't **become** an educator... you **are** an educator, and if you truly are an educator, you live, breathe and die **mentorship**."*

When you asked, "Do you want to do this project, Martin?" I thought "Of course, I do!" because there is probably not really anybody on this campus that I respect more than you for integrity and overcoming adversity and for just being an all-around benchmark for what it takes to be an awesome human being. There is also no other collaboration that I've experienced that brings the pedagogical technologist and technological pedagogue out of one another than when you and I get to collaborate, coordinate and communicate on a project. So, yeah, the timing was right, since I was going through some personal reflection, having just received a range elevation and becoming naturalized as a U.S. citizen, and then having this brilliant person knocking at my door to take on a new and interesting project in the midst of our campus climate being at an all-time low. Faculty were constantly complaining and not feeling appreciated.



There's a survival component there in either "Get under the train or get on the train," so ultimately to me, the trigger was clearly because of what the project might mean to both students and faculty and the timing – it was the right person, right place, right time, right project.

Teaching is a *lifestyle* in that you don't *become* an educator, you *are* an educator, and if you truly are an educator, you live, breathe and die mentorship. What that really translates to is that it is a tri-factor: I love research, I love my students, and I love mentorship. I've been blessed with a caring, supportive and loving family. Along the journey I have had the privilege of experiencing many different mentors guiding me through challenges, providing encouragement, problem-solving advice and independent thinking. I can't wait to pay it forward by redefining the feedback and guidance in the learning process.

Luanne, that's how we tick, and we get asked to do things, even if it is not necessarily our field of expertise, and then we go and put the time and effort to mentor our students, and figure out how to give them appropriate and pragmatic feedback. This project is that silver bullet on how to give that feedback in the most powerful way and transform higher education pedagogy to truly enter the 21st century through the confluence of mentorship methodology, technological advancements and timing. Isn't it great to be educators in this day and age?

REFERENCE

Kolowich, S. (2015). Could video feedback replace the red pen? *Wired Campus - Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/could-video-feedback-replace-the-red-pen/55587>



Article #3 PREVIEW:

DIGITAL ACADEMIC REVOLUTION MENTORSHIP COMPETENCY SERIES

THE PROCESS: Mentorship – Recruitment, Refinement, Transference
(Pairing the A's & C's)

Now that we have disclosed our personal journeys and the triggers behind the motivation for pursuing video assessment as a holistic academic unit, we will take you through the process of replicating our success at your campus, in a reverse-engineering approach. [Article #3](#) of this series will explain, in-depth, the recruitment process of identifying “change-agent-mentors” via our “R.E.A.D.” technique, paired with the “Five Pillars” of Mentorship Competency training.



RESEARCH TEAM



Martin Mehl
Digital Academic Revolution
Co-Principal Investigator
mmehl@calpoly.edu

Prof. Martin Mehl, a native German, is a Sr. Lecturer in the Communication Studies Department at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis

Obispo and an Iowa State University and Emerson College alumnus. He draws from 20 years of broadcasting, consulting, management, pedagogy & research experience for academic, business and non-profit environments. Clients have included: *Adobe, Apple, Audi, Bose, Center for Ethics in Political & Health Communication, Eli Lilly, Emerson College, Harvard Medical School, Iowa State University, Lionbridge, MIT, MGH, the University of Sydney and the Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research.*



Luanne Fose
Digital Academic Revolution
Co-Principal Investigator
lfose@calpoly.edu

Dr. Luanne Fose is the Lead Instructional Designer for the Center for Teaching, Learning & Technology at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo. She holds a Doctor of Philosophy in music theory, musicology, and music technology from the

University of North Texas. In her current position at Cal Poly, she conducts faculty workshops and consultations for the development of flipped, hybrid, and online courses. As a former music professor, she has an innate passion and artistry for audio and video production as a means of integrating Universal Design for Learning with the craft of teaching.