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A Multifaceted Partner Presentation Assignment for Improving Educational Outcomes Among College Students

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This article reports a multifaceted course assignment involving the development of information literacy skills, speed partnering, a brief team VoiceThread presentation, and peer evaluations of the presentations. The assignment was rooted in Chickering and Gamson's (1989) highly regarded principles of good educational practice, as well as the pedagogical literature on speed partnering, collaborative learning, use of VoiceThread, and peer evaluations. It was piloted in a high enrollment introductory family course and in an advanced close relationships seminar. The instructors employed both quantitative and qualitative methods as a basis for both formative and summative evaluation of the assignment. Student responses were generally favorable. For example, 75% of students said speed partnering was an average or good way of forming partnerships. Other results showed that the assignment generated student enthusiasm and engagement in the course material, enhanced learning, and fostered peer relations. Student reactions to conducting peer evaluations were mixed. Despite some initial shortcomings, overall the students and instructors perceived this assignment as successful.

"Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel" -Socrates

Much like the previous quote by Socrates emphasizes, education is about sparking students' interest in learning rather than just promoting rote memorization. One of the challenges for instructors in higher education is how to engage students in the classroom and facilitate them as active participants in their own learning.

The current paper reports the development and implementation of a multifaceted course assignment whose aims were sixfold: (a) to demonstrate the utility of speed partnering events in an educational context, (b) to assist students in building and developing interpersonal relationships with their classmates and foster collaborative work contexts, (c) to stimulate student learning and engagement, (d) to promote technology and library-based skill acquisition, (e) to facilitate peer-to-peer feedback and assessments of project presentations, and (f) to demonstrate the overall quality of the partner presentation assignment. The goals of this project were based, in part, on Chickering and Gamson's (1989) Principles of Good Practice (e.g., developing reciprocity and cooperation among students, using active learning techniques, providing prompt feedback, communicating high expectations, and respecting diverse talents and ways of learning). Although the current project has unique implications for a course on close relationships (e.g., speed partnering protocols) with an adjustment in substantive focus, the individual components and overall project can be used in a wide variety of fields and courses.

Speed Partnering in Higher Education

The first goal of the described project was to demonstrate the utility of speed partnering, a variant of speed dating, as a method of forming partnerships for group work. In speed dating sessions, men and women spend a short period of time (e.g., 3 to 8 minutes) meeting a series of potential dates and then indicate with whom they would like to have a date. This way of forming partnerships was especially pertinent given the courses the students were taking focused on intimate relationships. Speed partnering protocols have been implemented in higher education settings as a means to improve classroom dynamics for students. Studies have demonstrated the applicability of speed partnering for several purposes, including forming undergraduate student groups or partnerships, aiding students to get to know one another, helping students share information to form opinions, and making presentations. Speed partnering has also been used as a mechanism to facilitate peer assessments (e.g., Cook, Bahn, & Menaker, 2010; Maidment & Crisp, 2007).

Collins and Goyder (2008) noted several strengths of speed dating protocols for forming groups, including promoting the development of "soft" skills, such as developing networking and interviewing skills, encouraging group commitment via autonomy in partner selection, and improving the classroom environment as it enables students to meet and get to know their peers. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that a positive group environment has been linked with increased student learning, and students reported more positive group outcomes when they had some freedom in selecting their partners or group members (Bacon, Stewart, & Silver, 1999). Some research suggests that by allowing students to choose their own groups within a selected number of potential partners, speed partnering can help overcome problems with randomized group assignments such as unbalanced groups and diminished productivity and satisfaction (Chapman, Meuter, & Wright, 2006; Collins & Goyder, 2008).

Interpersonal Relationships and Learning Engagement (via Collaborative Work)

The second and third goals of the described project were (a) to assist students in building and developing interpersonal relationships with their classmates and foster collaborative work contexts and (b) to stimulate student learning and engagement. These goals align with the good teaching element of developing reciprocity and cooperation advocated by Chickering and Gamson (1989). Chickering and Gamson argued that collaborative work deepens understanding as well as increases learning engagement among students. A constructivist perspective on learning (e.g., Biggs, 1996) emphasizes active participation in knowledge construction via social, or cooperative, and individual activity. Furthermore, in order to align the teaching methodology with our theoretical perspective on teaching (e.g., Cohen, 1987), we included several aspects of the course that should encourage constructive learning. Through the emphasis on dyadic partnerships and group work, in which student dyads were allowed to be somewhat self-directed to learn about and present on a topic on close relationships or families, our goal was to promote co-constructive learning.

Collaborative learning in dyads, as well as in groups, has been shown to provide a variety of benefits to students including academic, relational, and adjustment. In their review, Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1998) noted that cooperative learning promoted students' academic achievement, "meta-cognitive thought, willingness to take on difficult tasks, persistence (despite difficulties) in working toward goal accomplishment, intrinsic motivation, transfer of learning from one situation to another, and greater time on task" (p. 31). In terms of fostering interpersonal relationships among students, cooperative learning strategies, compared with competitive learning and working alone, have been shown to promote better quality relationships among students across a variety of groups (e.g., cultural/ethnic, gender, social class, and gender groups) (Johnson et al., 1998). Furthermore, cooperative learning has been shown to have positive influences on students' self-esteem and attitudes towards the university, learning, and the particular subject area (Johnson et al., 1998).

Several studies have identified positive outcomes from allowing students to work in groups or in dyads. In their qualitative, in-depth look at upper-level students perceptions of task-oriented and problem-solving group work, Colbeck, Campbell, and Bjorklund (2012) found that students perceived group work as beneficial in that it encouraged the development of a variety of skills. Students in this study reported that learning communication and conflict resolution skills—skills they developed and honed through group work—were highly relevant and would be beneficial for their future careers. In other studies, group work among college students has been shown to "promote students' academic achievement, persistence in college, and positive attitudes about learning" (as cited in Colbeck et al., 2012, p. 61; Springer, Stanne, & Donovan, 1999).

Promote Technology and Library Skills Acquisitions (via VoiceThread)

The fourth goal of the assigned project was to promote technology and library-based skill acquisition. In the current project, students used VoiceThread to create narrated, online presentations. Although frequently used for lectures, VoiceThread has also been used for presentation purposes as well (Aponte, 2010). Chan and Pallapu (2012) interviewed eight students who had made short presentations about their opinions regarding whether VoiceThread fulfilled Chickering and Gamson's (1989) Principles of Good Practice. A majority of students reported VoiceThread does fulfill each Principle of Good Practice.

VoiceThread[1] is a free Web 2.0 tool that allows users to communicate asynchronously with one another through multiple modalities, namely text, audio file, video, telephone, or microphone. It is akin to narrated PowerPoints. However, VoiceThread offers many advantages over PowerPoint. VoiceThread is offered in a universal format that is easily accessible via an internet connection, does not require software downloads, and functions on both Mac and PC operating systems. Furthermore, VoiceThread avoids the large file-size problems that can be encountered with narrated PowerPoint presentations. Rather than being saved locally, VoiceThread files are stored on VoiceThread's server and accessed by using a url address.

Brunvand and Byrd (2011) claimed that student motivation and engagement as well as the quality of learning can be enhanced through the use of innovative technologies in the classroom. Through the introduction of a new and innovative medium of presentation (i.e., narrated VoiceThread presentations) in the classroom, we attempted to augment students' technological skills. The use of VoiceThread, specifically, in educational settings has also been widely credited with improving student learning and educational outcomes (e.g., Brunvand & Byrd, 2011; Chan & Pallapu, 2012; Orlando & Orlando, 2010). For

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example, Orlando and Orlando (2010) noted that the use of VoiceThread presentations promoted students' understanding of nuance and visual concepts, and it improved their sense of community and feelings of social presence in the classroom. Brunvand and Byrd (2011) noted that an advantage of VoiceThread is that it allows students to work at their own pace, taking the time needed to formulate their thoughts on a given topic or lecture. In another application of VoiceThread in an upper-level business course, Chan and Pallapu (2012) found that the majority of students would recommend using VoiceThread for creating presentations in future classes, with several students commenting about the ease of use in the open-ended responses.

Peer-to-Peer Feedback and Assessments of Project Presentations

Our fifth goal of the overall project was to facilitate peer feedback and assessment. As noted earlier, one of the Principles of Good Practice noted by Chickering and Gamson (1989) includes providing prompt feedback. To capitalize on this principle of good practice, students were asked to provide feedback and respond to feedback within the week following the posting of their presentations. This method not only alleviates some of the burden from the instructor to assess all of the student presentations immediately, but also allows students the chance to act as evaluators and critiquers.

Several scholars have suggested that formative peer feedback can provide several beneficial learning opportunities for students, including promoting higher quality thought processes and effective learning across settings, increasing productivity and time on task, and reducing overall errors (Bangert-Drowns, Kulik, Kulik, & Morgan, 1991; Crooks, 1988; Kulik & Kulik, 1988; Natriello, 1987; Topping, 1998). Peer feedback and assessment also has demonstrated benefits for students, including increasing motivation and personal responsibility for projects, encouraging active learning, and developing the ability to negotiate constructive criticism (for a review see Topping, 1998).

Turning from formative feedback to evaluative assessment, Topping (1998) defines peer assessment as "an arrangement in which individuals consider the amount, level, value, worth, quality, or success of the products or outcomes of learning of peers of similar status" (p. 250). As data reviewed by Topping (2009) testifies, a majority of studies (70%) find that students' peer evaluations have adequate reliability and validity. Peer feedback and evaluations encourage learning through their role as an assessor. Similar to learning via teaching, students are required to place themselves in the role of the instructor and evaluate the quality of their peers' work. Allowing students to provide feedback, critique, and evaluate peer work fulfills another of Chickering and Gamson's Principles of Good Practice as it encourages active learning via the use and development of critical thinking.

Method

Brief Project Procedure Overview

The overall project for this course was multifaceted and involved several steps[2] (i.e., library information and skills training; group formation via speed partnering; narrated, online VoiceThread presentation; and peer reviews and evaluations) throughout the semester. The project was designed to fulfill the six specific aims identified at the beginning of this article. The basic procedure for the speed partnering event involved randomly creating groups of 8-10 students. Four (or six)-minute sessions were held to enable each student to meet each member of their group, with 30-seconds in between sessions. Students then formed partnerships with one other student they met through the speed partnering event. Student pairs were then required to create narrated VoiceThread presentations and upload them to Blackboard, the course learning management system. In Blackboard, student pairs were organized into small discussion and review groups. Each student in the small group reviewed, critiqued, and evaluated the other presentations in their small group.

Participants

Data were collected at a large public university in the Southeast enrolling approximately 17,700 students, 14,350 of whom are undergraduates. Carnegie ratings indicate this is a high research activity institution. The university at which this study was conducted is a comprehensive university with a diverse student body (White 57%, Black or African-American 25.2%, Hispanic/Latino 6.2%, Asian 4.3%, Nonresidents including international students 1.7%, and other 5.6%). Approximately 80% of first-year students reside in the on-campus dormitories, and this is the first university or college experience for many of the students and families of students attending this institution.

During the Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 semesters the multifaceted Partner Presentation task was assigned in three undergraduate courses in the Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) department: two sections of an introductory-level course entitled Families and Close Relationships during the fall semester and an upper-level course entitled Advanced Family and Developmental Studies Seminar during the

[2] Complete project procedure is available upon request from the corresponding author.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations among the Study Variables for Each Course

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Instruction Clarity	-	.38*	.55**	.35†	.57***	.61***
2. Interpersonal Relationships	.17†	-	.48*	.27	.39*	.51**
3. Learning & Engagement	.34***	.29**	-	.58***	.72***	.47**
4. Library-Based and Technological Skills	.66***	.13	.42***	-	.40*	.47**
5. Peer Feedback & Evaluation	.37***	.04	.54***	.44***	-	.26
6. Assignment/Speed Partnering Quality	.49***	.25**	.45***	.46***	.28**	-
Implementation 1: Mean	2.39	2.98	2.53	2.37	2.30	2.63
Implementation 1: Std dv	.75	1.71	.65	.77	.48	.80
Implementation 2: Mean	1.91	2.29	2.38	2.44	2.30	2.29
Implementation 2: Std dv	.73	1.33	.71	.86	.45	.75

Note: Correlations below the diagonal are for the larger introductory course (implementation 1), whereas correlations above the diagonal are for the smaller, upper-level course (implementation 2); lower mean values signify more positive evaluations for each variable.
† $p < .10$ level (2-tailed). * $p < .05$ level (2-tailed). ** $p < .01$ level (2-tailed). *** $p < .001$ level (2-tailed).

spring semester. Students completed anonymous questionnaires as part of the normative teaching efforts to improve course delivery. As surveys were completed anonymously in an effort to promote accurate student feedback, comparative descriptions of the students who completed the survey versus those who did not are unavailable. Survey questions were designed to gather data regarding this study's specific aims.

During the first implementation of the partner presentation protocols, the introductory-level close relationships course had a total of 218 students between these two sections. The larger section had 137 students, whereas the smaller of the two sections had 81 students. This introductory course is often taken by students of various majors as opposed to just Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) students. Furthermore, there is a much higher proportion of first-year students in introductory courses compared with upper-level courses. Questionnaires regarding the project were supplied at the end of the semester. Of the 218 students who participated in the course project, 108 completed the survey. The upper-level course in which we implemented this project is typically for students in the HDFS department who are in their senior year and have completed several prerequisite courses. Of the 32 students who took the course, 31 completed the survey provided after the project.

Quantitative Measures

The web-based questionnaires used in this study, which were approximately 50 questions long, included both qualitative and quantitative components. In accordance with our study goals, the questions were targeted at understanding students' perspectives of several key aspects of the overall project. Means and standard deviations for each quantitative scale and class are presented in Table 1.

Instructional clarity (6 Items). Although not a specific aim of the study, as part of improving the instruction and implementation of this project, students were asked to rate the overall instructional clarity of each of the various aspects of this assignment (e.g., the overall partnering and presentation assignment, the Speed Partnering event, and grading requirements for evaluating classmate presentations). Responses were averaged across this measure (1 = *very clear* and 5 = *very unclear*). This scale was reliable for both the introductory and upper-level courses ($\alpha = .81$, $\alpha = .88$, respectively).

Foster interpersonal relationships (3 Items). One of the specific aims of this project was to assist students in building and developing interpersonal relationships with their classmates. Three scale items were developed to assess how well students were able to build relationships with their peers and to what extent these relationships were enjoyable (e.g., how much did you

like your partner?). Response options ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much*) for two items and 1(*very well*) to 4 (*not well at all*) for the third. Responses for two items were reverse coded so that lower values indicated more positive relationship experiences. This scale was reliable for both the introductory and upper-level courses (α = .76, α = .72, respectively).

Technology and library-based skills (2 items). An additional goal of this project was to further develop students' technological and library-based skills. Two items were designed to assess the helpfulness of instructional material at attaining this goal. The two items asked were (a) How useful were doing the information literacy PowerPoint and the quiz in helping you find academic material to use in making you presentation?, and (b) How helpful was the Blackboard Presentation Technology material? Response options, for these two items ranged from 1 (*very useful/helpful*) to 4 (*not at all useful/helpful*). This scale was reliable for both the introductory and upper-level courses (α = .73, α = .86, respectively).

Student learning and engagement (4 items). This project was also aimed at promoting student learning and engagement through enabling students to conduct independent research on a topic of their choosing. A four-item scale was designed to gage students' interest and learning from this presentation. Items included (a) To what extent did this assignment increase your interest in this subject matter?, which was 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*significantly*) to 5 (*none at all*) (b) How much did you learn from having a partner that you probably wouldn't have learned by yourself? (c) To what extent did having a partner make you look at your topic differently than you initially looked at it by yourself? and (d) How much did you learn from the presentations you watched?. For items b, c, and d, response options were on a 4-item scale ranging from 1 (*significantly*) to 4 (*none at all*). This scale was reliable for both the introductory and upper-level (α = .66, α = .78, respectively). Students were also asked to estimate their final grades in the course. This item was dropped as it was uncorrelated with all other variables.

Peer-evaluations and feedback (6 items). Facilitating peer-to-peer feedback and assessments of project presentations was another specific aim with this project. As reported earlier, students were asked to provide feedback and evaluate peer projects. A 6-item measure was developed to assess students' perceptions of this process. The six items from this scale were (a) How much insight into good and poor ways of making a presentation did you feel giving feedback to peers gave you?, (b) To what extent did you feel getting feedback from your peers helped you think about ways you could improve your presentation?, (c) The feedback I gave my peers on their presentations in this class was useful, (d) In deciding on ratings of my peers' presentations, I felt very comfortable (to very uncomfortable) in being an evaluator, (e) "Class members evaluated my work in a meaningful and conscientious manner" (1 = *strongly agree* and 5 = *strongly disagree*), and (f) The grading procedures for the assignment were 1 = *very fair* to 5 = *very unfair*. Items were averaged to determine a scale mean for further analyses. This scale was reliable for both the introductory and upper-level courses (α = .74, α = .69, respectively).

Assignment quality/utility of speed partnering (2 items). Students were also asked two questions designed to assess their perceptions of the overall quality of this assignment including the utility of using the speed partnering exercise as a way of forming partnerships. The 2-item scale consisted of the questions: (a) How would you rate the speed dating exercise as a way of forming partnerships for group work?, which was 5-item scale ranging from 1 (*very good*) to 5 (*very poor- should not be used in the future*) and (b) Overall how would you describe this assignment?, which was also a 5-item scale with responses ranging from 1 (*far above average*) to 5 (*far below average*). Means scores were computed for this scale. This scale was reliable for both the introductory and upper-level courses (α = .69, α = .73, respectively).

Qualitative Items

Qualitative items were designed to allow students to provide more in-depth feedback regarding their experiences with this project. Students were asked three questions designed to assess their experiences with the overall project: (1) What were the things you liked best about doing a partner presentation?, (2) What were the things you liked least about doing a partner presentation?, and (3) What suggestions do you have for making this a better assignment?

After the first implementation of this survey, decisions were made to ask students in subsequent courses about their specific opinions regarding the speed partnering portion of this assignment. Therefore for the upper-level, advanced family seminar, students were also asked: Specifically, what did you like or dislike about speed partnering as a way of forming partnerships? How can this method be improved in the future?

Results and Discussion

Overall the results supported the success of this project at engaging students in the course as well as fostering the other goals of the project. We will first present quantitative, descriptive statistics testifying to the general success of the multi-faceted presentation assignment. For ease of discussion, we will present these results separately for each implementation as well as aggregated across both implementations. Then we

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations Among the Study Variables Across Implementations

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Instruction Clarity	-					
2. Interpersonal Relationships	.24**	-				
3. Learning & Engagement	.40***	.33***	-			
4. Library-Based and Technological Skills	.56***	.15†	.46***	-		
5. Peer Feedback & Evaluation	.40***	.10	.58***	.43***	-	
6. Assignment Quality	.53***	.32***	.46***	.44***	.28**	-
Mean	2.29	2.82	2.50	2.38	2.30	2.55
Std dv	.77	1.66	.66	.79	.47	.80
Minimum	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	4.67	7.33	4.25	4.00	3.50	4.50
Possible Maximum	5.00	7.33	4.25	4.00	4.50	5.00

Note: Lower mean values signify more positive evaluations for each variable.

† $p < .10$ level (2-tailed). ** $p < .01$ level (2-tailed). *** $p < .001$ level (2-tailed).

Table 3
Univariate One-Way Analyses of Variance of Project Dimensions between First and Second Implementations

	F	*p*
Instruction Clarity	10.28	.00***
Interpersonal Relationships	4.19	.04*
Student Learning & Engagement	1.30	.26
Library and Technological Skills	.19	.67
Peer Evaluations and Feedback	.00	.95
Assignment Quality	4.41	.04*

Note: There was 1 degree of freedom for each of the ANOVAs as the comparison was across two implementations of the assignment.

will present results pertaining to specific aims of the assignment, reporting sequentially on each aim. Reporting on the specific aims will involve presenting a mix of quantitative and qualitative data.

The data from the first implementation of the assignment informed several modifications made to the second implementation. Discussion of these changes will be interwoven with the presentation of the results for specific aims. Given these modifications, we deemed it important to determine, quantitatively, if those modifications were associated with changes in students' ratings of the components and overall assignment quality. Arguably the biggest changes were in the way we conducted the speed partnering event, but other changes were also made (e.g., with regard to training on library skills, the instructions, the length of the presentations, providing a rubric for students in doing peer evaluations). There were also differences in the class sizes and student populations across the two implementations that may have played a role in the differences in students' reactions between the first and second implementations.

A MANOVA was run to determine if there were overall differences between the implementations. The MANOVA was significant ($F(6,132) = 3.63$, $p = .002$, Wilks' $\lambda = .86$, partial $\eta^2 = .14$). Univariate tests (i.e., one-way ANOVAs) were examined to determine where the differences existed between the two implementations (see Table 3). There were several significant findings. The noteworthy results from the ANOVAs will be presented in conjunction with their

corresponding specific aim. Finally, an ANCOVA was performed to determine what might be a key factor in the greater success of the second implementation, and a regression was performed to determine the strongest predictors of the overall quality of the assignment.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 provides correlations and descriptive statistics for each implementation separately. The pattern of correlations was similar for both courses, albeit the power to detect significant relationships was limited in the upper-level course due to a smaller sample size (N = 31). Table 2 provides the bivariate correlations, means, and standard deviations for all study variables (except estimated grades) across the two implementations of this project.

Focusing on the combined analysis (Table 2), the means of the scales in the current study were all below the scale mid-points, indicating a more favorable reaction from students. The scale measuring interpersonal relationships was rated most favorably as indicated by mean scores proportionally furthest below the mid-point. Of 15 intercorrelations, 13 were statistically significant. These variables (in both implementations) were generally associated with one another. Two of the strongest correlations involved instruction clarity, which was correlated positively with the utility of the library-based and technological skills component (r = .56, p < .001) and overall assignment quality (r = .53, p < .001). Interpersonal relationships failed to correlate significantly with either library-based and technological skills or peer evaluations.

Evaluation of Specific Aims and Its Use in Changing Procedures

The utility of speed partnering (Aim 1). The first aim of the project was to demonstrate the utility of speed partnering events as a method for forming partnerships in an educational context. Overall, students responded positively to the speed partnering exercise. For example, one student noted, "I thought the speed dating exercise was a very effective way of choosing our partners. Working with a partner made the presentation easier and more interesting to work on." Especially in the larger, introductory sections, however, there were some mixed responses (22 percent of students in those sections rated speed partnering as poor). This anti speed-partnering sentiment revolved around confusion on the day of the event, not enough time to choose suitable partners, and not knowing what to talk about with the potential partners being met, for example, "I did not like how we selected our partners through speed dating activity. Even though I thought it was a good idea, I felt like I didn't get to know enough about my partners work ethics in that short amount of time."

There were a few noteworthy challenges with our initial implementation of the speed partnering protocols in the large introductory section. First, tardiness and absenteeism is an issue in large introductory courses, although not in the subsequent administration in a smaller senior level course. Due to the nature of having predetermined groups, these factors created issues for the ease and smoothness of some aspects of the speed partnering protocols, especially getting the exercise started on the day of the event. In the introductory course, late students were added to groups with odd numbers of members whose members were absent. To avoid the problem of missing members, assignment to groups can be done in class after students have arrived. Second, although 4 minutes was typical of previous speed partnering paradigms, students felt that it may have hindered their ability to choose good partners. For this reason, we created smaller groups during the second implementation (8 students versus 10) and gave them more time to interact (6 minutes versus 4 minutes).

A third problem was that some students were perplexed as to what to ask about and discuss in their speed partnering encounters. In the feedback from the first implementation students noted difficulties in meeting up with their selected partners. Logistical issues, such as meeting up with partners outside of class time, require a consideration of issues such as geography and availability when selecting a partner (e.g., Collins & Goyder, 2008; Oakley, Felder, Brent, & Elhajj, 2004). Some scholars have noted that expectations and requirements regarding project work outside of class should be explicitly stated before group formation, as schedule conflicts may be a pertinent reason for partners not to work together (Collins & Goyder, 2008; Gradwohl & Young, 2003). Given students' concerns about getting together as well as our reading of the related literature, we provided sample questions specifically addressing geography and schedule conflicts in the second implementation, as well as additional questions that students might have wanted to ask potential partners to determine their suitability.

With the various other changes in the project procedures section, the responses were much more positive about the speed dating style event in the second implementation of this project. For example, one student stated, "I like how the speed partnering was the way we formed partners. Not only was I able to choose who I wanted to be with but it was a chance to meet other classmates." Another student additionally commented, "I thought the process for speed partnering was so fair. We got to meet everyone in our group and ask questions to see not only if they were the right fit for us but if we were the right fit for them!" This was also evidenced in the advanced students' quantitative responses as well. When asked how they would rate speed partnering as a way of forming partnerships, 54.8% of students thought

it was a good or very good way, 38.7% thought it was average, and only 2 students (6.5%) thought it was a poor way of forming partnerships.

Developing interpersonal relationships (Aim 2). The second aim of this project was to assist students in building and developing interpersonal relationships with their classmates. We expected this theme to be more relevant for the introductory course as these students are often new to the university and may have had little time to develop new friendships. However, this was one of the consistently noted favorite aspects of the project across both implementations.

In the introductory class, a consistent theme reported by students was that meeting their classmates and partners was one aspect of this project that they liked best. For example, one student stated: "I liked being able to get to know others in such a large class." Other students reported the following:

- I enjoyed getting to know my partner because I probably wouldn't have met her without this project (Comment 1).
- I liked the fact that I was able to meet new people. I am new to the area and it was nice to meet positive people with the same goals and ambitions as I have…My partner and I have grown a much fonder relationship and have been able to call on each other in the time of need, which is nice (Comment 2).
- My partner and I actually ended up becoming good friends. I think we will continue to be friends after this semester ends. When we did our voice thread, we laughed a lot. I haven't previously done many group projects. I feel like I choose a good fit for myself and the way I work on assignments. We worked well together and learned a lot of interesting and useful information during this assignment (Comment 3).
- [I] got to know someone elsee at the University [as a result of this project]. This is my first semester, and I know no one (Comment 4).

However, not every partnership worked perfectly and promoted liking. There can be pitfalls to team assignments (Hansen, 2006). In the open ended responses, several students noted issues with their partners, such as conflicting schedules and an inability to find time to work on the project outside of class, or feeling that the responsibility for the project was unequally distributed. In one of the more extreme cases, a student complained:

> "My partner did literally nothing to help with project. I did the PowerPoint with no help from partner (he was always busy) had to do narration on my own (partners narration was totally unacceptable) I found the articles (my partner contributed 0 info.) and put them together."

Several students in the upper-level course mentioned as a theme that their favorite aspect was getting to know other students on a personal level and making new friends. Results from the one-way ANOVA revealed that students in the upper-level course rated the development of interpersonal relationships significantly higher than students in the introductory course ($F(1, 137) = 4.19$, $p < .05$). Furthermore, students in this class linked our second and the third objectives (fostering relationships and promoting engaged learning). They noted that their favorite aspect of this project was working with a partner as it also enabled them to think about topics in a new way.

Promoting student learning and engagement (Aim 3). The third aim of this project was to promote student learning and engagement in the material. Complementing the favorable quantitative ratings, students' comments related to this objective were generally positive. No adjustments were made across the two implementations of this project that were targeted at altering outcomes on student's learning and engagement. Results from the one-way ANOVA provided further evidence of this and indicated that learning and engagement did not vary across implementations (See Table 3).

In the larger, introductory course, several students noted that the part they liked best about the assignment was the freedom in choosing a presentation topic, which was one of the ways we had tried to foster engagement. Further illustrating both the aim of interpersonal relationships and student learning, students wrote the following:

- What I personally liked best about doing the partner presentation is being able to meet someone new… I also liked that we had that extra voice within our decision on what I had planned to say within the presentation so we could see it from a different perspective (Comment 1).
- I enjoyed being able to bounce off ideas between the two of us. As well as, we both had similar ideas of what we wanted which helped make our process go along faster. It was also interesting how much you learn from another persons knowledge of the subject (Comment 2).

This theme was reflected in the smaller, upper-level class as well. One student wrote that this assignment "allowed both people to participate and be creative in presenting the material (I would like this better than writing a paper for sure). We also were able to bounce ideas off of each other." Another student wrote, "I liked working with my partner and learning more about a

subject with a companion, I liked working together and seeing how someone else works or thinks."

Promoting technology and library-based skills (Aim 4). The fourth aim of this project was to promote technology and library-based skill acquisition. In the first implementation of this project involving introductory level students, this included multiple presentations by the department's Instructional Technology Consultant (ITC) on how to use the university library website and the VoiceThread website and software. In the qualitative responses, several students noted that they learned a lot about using VoiceThread from the presentations by the ITC. For example, one student mentioned, "I learned a lot about the library, about voicethread, about powerpoint." Another student noted that their favorite part of the assignment was the ITC's presentation on finding and resizing images. However, several students also noted frustrations over learning to use VoiceThread, e.g., "The VoiceThread was a little complicated, maybe doing something else."

We made adjustments when adapting this for an upper-level course. As students at the upper-level were expected to have a basic understanding of locating scholarly sources and using the library website, outside presentations from the university's Instructional Technology Consultant were not utilized. Students in the upper-level section reported positive technological experiences. For example, "My partner and I was able to learn from each other on different techniques for voice thread," and "I liked that we could do a voiceover rather than presenting in front of the whole class."

Facilitating peer-to-peer feedback and assessments (Aim 5). The fifth specific aim of this project was to facilitate peer-to-peer feedback and assessments of project presentations. Students in the larger introductory sections noted mixed feelings about the feedback and evaluation aspect of this assignment. One student mentioned that getting feedback from other students was his or her favorite part, whereas another student noted some concerns, e.g., "I felt like the people in my group was a little biased with their feedback; Some didn't want to make others mad by what they said really about their presentations." In terms of doing an evaluation of other students' presentations, student feedback was not very positive. One student articulated that he or she thought the instructor should be responsible for final grades. Another concern students raised was the lack of a grading rubric for peer evaluations. As one student reported:

> "The assignment wasn't a bad assignment, however, I do believe some things about it should be changed. For instance, I don't believe the assignment should be peer reviewed without there being a rubric. A rubric not only helps the maker of the presentation more comfortable about what it is they are submitting, it also helps [provide] the peer reviewer [with] specifics about what they should be looking for to help them better critique the work."

We agreed with this student's critique. Topping (1998) also noted the importance of clarifying assessment criteria for peer evaluators. It seems that having a rubric provides a more tangible goal when creating the presentation as well as when grading one. We therefore implemented a rubric for the presentation in the second administration.

There seemed to be less open-ended responses specifically about grading and evaluations procedures in the second application of this project with the smaller, upper-level class. A few students in the upper-level class expressed the sentiment that the amount of feedback required may have been excessive. For example, one student noted that to make the assignment better she or he would "cut down on the feedback we have to give each other… It would be different if we actually had the chance to go back and make changes based on the feedback." We feel that this is an accurate criticism and ideally should be reflected in future implementations of this project. Students should be able to see the value of providing feedback by being able to adapt their presentations in response to their peers' comments. Students in both classes also noted the need to be able to evaluate the contributions of their partner and have that (e.g., relative contributions) reflected in the overall grades. We believe this may be an important addition for future replications to help promote a more equal distribution of work between partners.

Demonstrating the overall quality of the assignment (Aim 6). The sixth specific aim of this project was to demonstrate the overall assignment quality of the partner presentation assignment. Although students generally gave positive ratings to the overall quality of this assignment, students in the first implementation of this project noted there were several aspects in which they felt unclear of what they were expected to do or how exactly to do it. Some of the student frustrations over using VoiceThread and uploading their presentations to Blackboard prompted us to evaluate the instruction clarity and simplicity of instructions presented for using VoiceThread as well as for the steps necessary for uploading presentations. Several students in the first implementation of this project had technical issues with their projects, difficulty posting their presentations, or challenges in figuring out how to provide feedback to their peers. For these reasons, we attempted to improve our instructions by providing more explicit and detailed step-by-step guidelines for each stage of the project in the second implementation. However, there were still a few students in the smaller, upper-level class who

mentioned issues with instruction clarity and confusion about specific aspects of the assignment. They specifically noted issues regarding the speed partnering event and using VoiceThread.

Results from the one-way ANOVA indicated that our adjustments improved the instruction clarity and overall assignment for the second implementation. Instruction clarity and overall assignment quality were rated higher by students in the smaller, upper-level class ($F(1, 137) = 10.28$, $p < .01$; $F(1, 137) = 4.41$, $p < .05$, respectively) compared with the larger, introductory class. We aimed to improve the instruction clarity as a way to improve the overall assignment quality which was demonstrated by the significant improvements in instruction clarity and assignment quality from the first to the second implementations. Furthermore, results from an ANCOVA examining the differences in assignment quality after controlling for instruction clarity supported this. Instruction clarity remained significantly different across implementations ($F = 48.025$, $p < .001$), but with clarity as a covariate the overall assignment quality no longer was significantly different across the implementations ($F = .268$, $p = .605$). Thus, the improvements in instruction clarity may be an influential factor accounting for the improvement I overall assignment quality found between the first and second implementations of this assignment.

The amount of qualitative feedback on the overall assignment was modest in both courses. Some students, however, were quite expressive of their positive feelings about the assignment. For example one student in the upper-level course wrote: "I thought it was a good assisignment… I WOULD TAKE THIS OVER ANY PAPER ANY DAY!!!!" Another student in the introductory course wrote, "Thanks for being risky to try something new and let everyone experience 'relationship' in a new light!!!" Future replications might ask students how they felt about the overall assignment in order to better qualitatively assess their opinions.

A regression analysis was run to determine which component or components of the project were predictive of the overall assignment quality. We analyzed the regressions separately for each class to determine if there were differences in what predicted assignment quality between the two implementations of the project. The overall regression analysis was significant for both the larger, introductory class and the smaller, upper-level course ($F(5, 102) = 10.97$, $p < .001$; $F(5, 25) = 6.99$, $p < .001$, respectively). The regression analyses indicated that in the larger, introductory class, only instruction clarity and learning engagement were significant predictors of assignment quality ($\beta = .29$, $t(102) = 2.65$, $p < .01$, $\beta = .28$, $t(102) = 2.76$, $p < .01$, respectively). In the smaller, upper-level class, overall assignment quality was predicted by instruction clarity ($\beta = .54$, $t(25) = 3.28$, $p < .01$), the development of interpersonal relationships ($\beta = .32$, $t(25) = 2.11$, $p < .05$), and marginally by peer evaluations and feedback ($\beta = -.39$, $t(102) = -1.99$, $p = .06$). We then ran the regression again aggregating across the classes. The overall regression was significant in predicting assignment quality ($F(5, 133) = 16.97$, $p < .001$). Results from the regression analysis indicated that the overall assignment quality was significantly predicted by instruction clarity ($\beta = .35$, $p < .001$) and learning and engagement ($\beta = .27$, $p < .01$). The development of interpersonal relationships ($\beta = .13$, $p = .08$) and library-based and technological skills acquisition ($\beta = .15$, $p = .09$) marginally predicted the overall assignment quality. However, peer feedback and evaluations did not significantly predict the overall assignment quality.

Concordance between Instructor and Peer Evaluations

We conducted informal checks to compare our own (faculty) evaluations with students' evaluations of the presentations. We sensed three differences: (a) students gave more favorable judgments overall, (b) students tended to award more points to stylish and well-delivered presentations, and (c) we gave weight to more complete content (e.g., more use of traditional academic sources, etc.).

Conclusions

We feel, and the evidence indicates, that the speed partnering and presentation assignment was successful and generally well-received by students. From the qualitative student comments and quantitative responses from students, it is apparent that having clear instructions at each stage is imperative for the functioning of the project. Student's ratings of the instruction clarity, development of interpersonal relationships, and overall assignment quality improved in the second implementation.

There were several strengths of this partner presentation assignment using a speed partnering event to form the pairs who worked together. First, students were allowed some degree of choice in selecting their partners, hopefully allowing students to select partners who have similar work expectations and quality. Collins and Goyder (2008) noted that productivity and harmony from group work could be diminished if there were divergent expectations about the final product. In terms of the speed partnering style event for selecting partnerships, it is not always possible for students to ensure a cooperative and successful partner within a limited time frame for interacting. However, ensuring a successful partnership is not a given when students select their own partners or when they are randomly assigned by instructors either. An asset of speed

partnering for forming dyads is that it allows students to interact with several potential partners and then select an individual who they feel may be an effective partner.

Along with the several demonstrable strengths from this progressive assignment, there were some limitations of our evaluation of the multi-faceted assignment and components of the assignment itself. In terms of our evaluation, one limitation is that there was unequal participation in completing the evaluation survey across the two implementations, which may have introduced bias in the responses gathered. In the first implementation of this assignment approximately 50% of students completed the review survey, compared with the second administration in which 97% of students completed the review survey. Future implementations would do well to find ways to promote higher levels of engagement in evaluation for students in larger, introductory classes, perhaps by awarding extra credit.

There were two salient concerns that students expressed in doing the assignment. First, as previously mentioned, students reported that providing and receiving feedback from their peers would have been more effective and useful had they been allowed to correct or make adjustments to their presentations based on their peers' feedback. Topping (1998) noted that peer feedback is useful only to the extent that students act on it. Although it may be possible that students incorporate their peers' feedback into later projects, it would likely have been more useful and effective to allow for the incorporation of feedback for their current presentation. Future implementations of this assignment, or any assignment utilizing peer feedback, may benefit from allowing students to incorporate their peers' feedback into their final presentations before they are evaluated.

Second, in some cases, students noted that the inability to assess their partners' contributions to the final presentation may have been associated with, and possibly contributed to, an unequal distribution of work between partners. In support of assertions made by Slavin (1989), Colbeck and colleagues (2012) argued that group evaluations or rewards may create conditions under which one or two group members do most or all of the work, and conversely where one or two members evade their group responsibilities. However, there was variability in terms of the relative contributions made within the partnerships such that unequal work distributions were not uniformly present. Colbeck and colleagues (2012) suggested the problem of slackers is less likely in dyads than in larger groups. Future implementations of this assignment, or assignments that incorporate group work, should utilize evaluation methods that allow partners to assess each group member's contributions to the final project.

There are some disadvantages to peer feedback and assessment more generally. Regarding peer feedback, some students may reject peer feedback or assessment as inaccurate whereas others may not assess peers in a meaningful and appropriate manner (Topping, 1998). For example, students who assess peers with whom they have close affectional bonds may be more likely to overestimate their performance. A limitation of using peer evaluations noted by Topping (1998) is the inability to account for variation in students' level of proficiency at being an evaluator. A potential limitation of the project was that students weren't trained as assessors and we were therefore unable to minimize this variability. Although for the second administration of this project students were provided with a grading rubric to assess their peers, more instruction regarding providing constructive feedback and evaluating peer presentations may have better equipped them to assess and critique their peers.

In addition to addressing the project limitations in future implementations of this assignment, there are also some alternative ways to structure aspects of the project that may lead to interesting outcomes. In the larger class, some students mentioned that it was difficult to find a partner with a limited number of class members from whom to choose. A potential alternative might include putting students into groups for the speed partnering event based on a number of predefined characteristics. This paradigm could essentially be treated as experimental in the future. Have students in each of the clusters matched on personality, schedules/geography, interests, or haphazardly (as was done in the current administrations), and see if differences in the composition of the speed partnering clusters were associated with how well the partners from those clusters got along and/or did in making high caliber presentations.

In looking back over our experience developing this assignment, three additional points stand out. First, students often get nervous or shy in making face-to-face presentations in classes. The use of VoiceThread seems to considerably reduce any anxieties they might have. Second, having peer evaluations reduces the burden on faculty of grading assignments and adds a second perspective in the evaluation of students. In large classes where peer-rated assignments are just one component of course grades, the reliability and validity of peer evaluation, especially when pooled over multiple raters (Magin, 1993), is high enough (see Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000), in our opinion, to be used as the sole basis of grading assignments. Finally, we found several of the peer presentations creative and stimulating to review.

In sum, having students work together to make presentations is grounded in sound pedagogical principles. We believe this approach helps build social ties among students and fosters engagement in the learning process. In our approach, we have added

elements (a) to enhance students' information technology skills, (b) to engage students in critical evaluation of their peers, and (c) to introduce students to a free technology that they can use for other purposes. Although experiencing speed partnering has special relevance to courses on close relationships, with adjustment in substantive focus, the approach of this assignment can be used in a wide variety of courses—be they large or small—and fields. This assignment can be easily adapted to a variety of learning management systems such as Canvas or Desire2Learn (D2L). The multiple parts of this multifaceted assignment can be separated and just some components used. We recommend that you consider adapting speed partnering and VoiceThread type partner presentation assignments to your own situation. We believe you will find this approach a gratifying teaching experience and importantly are optimistic that students will benefit academically, professionally, and interpersonally.

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Appendix
Scales

	Instructional Clarity	Very Clear				Very Unclear
	How clear were the instructions for:					
1.	The overall partnering and presentation assignment	1	2	3	4	5
2.	The Speed Partnering event	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Narrating the presentation	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Uploading the presentations to Blackboard	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Knowing what to do once materials were on Blackboard	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Grading requirements for evaluating classmate presentations	1	2	3	4	5

	Foster Interpersonal Relationships	Very Well			Not Well at All
1.	How well did you get to know classmates with whom you would like to work as a result of the speed dating exercise?	1	2	3	4

	(Reverse Coded)	Not at all								Very Much
2.	How much did like your partner?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
3.	How much did you like working together on this project with your partner?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

	Technology and Library-Based Skills	Very useful/helpful			Not at all useful/helpful
1.	How useful were doing the information literacy PowerPoint and the quiz in helping you find academic material to use in making you presentation?,	1	2	3	4
2.	How helpful was the Blackboard Presentation Technology material?	1	2	3	4

	Student Learning and Engagement	Significantly				None at all
1.	To what extent did this assignment increase your interest in this subject matter?	1	2	3	4	5

		Significantly			None at all
2.	How much did you learn from having a partner that you probably wouldn't have learned by yourself?	1	2	3	4

3. To what extent did having a partner make you look at your topic differently than you initially looked at it by yourself?	1	2	3	4	
4. How much did you learn from the presentations you watched?	1	2	3	4	

Peer-Evaluations and Feedback	Significantly			None at all	
1. How much insight into good and poor ways of making a presentation did you feel giving feedback to peers gave you?	1	2	3	4	
2. To what extent did you feel getting feedback from your peers helped you think about ways you could improve your presentation?	1	2	3	4	
	Very comfortable being an evaluator			Very uncomfortable being an evaluator	
3. In deciding on ratings of my peers' presentations, I felt:	1	2	3	4	
	Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree
4. The feedback I gave my peers on their presentations in this class was useful.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Would agree or disagree with the statement: "Class members evaluated my work in a meaningful and conscientious manner."	1	2	3	4	5
	Very Fair				Very Unfair
6. The grading procedures for the assignment were:	1	2	3	4	5

Assignment Quality/Utility of Speed Partnering	Very Good				Very Poor
1. How would you rate the speed dating exercise as a way of forming partnerships for group work?	1	2	3	4	5
	Far Above Average				Far Below Average
2. Overall how would describe this assignment?	1	2	3	4	5