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THE USE OF WEB-BASED TECHNOLOGY IN TEACHING

Present: Rose Marie Toscano

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>> FACILITATOR: Are we ready?

Okay.

We have our next presenter here.

This is Rose Marie Toscano, and I just want to say that  
I've given out some evaluation forms.

Some of you have gotten these forms and if you haven't

gotten them yet, I'll be giving out more later.

There's two ways that you can fill these out.

One is on-line on the second floor in the ETC and then also you can just fill out the hard copy paper

and give it to me after this workshop.

I'll be standing back by the door.

All right?

Now I'll turn it over to Rose Marie.

>> ROSE MARIE TOSCANO: Well, good morning.

I'm happy to see such -- so many people.

My goodness.

I thought I would have maybe 10 or 15 people.

I made 25 copies and now I ran out.

But you can get a copy of my presentation on the World Wide Web after today.

I'm going to be signing for myself, but also asking Miriam to join me because I think sometimes people

prefer to watch the interpreter.

It's more smooth to watch one person.

Today, I want to talk a little bit about using web-based technology in the in the teaching of reading

and writing skills and I'd like to share with you some of my experiences in teaching two courses in using

that kind of technology here at RIT.

By the way, I am affiliated with NTID.

I've been here for 25 years, and I continue to enjoy working with Deaf students even though when

they hear 25 years, they think, "Wow, it must be boring by now."

It's never boring, as you well know.

The agenda for today is that I'd like to share a little bit about the course background so you could

understand the context of the examples that I'm going to show.

Also demonstrate for you some specific interactive software that has been developed through a

system called IdeaTools.

That's an on-line course-building software application that was developed by Simon Ting, who is

sitting right there, from NTID, and who is the brainchild of much of the technology that supports and is

the foundation of what I'm going to be showing you.

Specifically, I will be showing you something that's called the Reading Tutor, reading videos, markup

tool, Writing Tutor, and then the discussion boards, the web discussion boards.

First of all, a little bit of background.

I teach two courses called writing and lit 1 and 2.

Those are required RIT courses for students, Deaf students and hearing students, who are pursuing

an AAS degree or a bachelor's degree.

There are hearing sections of this course as well as all Deaf sections.

I teach the all Deaf sections of the course.

Which just means that it's a smaller number and that the signing is direct.

It's not through an interpreting system.

These courses are rigorous courses.

They are your typical first-year English courses at the college level.

There is a very heavy emphasis on critical reading of literary texts, such as poetry, drama, and fiction,

as well as nonliterary texts from newspapers like The New York Times, Newsweek, et cetera.

Simultaneously, there is a lot of writing that occurs, especially academic writing, analytical writing, that

incorporates their reading and incorporates research.

I'd like to think of my use of technology in these courses as creating a hybrid learning environment,

meaning that it's still a very traditional class.

The students are still coming to class.

They are still doing homework.

I am still lecturing, but at the same time, we're using web technology outside of class, sometimes

during the class, to support and enhance student learning.

I want to start by talking a little bit about reading.

It is not a surprise to anyone here, I'm sure, that

reading, particularly reading literature is a pretty challenging job for Deaf students, okay?

The Reading Tutor that Simon and I developed attempts, through strategies that we call the reading

tutor to enhance student comprehension of text and the way we do that is we're using what we call

annotations.

Annotation is the sign that I kind of came up with here at this institute, annotations, which are like

hypertext notes for a reading selection.

Students click on this yellow highlight and get information that (a) gives them some historical, cultural,

literary information that helps them understand what the text might be about; secondly -- I'm sorry about

the noise -- secondly, it alerts students to the kinds of literary conventions that they may not be familiar

with, that are new to them.

And thirdly, it kind of prompts students through analytical questions to think more deeply about the

story.

Let me demonstrate.

I have numerous selections of poetry, drama, and short stories but I'm just going to pick one that I

use pretty regularly in my class called the read -- a Rose for Emily.

Okay.

Students have this story in their textbooks, and at the

same time they could go on-line and use these annotations to guide them through the reading.

What I try to do is to sort of model what expert readers do when they read, okay?

Because I found that often my students didn't know, didn't have the strategies for how to approach a reading text.

So for example, I've highlighted a title because that's an important hint for them to figure out what's going on in the story.

So I tell them think of what a Rose might symbolize.

I'm immediately sort of introducing the concept of symbol, and I'm introducing the concept that the main character might be a symbolic idea.

Many times students don't know that background information -- time, year -- influences the comprehension of a story, so I give them a little bit, particularly what will influence the story that they're going to read.

So that's just a quick talking about this time between World War I and World War II where

industrialization occurred, that influences the story, they will understand what's going on better later.

For my students, knowing narrative voice -- who's the speaker in the story -- is often, you know, sort of elusive, so paying attention to that.

Who is talking?

And that will help them understand later on that that's sort of involved in what the conflict of the story

and the eventual ending of the story.

So as you see, there is a kind of modeling through this system that enables them to work with the text

in the way that I, as an expert reader, might work with the text.

The first sentence is very descriptive about the setting, and there's that one phrase where it says the

house sat up on what used to be a very, very select street, but if they picked out "select" from a

dictionary, they're not going to get that meaning.

So I thought I should help them with that, because that's going to influence their understanding of

the theme and the conflict in the story.

Without that piece of information, they wouldn't get it.

So I have a series of those kinds of things that I think teachers can easily create, you knowing can

predict what these students would have difficulty with, and then modeling good reading strategies for

them.

After they sort of practice or read this text, then I ask students to go and take sort of a self-

assessment, a self quiz.

I don't use it for a grade in class.

It's really the process of reading that I'm interested in.

I'm trying to ask students to think like expert readers.

So this is the first part, then they take this self quiz as a second part, and what's unique about these

self quizzes that Simon was able to develop through this IdeaTools is that students have sort of an

answer guide.

Let me show you.

My students like this system because they can figure out how much they don't understand, so they

like that they can try and try and try again, and again and again until they get it.

So I mean this individual did pretty well with 95, but some of my other students would begin with a 45

and then take it a second time and get a 55, and a third time and a fourth time.

So that helped them see that they were improving in their comprehension.

My idea is that I'm asking questions that are not so evident.

You know, that really sort of force the issue of more analytical reading.

But if the person does misunderstand, gets it wrong, then they can click where the answer does

appear, and then try to figure it out again, okay?

So it's what I call a tutorial, a tutorial of their own, so that they can improve their reading skills.

Another added advantage of this is that I, as the



instructor, can look to see where the errors are.

So I can check all of their performance and see, in advance of the class, what they're having

problems with, and then I could address that more specifically in classroom time.

Currently, the Reading Tutor has 10 short stories, but there are 10 more in the plans for next year.

11 poems with 20 more in the plans.

1 play with 10 more in the plans.

And 30 non-fiction articles that we are planning to incorporate.

And we are hoping that this will become sort of a stand-alone website that might be available to

people to use, okay?

If people are interested in developing their own, then the recommendation is that you have to link

through the IdeaTools software to be able to do that, but I have found it to be a wonderful way --

student reaction has been very positive.

They feel that they can come to class a little bit more prepared than with an independent individual

reading, and I'm hoping that they're learning some good reading skills through the process.

This past year, we thought, well, okay, that's good that they have this Reading Tutor, but now maybe

it would be a good idea to try to add some additional elements that would help in the reading process.

So we tried some reading videos, and we experimented

with three different formats as a way to support classroom instruction.

The first one I want to show is a story called "battle royal," which is a very, very interesting but complicated story, and what I -- the approach I took for that is that students went to the Reading Tutor, so they followed the annotations, the textual guides.

They also took the quiz to see what their level of comprehension or misunderstanding was.

And then I invited them to view the videotape.

This first videotape is -- these are an exact copy of the story itself in a transliteration mode.

So long videotape.

It's 45 minutes.

I'm not going to show you the whole thing but just to give you an idea of what then the students saw

in support of their own reading.

And what they may have missed.

(Video playing).

>> ROSE MARIE TOSCANO: Students seem to like that.

They came to class.

They were ready to discuss.

Some of the students who really rely much more on ASL said, "I finally understood it," you know.

But there was a little bit of a problem.

45 minutes was too long, okay?

So now we needed to sort of change that a little bit, so the second videotape that we tried was based

on a common novel that the students were required to read by RIT that is called "the intuitionist."

Very complicated for both faculty and students.

It's really a tough book.

(Laughter).

>> ROSE MARIE TOSCANO: So we sort of read it together and whatever, and I thought, okay, how

can the videotape help them understand that book better?

I thought, well maybe I would voice for the students how I understood or how I'm reading that

chapter.

You know, what things I'm paying attention to.

So I voiced and recorded and then sent to the interpreter and created a videotape of one part of the

book where it was really much more summarized, much more focused kind of a discussion, a guide for

student reading, so let me show you that example.

(Video playing).

>> ROSE MARIE TOSCANO: You'll have to voice this, Miriam.

>> SIGN INTERPRETER: This is about a book called the intuitionist.

I'm going to summarize the main points for you.

You'll see some highlighting, and you'll know that those are important points that I want you to pay attention to.

Please check this over yourself briefly and see what you think.

>> SIGN INTERPRETER: Okay.

Now, basically, this is talking about people at a party, and at this party -- Funicular Follies, Rose Marie,

I'm sorry, I just don't understand it -- there's discrimination at this party and there's a lot of greed as evidenced by the people.

There's a lot of mockery.

And sarcasm that's evidenced in this particular part.

>> ROSE MARIE TOSCANO: Thank you, Miriam.

Okay.

You got a sense of the complication of the reading there.

That was just one part of a 350-page book, but the students told me that the summary, the sort of

guide, the highlighting of what was important in that paragraph helped them understand.

It wasn't the only thing that happened, but it was part of the process.

Okay?

So this was a little bit shorter, and seemed to be in the direction of where the students had the time

and the interest to be able to stay on it.

So the third experiment, I tried a different approach completely.

This time, I wanted the students to read by themselves, analyze it themselves, annotate it

themselves, outline it themselves.

It was much more of an independent kind of reading.

And then rely on the videotape to sort of double-check their understanding of the main points.

So this third videotape is based on an article.

We were discussing the concept of reparations, reparations to black people for their long history of

enslavement.

So in this videotape, what happened was that there was the full text, but at the same time there was

some summary statements being made and then the signing captured the summary statements.

So it was a good double-check for students to be sure that their annotation, their outlining and their

comprehension and analysis of the article matched sort of an expert reading of that article.

>> ROSE MARIE TOSCANO: The title of this article is "sins of the past."

(Video playing).

>> ROSE MARIE TOSCANO: Black people want to be paid back for -- called reparations.

The signing now is really -- the signing is sort of

matching the captioning, so I don't think we need to voice that part.

>> ROSE MARIE TOSCANO: Sorry to interrupt but you notice that there are a lot of things going on

at the same time, which could be confusing, but young people tell me they're used to it because they

can manage multiple images and captioning at the same time.

For me, it's very confusing, but the good thing about this system is that the student has the option of

turning off anything that they want.

So they could turn that off, or they can turn that off, and just focus on the signing, if they want.

Or they can have the full thing.

>> ROSE MARIE TOSCANO: I'd like to sort of move now to the writing arena, because another goal

of my program and I know most of you is the development of good writing skills.

And that's also daunting for many Deaf people.

So IdeaTools has a technology, an application called the markup tool, and that enables faculty,

teachers, whatever, to -- well, first, it enables students to send homework and assignments

electronically.

It also enables teachers to respond electronically, quickly, in a timely way.

Teachers can respond -- well, many ways.

At the word level, at the paragraph level, at the sentence level, at the whole text level as well.

And it includes a grammar component.

So I'd like to demonstrate how I use the markup tool and how it helps students really make

meaningful revisions in their thinking, in their organization, and then eventually in their final products in

standard English.

>> ROSE MARIE TOSCANO: This is a student site, so this is what the student is working from.

And I have four assignments that are connected to a research project that students are required to

do.

So the first part of the research project was the development of a proposal, and that's the first

assignment I'm going to show you, where the student sent it electronically and then I e-mail -- not e-

mailed but responded back in this technology.

And then really focused on the idea development, sort of clarifying thinking.

The student then the next day could revise and send me a second revision and then did some

research, eventually had to outline thinking in that part of the process I was able to sort of influence in a

very detailed way where the thinking was going off.

And then finally, the student submitted a draft, and I was able to comment very specifically on some

surface and sentence-level kinds of things.

So I'm going to be showing you all four of those assignments.

Okay.

So the student sent to me this kind of information.

You don't need to read the whole thing, but just basically that the topic of the research paper is about

improving educational standards and tests in the United States.

The broad topic is education, the main topic is sort of the concerns of the professors of the students'

performance, blah, blah, blah.

This student had a kind of vague idea of what he wanted to do.

It was not very clear at all, okay?

But at this point, I was not going to harp on the grammar or the kind of expression that was going on,

but attend more to the idea of development.

So I sent him back a quick note.

It was immediate, it was realtime, okay?

Talked about the idea, talked about the questions that he did not address, you know, and maybe

some of the areas that he might want to investigate.

And he got some concept clarity.

And the fun part was that I could grade it and that got submitted to the grade book, so it was pretty



automatic and he knew that he did fine with a 10 and I knew that I had put down what he had done.

In the second -- in the revised, I could now kind of focus a little bit more specifically in the sections

instead of sort of the global one, so for each of the questions that he was answering, I could respond

sort of specifically to what I wanted him for pay attention to.

And I have to tell you, as an English teacher -- I must explain the fact that I am not using proper

English here.

You notice I did not capitalize, and I just can't do that and be quick about the typing at the same

time, so I explain that to the students in the class, that not to model my lowercase --

(Laughter).

>> ROSE MARIE TOSCANO: -- stuff.

Okay.

So you see that now it's becoming more and more detailed, and I can offer advice that moves the

process along.

And then in his first -- I think this is his second draft.

They do three drafts for the research paper.

This is the second draft that he sent to me.

Now I'm becoming even more detailed, and I'm going into words, sentence.

I'm underlining that because it's a problem and I want

him to become more concise so I can give him advice about that.

You know, this part seems too detailed, I said.

Get to the real part about the mother.

So I'm able to really help him through that.

And at the same time, you noticed earlier that I'm starting to bring up some grammatical problems that

I saw.

So now, the student has a little bit of a hint that articles are problematic for him.

It's not the only problem area, but I try not to overwhelm and just pick a few of them at one time.

So now the student is guided to some exercises that might help in the understanding of that

grammatical principle.

I don't teach grammar in class.

We don't have enough time.

But I do a lot of grammatical instruction one on one and this is sort of a support to that one-on-one

grammar instruction, so the student has two options.

He can elect to practice with some exercises that I developed, you know, with a consultant, or can link

to the common grammar book that all of the students have.

So I'll show you how the student can practice that.

>> ROSE MARIE TOSCANO: So by the end of the

quarter, I am expecting that the students have  
sort of a list of what their typical problems are.

Some practice and some awareness that that is what  
needs to be edited in their final products.

I'm not expecting that it's going to be perfect, but I'm  
expecting awareness and an approach to

working on that particular problem.

Right now, we have about 18 sort of common problems  
that I see at the college level.

Some of them are basic, like articles.

Others are a little bit more advanced, like comma use.

I know some people are saying what?

That's not really that important.

But for some of the better writers, that has become an  
issue.

So I try to sort of link it up to what applies to the higher  
range, the mid-range, and the weaker writers

as well.

So the Writing Tutor, which is what we call that sort of  
grammar program helps, I think, in an

explanation of what the mistake is, kind of ongoing. An  
example of how to correct it.

And then some exercises.

And the hope is that then the student can go back and  
do their own self-editing, okay?

They also -- I, as the teacher, also have a sense of what

their recurring problem is.

As I said, we have 18 and we're hoping to add some more.

All right.

I know I'm kind of getting to the end, so the last strategy I want to talk about that sort of incorporates

web technology is what is called the web discussion board, okay?

And that is also part of IdeaTools.

This is a public sort of chatroom where students have an opportunity to get involved.

I require this sort of on a daily basis to discuss the readings that they do.

And to practice writing.

Often students do not have a whole lot of experience in doing literary analysis or seeing models of

really strong writing, so this public way of demonstrating writing gives them an opportunity to do that.

It also helps them see the multiple meanings of a text, and often -- at least at the beginning of the

quarter -- students will come and say, "What does it mean, what is it about, what's the story mean?"

Okay?

And it's a hard role to say, "There are many meanings in this text and you have to uncover them like

an onion, you have to peel all the layers to get to sort of the center of the story."

And surprisingly, it also sort of frees the students because this kind of writing is not requiring

grammatical accuracy or, you know, precision and all that.

It really enables them to take risks which I think all of us know that writing to learn is a powerful way to improve writing skill development.

This is the -- these are the web boards that I used this past quarter.

I'm just going to show an example of one of the stories, no. 3, a story of "where are you going?

Where have you been?"

A very, very fascinating story about a young teenage girl who eventually gets raped and kidnapped

and killed and students had a good time discussing it on-line, and I want just to show you the variety of

discussion that can occur.

I set it up and I asked them to do two things.

First was to do kind of an analytical kind of writing, where they had to pick something -- like plot or

symbols or something -- to analyze.

Then another part where they gave reactions, you know, from sort of a -- a reading -- a reader

response kind of reaction.

And the third was to raise a question that they had regarding the text and to provide a response to

one person's questions.

So there was a lot of writing that happened and I am asking students to read all of this prior to coming

into the classroom, so this is happening all before the actual instruction occurs.

I'd like to show you the first example of a student who really sort of struggled with trying to analyze,

but is a good example of venturing past the safety and taking a risk.

There was a real attempt there to try and figure out what the meaning of the story was.

It's very basic, okay?

And after, I think, reading all of the discussions and all of the comments, many of the students came

to class saying, "I thought it was about this, but then I changed my mind and I realized that it's even

more and I, reading all of the discussion, saw what they missed, okay?

So they were all sort of focusing on poor -- poor girl who got raped and girls need to be careful and all

that.

And I could prepare, prior to going into the class, "wait a minute, this is a critique of American society.

This is a very, very superficial kind of girl, you know."

And really kind of expand their discussion of the story, understanding of the story.

I'd like to show you an example of someone who is a pretty good writer and then I have two minutes --

and then could serve as a model.

Thank you, Barry.

So this writer brings up that now we're talking about a struggle with power, okay?

So she's getting closer, closer to the meaning of the story, okay?

And that there's a lot of irony -- irony going on in the story.

So this young woman is bringing up some of the literary elements that I'm hoping everybody will pick

up on.

Then when I go into the class, I can say, "Remember, charity's comment about irony?"

Let's go back and read it."

So then I'll just put this up and we read that and that can be sort of the lead for discussion.

I like to have students be the lead for the discussion.

I don't like to be preaching, you know.

So anytime I could share their writing to do that, I think it's powerful.

And then finally, this whole section was a whole thing on questions that came up about the story and

answers, and it was wonderful because all of that basic stuff that takes so much class time was over.

It was answered right there.

So the students -- this one asked, you know, is this about infatuation, and then the next person

answered and on and on and on and on.

They talked about music, they talked about all of the questions that normally consume a lot of time in the classroom.

I don't have to bother with that, okay?

So for teachers, this interactive system benefits are very clear, okay?

It helps students get through the basic peer instruction is the best strategy.

It helps me preview what to do.

I always require it at least four hours prior to my class.

I read it all, then I prepare real quick to go in and respond.

And it really has moved up the level of discussion in the classroom.

I'm going to stop now.

I do have other slides that show student comments that have been both positive and negative, you know.

The students have been my best critics for this system, and I pay attention, so when they say the videos are too long, I do something about it.

When they say the annotations are helpful, I continue to work with that.

Let me stop and do some questions.

I think I have five minutes.

Any questions?



Yes.

>> AUDIENCE: This looks like an incredible amount of work because you're teaching in the classroom

itself and developing all of the web material, so I'm just curious how many students (inaudible) actually

doing that process for each class.

(inaudible).

>> ROSE MARIE TOSCANO: The question is, this system tends to be a lot of work.

How many students can you handle with all of the feedback and critiquing of work and all that.

I have 30, and it takes a lot of time, yeah.

But I'm sort of committed to it because there is a goal.

They need to graduate.

They need to get into that bachelor's degree program.

They need to do that.

So we spend a lot of time, both on-line and one on one, but it does.

It does take time.

I can't say no to that.

You know.

But I think the benefits are worth it.

I mean I spent a lot of time before and I didn't feel that the benefits were going on, so I prefer to

spend time now that has some positive idea, you know.

And they like it.

You know, our kids now are very technology savvy.

They're not interested in coming into a traditional classroom anymore.

So we have to do it.

(Laughter).

>> ROSE MARIE TOSCANO: Whether we like it or not.

(Laughter).

>> ROSE MARIE TOSCANO: Any other questions?

Yes.

>> AUDIENCE: You said you were using the IdeaTools system.

Is that something that you can buy somewhere?

Is that sold someplace?

>> ROSE MARIE TOSCANO: We're in the process now of sort of discussing how to get it out to the public.

There was a workshop here last Monday, 9 people now have the possibility of using sort of the

license to use that for educational use.

But it's our hope that this will become some free software that you can just download and use and

develop your own course materials with it.

And I'm hoping that the Reading Tutor will become just a stand-alone website that you could just

download and use, either my stories or your own.

>> ROSE MARIE TOSCANO: Yeah, we're not interested in making money on this.

We're just interested in helping people.

Anybody else?

Well, I thank you, and continue to enjoy the tech symposium.

(Applause)

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