

ASSIGNMENT #3

EdTech Exploration Plan

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Introduction

The Beat the Winter Blues 7-Day Challenge course has many opportunities to enhance its delivery by using technology and media. It's primarily a self-development and well-being intervention that is meant to increase the participant's happiness and help guard against depression. As prerequisites, participants learn about character strengths by taking an assessment to determine their top strengths, and learn to identify strengths use in themselves and others (strengths spotting).

There are a number of opportunities to enhance the course delivery with technology and media. Here are some:

- Introducing the course
- Learning about strengths spotting
- Practicing strengths spotting
- Sharing one's signature strengths and how they are uniquely used
- Supporting and sharing experiences during the challenge
- Ensuring understanding of the strengths content

Technology Short List

I've chosen two types of technologies to investigate to help enhance the delivery of the course, text tools and video tools, along with two options for each.

A. Text Tools

A text-based tool can outline examples of the activities participants can do. The benefit of this type of tool is that step-by-step instructions can be detailed, supported by images, and are easily accessed by the participant. A text-based document can quickly show the strengths options so participants can skim the content, make a decision on a top strength for the challenge, then link to additional text to go deeper for more information. Text is good when working with the abstract idea of strengths through the use of language and when explaining step-by-step instructions expressed in a linear sequence. With the addition of background information for those who want further explanations, examples, or a list of frequently asked questions (FAQ). Still images such as diagrams can enhance the text to help understanding of the concepts. Text documents are also downloadable and printable for increasing portability for students. (Bates, p.376)

1. **Infographic creator** – Piktochart, <https://piktochart.com/>. This text and graphic tool is good for creating info charts and text based documents with graphic elements. There are many templates to work with a good ability to customize. It's also fairly easy to use as a beginner and it's free to start.
2. **Business document creator** – Xtensio, <https://xtensio.com/>. This tool is also text based but more focused for the business user wanting more formal

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documents. It's easily used by several team members, and templates can be created and shared with participants. It's easily customizable and you can incorporate multimedia elements within the documents.

B. Video Tools

I feel that video would enhance the activity selection portion of the 7-Day Challenge by showing participants some examples of what others have done, either sparking their creativity or giving them an activity that they can copy. In some cases, it is easier to show an image of an activity around an abstract concept such as 'gratitude' or a 'hope', while providing concrete examples for using these strengths. (Bates, p.393-394)

1. **Audio slide show** – Animoto, <https://animoto.com/>. This slide show video tool is good for providing step-by-step instructions. It uses text over images and music to enhance the end product and comes with many free images, music and resources.
2. **Video** – Canva, <https://www.canva.com/create/videos/>. This video creation tool has templates and a drag and drop system. It was chosen for its ease of use, connection to the other Canva tools such as images, branding templates, and quality of end product.

Resources

Bates, A.W. (2019). *Teaching in a digital age: Guidelines for designing teaching and learning – Second Edition*. Vancouver, BC: Tony Bastes Associates Ltd.

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Assignment #2 - The Problem Statement Activity

Course: I've designed and facilitated a course called Beat the Winter Blues – 7 Day Challenge. Here is a description of the course:

The Beat the Winter Blues 7-Day Challenge - Research shows that using our signature strengths in a new way every day for as little as a week has been found to be the most effective intervention to increase happiness levels AND decrease depression, up to 6 months. (Seligman et al., 2005; Gander et al., 2013, and others) Those that are languishing the most, are the most likely to experience the greatest benefits.

The Beat the Winter Blues 7-Day Challenge combines this effective signature strengths intervention in a way that is unique to everyone in a fun community setting that enables participants to learn more about each other, and from each other, as they move through their daily strengths-based activities. It achieves maximum results, boosting happiness and guarding against depression, in a short amount of time - as little as 7 days. (Niemiec, 2018).

Current Status: I've taught this course in two iterations:

1. Participants were lectured with PowerPoint presentation in a live Zoom webinar with Q & A. They learned about character strengths, the history and benefits of strengths, and shown examples of how to do a 7 Day challenge. This was followed by a downloadable workbook that participants can use to create their own challenge activities. Participants had regular email follow-up to support them in their progress.
2. In a blended learning format with:
 - a. Part A - Introductions to Character Strengths delivered in a face-to-face format with live lecture, PowerPoint, and small group exercises and sharing. Individuals were assigned pre-work of viewing a video on character strengths, and taking a survey assessment to determine their top character strengths to least used. They are led through individually identifying their signature strengths, and a group activity of practicing strengths spotting with well known personalities. This segment was recorded and posted on Youtube for those that wanted to do part B but couldn't make it to Part A.
 - b. Part B – the 7 Day Challenge portion was presented through eLearning in Thinkific with a variety of zoom/PowerPoint mini-lectures of 2 to 5 minutes in length, PDF worksheets to download. Participants had access to emailing the instructor but few did. There were no live elements to this. Part of the program.

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The course has had two parts:

1. The Power of Cultivating Character Strengths – pre-requisite workshop
 - a. Live workshop with a survey for pre-work (VIA Character Strengths survey)
 - b. Power Point presentation, worksheets, discussion
2. Beat the Winter Blues 7-day Challenge
 - a. VIA Character Strengths survey link (pre-work required for the challenge)
 - b. Worksheets for participants, step-by-step instructions provided for PDF download through Thinkific
 - c. Pre and post happiness assessment
 - d. Email support before and during the challenge for employee questions

Note: The Power of Cultivating Character Strengths workshop is a prerequisite for this challenge.

Current students

Currently students for this program are working adults who lead busy lives and have many demands placed on them. They are often experiencing symptoms of depression or dissatisfaction with their lives for various reasons. They are often in times of transition. Three categories emerge: mid-life adults between the ages of 40 and 55, who are experiencing the dip in happiness characteristic of this stage; and 18 to 34-year-olds who are starting out in life and experiencing bouts of anxiety and depression; and those adults who experience the 'winter blues' or seasonal affective disorder during the darker winter months.

Neither delivery method is satisfactory yet as participants encounter these challenges:

- The live zoom webinar method (1) left participants wondering how to create their own activities and they didn't know if they were doing it correctly. They wanted some examples created for them so save them time. The experience was also an individual experience as they only had the instructor to share it with. This type of exercise might be improved as a shared experience.
- The blended learning format was set up by the client in a way that the participants who wanted to go through the 7 Day Challenge didn't necessarily see the recording of Part B. They were at a disadvantage when preparing for the second part. The eLearning format was well laid out but not as engaging as it was again an individual experience. A shared experience might have improved the outcome.
- Feedback was received from the first iteration (Zoom webinar) but not the second (blended sessions) as the client didn't fulfill this portion. Unfortunately, I do not know how participants felt about the eLearning but am guessing based on observation and some emails with participants.

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Why it would be a good candidate for educational technology: I feel that all the elements are there for a good virtual or eLearning course but I'm not satisfied with how it's delivered right now. The course content for choosing a top strength, 7 new activities, and personal reflections is not strong enough yet for a participant to go through it on their own. There are too many questions, and it's confusing as it is. Participants may not finish the entire course which is where they receive the most benefits and there is a lack of social support as they move through the 7-days of challenge.

Resources

Niemiec, Ryan M., *Character Strengths Interventions: A Field Guide for Practitioners*, Boston, MA, Hogrefe, 2018, page 172.