

Beth Owens

Case Study 16

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Reflective Case Analysis

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Beth Owens Case Overview

Beth Owens is eight months into an ID consulting role with State College, a state-supported college with open-enrollment and located in a Colorado downtown metro area. Her task is to analyze and rebuild, as necessary, instruction in the culinary arts program with a focus on improving student retention while producing quality graduates. The program director is a decorated culinary professional, perfectionist, and taskmaster. At this point, the quality of the graduates is not an issue. Quantity is the issue, as retention is a challenge considering the student demographic and the current instructional style.

Key Stakeholders and Primary Concerns

Client:

Dean Carlton Jacobs is a dean with a keen business sense managing a recent reorganization of State College departments. He is very clear on what he wants: increased enrollment and quality graduates whose growing reputation will, in turn, further increase enrollment. His primary focus in regard to increased enrollment is to ensure that enrolled students are retained. “It’s all about including all students and growing enrollments.”(Ertmer, Quinn, Glazewski, 2014, p.162)

Audience/SME:

The role complication in this scenario involves Chef Reiner. Although he is initially approached as the SME with an impressive culinary resume, he will later function as a member of the audience in his position as department director and instructor. He is the SME regarding course design, what has and has not worked in the past, and, subjectively, recent department history. Chef Reiner is also part of the audience as his operation needs to meet the expectations of Dean Jacobs. Chef Reiner is one of the instructors responsible for directly deploying what Beth recommends.

Designer:

Beth Owens is a delightful, newly minted Instructional Designer. She has a quick wit as we see from her characterizing her work with the culinary arts organization to be a “Piece o’ cake!” (Ertmer, Quinn, & Glazewski, 2014, p. 162). Beth understands what Dean Jacobs expects and is in a quandary as to how to remold the program in a manner that Chef Reiner is capable of delivering.

Instructional Design Challenges

Analysis:

The State College culinary arts course structure is producing quality graduates, albeit few, as Chef Reiner’s comment, “96% placement rate, with starting pay up 60% in 5 years” (Ertmer, Quinn, & Glazewski, 2014, p.166), depicts. Consequently, Beth needs to investigate both the validity of that statement and, if accurate, how to keep that quality constant or increasing while attracting and retaining greater quantities of students in the program. Her biggest challenge is to build and implement the changes with the blessing of Chef Reiner. A tall order.

Design:

The base program structure is in place to deliver quality students. Adjustment is required in the area of new student experience management. Chef Reiner’s instructional tactics are reasonable for a high stakes culinary school, but the harshness needs to be tempered for the State College demographic, which is primarily inner city workers attending school on a part-time basis in order to learn a more valuable trade while working a full-time job to pay for this education. The entry-level classes need to be more demographically tolerant while systematically introducing the personal adjustments that each student will need to make in order to be successful in the program.

Development:

Existing course entry structure will need to be rebuilt to better transition the students to Chef Reiner’s high expectations. Beth will also need to investigate the aggregation of data supporting the impact of the personal appearance levels that Chef

Reiner expects. Data documenting how his list of attributes of a quality chef matches with industry norms will better acclimate the students to the environment that Chef Reiner maintains. Content of the course, on the surface, appears adequate. The delivery system of the entry level courses needs to be better attuned to the clientele of State College.

This will be the most challenging aspect of the project as Beth is tasked with changing Chef Reiner's 'baby', and Chef Reiner will undoubtedly be difficult to work with in this area. Beth can expect a plethora of negatives for each and every change that she proposes. Beth may need to 'grease the wheels' by asking Chef Reiner to prepare his favorite meal for herself, Dean Jacobs, and Chef Reiner one evening while they talk through scenarios. Their 'kitchen talk' will be critical to success.

Implementation:

Chef Reiner will need to 'buy in' to scaffolding the transition of student personal appearance from entry in the program to entry into the upper level classes. Beth will play a key role here as she must determine the most effective methods for transitioning the State College demographic to the high expectations of Chef Reiner's course.

Evaluation:

The ultimate measure in the eyes of Dean Jacobs is that the same, or improved, post-graduate opportunities continue to be afforded State College graduates as they are experiencing today while the program enrollment, retention rate, and completion rate trend upward. These are very measureable and objective items which provide a very clear view of the impact of Beth's adjustments.

Designer Constraints and Analysis

Beth's conundrum is much like a situation discussed at my school each year. We have a lead Advanced Placement art instructor, who is also a recognized working artist, whose students have never received anything less than the top score, 5, on their AP submissions. Their weekend art show, which is held at the end of the year in a central

shopping area of the city, outshines many of the professional art displays that grace the space throughout the year. Yet, the art instructor is a taskmaster and few students choose to stay in the program once he has a talk with them regarding their commitment to unique and quality work. In the end, administration continues to support quality over quantity. Sacrificed by this decision are students still in development that would benefit from being ‘pushed’, even if they didn’t have the skills to attain the top level in the current school year.

The major challenge for Beth is how to help Chef Reiner adjust the course structure to maintain the rigor level while encouraging students to stick with the program and successfully attain the bar he has set.

A convincing case can be made using the historical enrollment, retention and placement statistics for the culinary arts courses, so Beth needs to spend some significant time gathering and organizing this data. Plotting this history and projecting it onto the future will remove some emotion from the conversation. Beth will also need to bring her education credentials into play in order to sell the benefits of a student-centered approach in the entry-level courses.

Proposed Solutions

Augment Staff:

An important element of retention is to avoid the ‘shock factor’ early in student careers. In support of this, Chef Reiner should be freed to continue to run his upper-level courses as they are (pending review and validation of his graduate success claims) while State College adds an instructor to address new student courses with a smoother, more student-centered introduction to the culinary standards environment.

Though Beth “sees her primary role as helping faculty members make the transition from traditional teaching methods to more student-centered teaching activities” (Ertmer, Quinn, & Glazewski, 2014, p. 161), this can also be accomplished through instructor replacement. In this case she will transition impressionable students from a student-centered environment with a new instructor to the more intense culinary arts

environment focused on preparing the students for employment in a very competitive industry managed by Chef Reiner.

Pros:

The beauty of having Chef Reiner run only the upper-level courses allows him to spend more time honing his top-level students while new instructors can be brought in with student-centered mindsets to better encourage and prepare the entry-level students for what lies ahead. This will also free Chef Reiner to spend more time networking to expand the number of venues in which to place his graduates.

Cons:

Chef Reiner will not be comfortable releasing control of the culinary arts younglings and he will make the case that the continuity of his heavy influence at each level is key to program success. Dean Jacobs may also not be willing to add an instructor to the smallest program at State College.

Compromisation:

Another option is to allow Chef Reiner to continue to run the tight shop related to courses, restaurant procedures, and artistic meal preparation activities, while Beth works with him to redesign his Behavioral Checklist to provide a structure that allows the students to better understand how to grow into his expectations as opposed to Y/N only feedback.

Pros:

As there is no tampering with the final output of the class, there is no 'breaking' of what is working. Students will respond more favorably to a better scaffolded adjustment to Chef Reiner's expectations.

Cons:

The Chef is not going to be content with any adjustment to his course, especially in an area that he feels compromise will negatively impact student performance

throughout his course. There is a possibility that Chef Reiner's fears are well-founded and the change results in a lower quality 'product' graduating from the course.

Consultant Recommendation

The course adjustment with the highest potential for success is to leave the high-end product (pending review of Chef Reiner claims of graduate success) as is and focus improvement efforts on revising the strategy for managing entry-level students. This consists of adding an instructor with both a demeanor and mindset fixed on helping the students with their transition to the highly competitive culinary industry and the ability to deliver a rebuilt first year curriculum designed to transform their physical appearance in a positive manner. Rather than receiving a low score on a checklist on day 1, with limited feedback, the new material will show the students where they need to be, at all levels of skill and appearance, before entering the upper level culinary courses.

Though Beth's training suggests that moving to a fully student-centered design is the best move educationally, because this program places students directly into a highly competitive workforce, Chef Reiner's simulation of workspace demands is actually critical preparation for the students. Therefore, the mix of instructional designs best fits the needs of State College's students.

To realize Dean Jacob's vision to grow enrollment means that he must also be willing to commit additional staff to support that growth. The major challenge of this strategy is Chef Reiner's response to the 'softening' of entry expectations. Granting Chef Reiner a voice in the construction of that plan, a role in the selection of the new instructor, and the exchanging of his 'drill sergeant' role with new recruits for more time with his top-level students and more time for industry networking provides an acceptable trade-off for all parties involved.

Bibliography

Ertmer, P. A., Quinn, J., & Glazewski, K. (2014). *The ID casebook: Case studies in instructional design* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.