Portfolio Project Reflection Paper

Orientation Course for Fall ENG 090 On-line Students 2010

Julie L. Kling

Trends and Issues in Instructional Design

Professor N. Stone

U.W. Stout

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The instructional design process for the Web CT Orientation Course was influenced largely by the process suggested by Morrison, Ross, and Kemp. This process allowed for reflection upon the learners’ needs as well as the context in which learning would take place. A thorough analysis of the learners and the learning context is presented in the portfolio design itself. Since the Web CT Orientation course is designed to better prepare students for success in ENG 090 Basic Composition, which is a developmental writing course, the task analysis was critical in order to make sure each step needed was covered. Clarity is important when working with developmental education students as these are students who are considered an at risk population for absenteeism and not completing courses. If expectations are clearly stated, developmental students are more likely to succeed. The task analysis presented as a procedural analysis, in line with the peanut butter sandwich model presented in the Morrison, Ross and Kemp text, allows for the detail that is needed.

Feedback from the designer’s ID course instructor indicated that too much detail may have been given in module one, which is the module selected for content development. However, upon consultation with current Board members of the National Association for Developmental Education during the National Conference this past week, the designer decided to leave the majority of detailed steps in the course content while striving to make the enabling objectives less wordy. Therefore, formative evaluation has begun to take place as other experts in developmental education have been consulted. The process outlined by Morrison, Ross, and Kemp stresses the importance of ongoing evaluation. The Web CT Orientation course will be piloted this spring and summer and will allow for student evaluation at the end of each unit. A summary of the formative and summative evaluation process is explained in the evaluation section of the design document.

Gagne’s model of instructional design has been the primary model selected for this course. As stated in the design document, Gagne’s model stresses the importance of systematic feedback to learners and structured, clearly stated objectives. Course terminal objectives have been clearly stated in the form of seven technical cognitive tasks and one affective objective. These objectives form the basis for the course modules. Each module has a clear task(s) that must be successfully completed before moving on to the next module. For example, in model one, students learn how to view, save, and print an assignment file in the Web CT learning management system. The process is demonstrated through a PowerPoint presentation. Students must then apply what they have learned. Once successful, they have opened the document needed for another module. In other modules, students will also have feedback from the instructor.

Decisions made along the way include the decision to continue to stress clarity of steps as noted above. Other decisions made along the way include the reordering of the modules. The ordering of modules will continue to evolve as course content is further developed. The subject matter expert who will be piloting the course beginning in April is wavering and wondering rather module two should be how to use discussion boards or how to send e-mails. The opinion expressed in the last consultation was that module two should be how to use the discussion board. So module one has been designed to lead into module two, how to use the discussion board. However, the placement of modules two and three are still in question. (Which should come first: discussion boards or e-mails?) However, the designer and the subject matter expert do agree on the order of modules four, five, six, seven and eight.

As discussed in the design document, the work of Wadsworth, Hunsman, Duggan and Pennington (2007) has been influential on the design of this course as their research indicates that self –efficacy is a key factor for the success of developmental students enrolled in online courses. All students need feedback, but especially developmental education students. Debate ensued at many of the sessions at the NADE National Conference this week rather developmental students should enroll in online courses at all. The designer of this course feels that it is possible if students are given frequent feedback from the instructor, clearly stated directions and expectations, and opportunities for self-reflection. As mentioned above, the designer has tried to state the objectives and directions clearly and will continue to improve in this area as the course is developed. Students are also given feedback in each module. In the research of Wadsworth, Hunsman, Duggan and Pennington, students were given the opportunity to rate themselves on a scale of 1-10 periodically regarding their comfort level with mathematics. In the Web CT Orientation, students will have the opportunity to rate their comfort level with technology at the beginning and end of the course. In the beginning, a survey will be mailed along with the introductory letter that prepares students for module one. Students will complete the same self-evaluation at the end of the Web CT Orientation course. These self-evaluations relate to the eighth terminal objective, which is an affective objective encouraging student self-reflection on online learning readiness.

The learning theory of Knowles was influential on this course design project as Knowles’ Andragogy acknowledges adult learners and their different needs and backgrounds. Knowles affirms that adults will have different comfort levels and experience with computers and technology. Therefore, this course seeks to “level the playing field” so that all students will enter ENG 090 with some comfort with technology. The subject matter expert consulted, the course designer, and other colleagues have all expressed frustration with having to teach computer skills to students during the first weeks of an online course. If students are comfortable with Web CT before the course begins, students as well as instructors will be able to focus on the subject matter rather than technology issues. A full discussion of student success data and its application to student motivation is discussed in the design document.

The designer of this course has also been influenced by the learning theory of Piaget. It helps to connect what one already knows to existing knowledge. For Piaget, intelligence was based upon how well one adapted to his or her environment. This process of adaptation centered on establishing a balance between what one thinks and his or her environment. As children act in their environments, they encounter new objects, ideas, and concepts. These new ideas are compared with what they already know. These new ideas often create a sense of imbalance when they conflict with or challenge prior knowledge. Piaget believes children make cognitive adjustments themselves. Children are constructivists, which means that if children are to really learn something they have to do it themselves. The designer of this course believes this is true for adults as well.

Both children and adults construct their own knowledge using the processes of assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation is the process by which one approaches new knowledge in light of what they already know. As content for this course is developed, the designer hopes to connect the technological skills, the new knowledge, to what students may already know. For example, in module two connecting discussion boards with face to face class discussions may help students assimilate the idea and purpose of the discussion board in online courses.

The designer of this course has begun to think systematically. As a college instructor, the designer has focused on content. What needs to be taught? What needs to be covered in class today? What have the students learned? The instructional design process takes the “what” and places it in a larger context. This harkens back to Piaget and the constructivist approach: one must have a framework or matrix on which to place knowledge. The instructional designer facilitates that framework so that the knowledge rather it is making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich or uploading a file to Web CT is learned and processed at a deeper level. Hence, Sweller’s cognitive load theory has influenced the designer of the course both in roles as instructor and course designer: keep things simple and strive for clarity so information is learned and retained easily. This is especially important in work with developmental students.

However, the designer, and hopefully, future instructional designer, has begun to see a larger framework for the application of design principles. The designer also sees an application of the design principles for her work as a night auditor at a hotel. The current process for completing the night audit can be made simpler and clearer before a new assistant auditor is trained for the summer season. The current manual is too complex. Last year’s assistant auditor never learned the complete process and never completed a full audit even though he has a degree in accounting. Problem: the manual created by the general manger is wordy and does not communicate the process effectively. Evidence: the course designer/night auditor created her own manual through a trial and error process, and the assistant auditor never completed a full audit. Solution: a new training manual or another type of training needs to be designed.

Even while driving home from the NADE conference today, the designer and fledging ID professional considered a possible opportunity for ID. As Assistant Conference Chair, the designer had opportunity to interact with hotel staff at the conference venue. The designer was impressed with the superior customer service provided by all hotel staff: from the general manager down to the wait staff and front desk personnel. However, the cleaning staff and some of the wait staff did not speak any English. The designer need to speak Spanish on several different occasions to request needed items from the housekeeping and facilities staff. Wrong information was given to diners on several occasions in the hotel restaurant as the wait staff answered “yes” to questions they evidently did not understand. Despite the obvious efforts of the hotel to train employees in customer service, some employees need to improve their English communication skills in order to serve guests. Thinking as an ID professional, the designer believes that here is a need that ID could fulfill. While the hotel takes pride in providing great customer service and appears to have to have an effective training program, the training is not effective for non-English speakers. The problem: customer service is superb in throughout the hotel except with non-English speaking employees. The solution: the designer believers she could fulfill that need by designing an ESL course that would teach the basic English skills necessary to communicate with hotel guests. It is tempting to pick up the phone and talk to the general manager. The designer hopes she is heading in the right direction and beginning to think ID!

# References

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