

Chapter XII

Training Prospective Online Instructors: Theories Utilized by Current Online Instructors

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ABSTRACT

Research shows that training prospective online instructors in an online learning environment is advantageous. One effective training topic is on use of theory when designing curriculum. Information in this study reports what empirical research shows about online instructor use of different design theories. It identifies design theories that have not been researched in regard to online instructor utilization of theory, and it illustrates how frequently online instructors use nine of the design theories.

INTRODUCTION

When training instructors to teach a course online, what should be taught, how should they be instructed, and where should the learning experience take place? Researchers argue that teaching instructors how to design and execute courses in an online learning environment is a most advantageous choice because they encounter similar

perspectives that their own future students will experience. In addition, they go beyond learning the basic 101 instructional aspects and mechanical abilities needed to manipulate a computer management system and teach a course online (Bird, 2007; Cook, 2007).

Considering that there are many facets to instructing a course online, there are just as many topics that can be presented to prospective

online instructors as they participate in training programs aimed at teaching online (Bird, 2007; Dennen, 2007). Dennen (2007) indicated that an instructor persona exists as part of the online discussion in relation to instructor presence (number of posts) and position. Instructors need to learn to be aware of the persona that they present to their students, and they should recognize that student's perceptions of their instructor impacts the learning experience. Bird (2007) presented a design model for e-learning and discussed theoretical underpinnings of utilizing a design model. Mimirinis and Bhattacharya (2007), based on results from their study on deep learning in virtual learning environments, also noted the importance of course design and highlighted the need for students to reflect, inquire, analyze, and synthesize for deep learning.

Research in the field has shown us that an increasing number of individuals have chosen distance education when taking a course or earning a degree because it is a flexible alternative that meets their needs (Chu & Hinton, 2001; Course-Management systems, 2005). We also know from research that there are advantages to taking an online course, and there are challenges that students and instructors must overcome (Figueroa & Huie, 2001; King, 2001; Northrup, Lee, & Burgess, 2002; Prester & Moller, 2001). Another training topic appropriate for prospective online instructors is on use of theory to guide the development of effective courses so that needs can be met, advantages can be recognized, and challenges can be overcome.

In a study conducted by Ciccirelli (2006), information on online instructor use of theory when designing a course is presented. Data from the study was used to answer the three following questions: (a) According to empirical evidence, what does the research show about online instructor use of different design theories? (b) According to lack of empirical evidence, which design theories have not been researched in regard to online instructor utilization of theory? And (c)

According to a recent study, how frequently do online instructors use nine of the design theories? Information that answers these three questions can be used when training prospective online instructors on the use of theory to design an effective online course.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are three schools of psychology in which theories are categorized; Behaviorism, Cognitivism, and Humanism. It is believed that one school of theory is not better than the other, and individuals are encouraged to apply the theory that is the most appropriate for the student (Pinar, Reynolds, Slatery, & Taubman, 1996; Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2000; Tomei, 2007).

Behaviorism, Cognitivism, and Humanism

Behaviorism

Experimental psychologists William James and Edward L. Thorndike questioned the use of memorization as a strategy for learning. Experiments that they conducted showed that memory did not increase after the participants had memorized sets of information. These results guided a turn in research toward stimulus-response behavioral psychology. James and Thorndike believed that the environment served as a stimulus, and it could be used to change the way individuals responded. As Behaviorism became more established as a part of the school of psychology, psychologists began to focus on individual's responses to feedback when they performed a task. Other behavioral psychologists that have made contributions to the field of behavior psychology include Ivan Pavlov, B. F. Skinner, Albert Bandura, and Benjamin Bloom (Pinar et al., 1996; Joyce et al., 2000; Ciccirelli, 2007).

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