


Chapter 6

Recognizing Curricular Infusions in Extant Online Learning Contents by Types and at Varying Scales

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ABSTRACT

Online learning exists in a dynamic environment, with changing research, applicable laws and policies, pedagogical approaches, and technologies. The changing external environment necessarily informs the curriculum given the need for learning relevance. Curricular infusions (CIs) occur as a practical method of integrating new elements into extant learning: values, ethics, thinking, knowledge, worldviews, practices, tools and technologies, and other elements. These infusions may occur at the most granular level of the learning object all the way to learning disciplines and domains. The method of curricular infusion enables adaptivity to occur with online learning without having to rebuild learning from scratch, so infusions could be additive to particular learning sequences or integrated with the learning objects, and other aspects of designed online learning. This work explores some of the prior research into curricular infusions and introduces some basic ways to reverse engineer curricular infusions in extant online learning.

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INTRODUCTION

The moment an online learning object or module or course or program or discipline is created, it starts to date out, sometimes gradually, sometimes precipitously. Parts of the learning contents become less relevant to contemporaneous learners. The pedagogical approaches leave a feeling that the learning is designed for other learners, maybe those of a different generation or background or culture. New ethical guidelines in the domain go unaddressed. The technologies start to show their age, or they fail to function altogether. “Curricular infusion” (CI), integrating new learning contents into existing learning contents, programs, and practices, may be a fairly low-cost way to revise and update such contents, without requiring fundamental redesigns. These are popular approaches because of the lighter footprint and lesser costs for such piecemeal updating. CI enables working through campus politics and “presents a viable, cost effective method because it obviates obstacles and limitations inherent in the creation, approval, and implementation of new courses of purely international focus” (Guerin, 2009, p. 613).

The idea of curricular infusions had its apparent heyday back in the 1960s (Figure 1), but it’s a concept and a practice whose time has arrived again. The rising line graph presages a powerful future for this practice in addition to the efficiencies of this approach.

Curricular infusions are seen as practical in enabling “a viable, cost effective method because it obviates obstacles and limitations inherent in the creation, approval, and implementation of new courses” focused on the topic (Guerin, 2009, p. 613). This cost savings also extends to institutional levels, such as the infusing of international perspectives across a range of core curriculums, disciplines, and

Figure 1. “Curricular Infusion” in Google Books Ngram Viewer



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