


Chapter 1

A Tale of Two Occupational Health and Safety Programs

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ABSTRACT

This is an experience-based examination of the contrast between cognitive and affective outcomes in two programs within the same field. Both programs are delivered online without explicit instructional leadership, making them comparable with respect to delivery methodology. Conclusions drawn from the instructional design perspective expose the intrinsic difference between these two different types of outcomes, reflected not just in the delivery of training but also in appropriate methods of evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

I hadn't thought much about affective outcomes before encountering Sarah Sniderman's call for chapters. Most of my work as an instructor and designer of instructional programs has taken place within the realm of applied technology, where outcomes are things like mastering iterative loops. The student's emotional

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disposition with respect to loops is not at issue on the final exam, only whether they possess the required skill.

Then it struck me how two Occupational Health & Safety (OH&S) programs I had recently worked on as instructional designer exemplify the distinction between affective outcomes and the cognitive ones, I was more familiar with. At that point I knew I had a story to tell. It surprised me how deep the story turned out to be.

Given my previous experience as both facilitator and instructional designer, I was especially challenged to consider how one might evaluate an affective outcome, as assessment is obviously critical in the context of ensuring health and safety in the workplace.

However, I also realized even fact-based learning is never wholly devoid of affective intentions; at the same time, it is hard to influence attitudes without teaching any knowledge or skills. Grappling with the differences between a dominantly affective program and a dominantly cognitive one proved complex, until I realized there are qualitative differences that shift the emphasis from performance testing for achievement of outcomes to the proper integration of goals with instructional methods and the nature of the students themselves.

Let me lay the groundwork by describing the two programs concerned, both of which relate to OH&S, a discipline committed to the mitigation of risk to employees in the workplace.

UNBC's OH&S Certificate

The *Occupational Health and Safety Certificate* offered by Continuing Studies at UNBC (Continuing Studies, University of Northern BC, n.d.) is a popular, ten-course program that fulfills the educational requirement of the Canadian Registered Safety Technician (CRST) certification offered by the Board of Canadian Registered Safety Professionals. It is also accepted for laddering into the University of New Brunswick's diploma in Occupational Health and Safety.

Students are typically looking for a first job in occupational health and safety, with no prior experience, or sometimes transitioning into an OH&S role with their employer after working for many years. The only prerequisites are a grade 12 reading level and computer literacy skills, which the student is advised to assess for themselves before enrolling in the program.

To satisfy the roles required of it, the certificate delivers on learning outcomes of a concrete and practical nature within the regulatory framework of Canada. It is pitched at an introductory level of awareness and competence. For example, the course *Occupational Health & Safety Fundamentals* includes the outcome that a student will "recognize where Canada's privacy laws might apply in the workplace."

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