Chapter 8
Evolving Practice for Training Online Designers and Instructors

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ABSTRACT

Online courses place greater responsibility and demands on both the instructor and students compared to traditional face-to-face courses. Online instructors and designers are often given checklists of required or best online teaching practices to help them meet the challenge. But these checklists tend to assume that online courses fall into a single model that is independent of course goals and of the unique teaching style and strengths of the online instructor. This chapter presents the author’s methods and values in training online instructors and designers. Conventional online instruction model aside, the focus is on helping the instructor and designer identify salient aspects of the course, the students, and the instructor. The chapter presents methods, content, and values that may to be less known, less understood, or difficult to implement for new designers and instructors. Each model builds on elements such as student interests, deep engagement, group collaboration, and practical assessment.

INTRODUCTION

From complete online degree programs to simple classroom flipping, the instructor of an online experience often serves as the instructional designer as well. For this reason, the chapter addresses training in both online design and instruction. The author has taught the chapter’s methods and content to new online designers and instructors in both online and face-to-face formats; many of those students now teach online, and some direct entire university online programs. Before they try to design or teach online, they need to experience a variety of online course designs and teaching/learning methods. As they decide how their strengths can best meet differing student needs, they also need to learn how designers and instructors can fail their students through ignorance of the expected challenges in creating and delivering a successful learning experience. Finally, they need to know how to select and implement specific
technologies that are a good fit for their course goals and for the instructor, students, and institution. The quote from a student in an international graduate course (described below in Case Study #1) suggests that the authors' methods created a memorable learning experience.

Thank you for providing such an innovative learning opportunity in this course. Using audio and video conferencing was not only contextual and appropriate, but also delightful! I also appreciated your timely feedback on papers and your flexibility with scheduling.

And, thank you to my partners in peer reviews and collaborative [Thoughtful Questions]? I appreciated your thoughtful feedback and support throughout the semester.

Finally, to everyone in the class: I’ve enjoyed reading your TQs and hearing your voices! What a wonderful international community of learners!

— Lynn from Nagoya, Japan (just turned 50) (personal communication, 2003)

BACKGROUND

Focus on Online Learning or Online Teaching?

An appropriate question for the beginning of this discussion is whether online instructor training should focus more on online teaching or on online learning. While some may argue that effective learning depends on effective teaching, others such as Ackoff and Greenberg (2008) suggest that the emphasis on teaching over learning is a fundamental error in contemporary education. Following this meme, major universities such as Purdue and Penn State changed degree and course names from instructional design to learning design. Extending the meme, Malamed (2015) received praise from practicing designers when she suggested that the designer of an online course, rather than be called an instructional designer, could be called a Learning Experience (LX or LEX) Designer. She advanced three arguments for this change. First, LX focuses on the learner, whose needs must drive the design. Second, LX draws from the body of cognitive psychology and neuroscience research of how people actually learn. Third, LX properly focuses on the experiences through which learning is designed to occur more than on a subject-centric outline of content. Course design, from the perspective of an LX designer, looks like a sequence of carefully crafted learning experiences. In other words, the emphasis is more on the power of the individual learning experiences than on the precisely articulated sequence of content. The specific nature of the learning experience depends on the nature and goals of the online course.

Nature and Goals of Online Courses (Variety of Online Course Goals)

Gagné (1985) long ago suggested that instructional design can address three kinds of learning: knowledge (like history), skills (like mathematics), and attitudes (like art and poetry appreciation). For example, a recent industrial client of the author requested the first of a series of planned courses be designed to change worker attitudes and hopefully behavior related to sexual harassment. Many instructional design models assume that there are correct “answers” for the course content that are known in advance. Design-
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