Chapter 4
Facilitating Student Empowerment and Agency Through the “Scaffolded Autonomy” Approach to Curriculum Design

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors introduce, define, and describe an approach to designing and implementing learning activities. This approach involves learners in the collaborative design of curriculum and assessment and allows them to apply their background knowledge and interests to course content. Through intentional course design and implementation by course instructors and designers, the “Scaffolded Autonomy” model the authors present allows learners to choose when and how they demonstrate content-knowledge construction. In this nontraditional approach, the authors focus on the “what, how, and why” of instructional design in order to provide relevant and meaningful instruction that serves adult learners in a variety of contexts.

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of institutional contexts. This chapter includes the theoretical foundations of the scaffolded autonomy approach, a description of the design and implementation of the scaffolded autonomy approach, and examples of how the scaffolded autonomy can be applied in a competency-based classroom.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the authors introduce, define, and describe an approach to designing and implementing learning activities. This approach involves learners in the collaborative design of curriculum and assessment and allows them to apply their background knowledge and interests to course content. Through intentional course design and implementation by course instructors and designers, the “Scaffolded Autonomy” model the authors present allows learners to choose when and how they demonstrate content-knowledge construction, allowing them considerable autonomy and control that maximizes student motivation and engagement. The element of choice is a key aspect of empowerment and validation in the emancipatory classroom, which contributes positively to social justice inside the higher education institution, but also promotes the validation of learners as constructors of knowledge in their lives (Schneider, 2010). This chapter will describe the theoretical foundations of the “Scaffolded Autonomy” model (hereafter referred to as the SA model), describe how the SA model is designed and implemented, and provide examples of how the model can be applied in a competency-based classroom. The authors provide examples of how to implement SA while managing the course-related administrative workload of professors without sacrificing depth and breadth of learning opportunities throughout a course.

By introducing this nontraditional approach, the authors focus on the “what, how, and why” of instructional design in order to provide relevant and meaningful instruction that serves adult learners in a variety of institutional types. This chapter will be appropriate for higher education practitioners, faculty in a variety of disciplines, and urban/community developers who are designing instruction that can be applied in a variety of formats in order to allow learners to direct when and how they apply course knowledge to their own lives.

The objective of this chapter is to introduce, define, and describe a theoretical and philosophical framework for designing instruction and authentic assessment.
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