Innovative Learning Design Integrating Pedagogical, Social, and Motivational Learning

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Ragan (2017) contended that the goal of designing an online learning environment is to empower online learners to take responsibility for managing their own learning experience and free instructors to concentrate their time and energy on facilitating a truly engaged learning experience. As Kearsley (2012) observed, “the most important role of the instructor in online classes is to ensure a high degree of interactivity and participation” (p. 78). This implies designing content that drives learners to actively interact with the subject matter and fellow learners, as well as assessments and activities that are application-based and cognitively engaging. An abundance of literature indicates that effective online course designers consider learner-centered pedagogical approaches using active learning strategies and meaning-making using modern technologies (Christensen & Osguthorpe, 2004; Crews et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2015; Nash, 2015; Scoppio, 2017). These principles of design have been integrated into online degree business program along with the 7Cs framework.

Master of Business Administration – Online Degree Program

The Master of Business Administration (MBA), which refers to an internationally recognized degree designed to prepare students and further develop their required skills for careers in business and management, has been recognized as one of the most popular professional degrees worldwide since the last few decades (Baruch & Leeming, 2001). Today's typical full-time MBA program is structured around three key areas: core courses, elective courses, and extracurricular activities including professional and social clubs as well as immersion and business consulting experiences. The MBA by nature is interdisciplinary as the
core courses range from Accounting, Economics, Finance, Marketing, Management, and Information Systems with electives occurring within these core areas along with other Colleges across the higher education institution. Overall, MBA students have incredible and diverse learning opportunities to promote themselves as business leaders that are able to handle the legal, ethical, social, and environmental responsibility ramifications of business decision-making.

A College of Business Administration (CoBA) at a state university is dedicated to creating competitive Online MBA to meet the needs of students, employers, and faculty by creating Responsible Leaders. Responsible leaders engage in reflexive practices and aspire to upholding a “responsible” mindset (Eriksen & Cooper, 2016). This mindset is based on the responsible leader possessing the ability to intentionally respond to others within the unfolding ethical and moral situations they find themselves in and make “moral and principled decisions by considering their impacts on others” (Pless and Maak, 2011, p. 8). To create responsible leaders the Online MBA utilizes a variety of learning design elements to promote deep learning. Each course in the program is unique, but all courses focus on collaborative learning based on the 7Cs of learning design (Conole, 2015) to create an innovative learning design framework.

7Cs Framework

The 7Cs framework developed by Professor Gráinne Conole and her colleagues provides a tool for discussing learning designs for online learning environments. Integrating the 7Cs into the Online MBA allows for adaptive learning designs and personalized learning paths that are essential in supporting students’ in their individual learning processes. The 7Cs framework shifts the focus away from content to creating a learner-centered experience based on a shared vision, activities, synthesis, and implementation. These four categories support each of the seven stages of the model”
• Conceptualize: What is the vision for the learning intervention, who is it designed for, what is the essence of the intervention and what pedagogical approaches are used?

• Capture: What resources are used and what other resources need to be developed?

• Create: What is the nature of the learning intervention the learners will engage with? What kinds of learning activities will the learners engage with?

• Communicate: What types of communication will the learners use?

• Collaboration: What types of collaboration will the learners engage in?

• Consider: What forms of reflection and demonstration of learning are included? Are the learning outcomes mapped to the activities and assessment elements of the learning intervention?

• Consolidate: How effective is the design? Do the different elements of the design complement one another?

Vision

During the shared vision stage, the conceptualization of the course is created through a collaborative partnership. Researchers analyzed online design and pedagogical practice and found that a collaborative instructional design partnership between faculty and team members provided positive outcomes for course development (Brown, Eaton, Jacobsen, Roy, & Friesen, 2013; Grincewicz, 2014, 2012; Puzziferro & Shelton, 2008). A sound instructional design team brings extensive online teaching experience, educational technology experience, discipline experience, institutional knowledge, and leadership experience to the collaborative team.
It is the robust nature of this team, as well as the resources that institutions can often offer toward the design, that promote significant learning experiences within the course design. An abundance of literature indicates that effective online course designers consider learner-centered pedagogical approaches using active learning strategies and meaning-making using modern technologies (Christensen & Osguthorpe, 2004; Crews et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2015; Nash, 2015; Scoppio, 2017). Instructional designers use a variety of instructional design models, methods, and theories as a foundation for designing effective learning environments. These instructional methods act as a compass to design the instruction and learning environment, as well as to promote significant learning.

**Leaner-Centered Activities**

The second stage of the 7C framework focuses on designing the resources and activities that the Online MBA students engage with through Create, Communicate, Collaborate, and Consider as the four Cs. During Create the team articulates what learning materials need to be created, whether these are text-based, interactive multimedia materials, narrated presentations, podcasts or videos. The Communicate C is concerned with methods to facilitate communication between the learners and the educator, peer communication and communication between the learning group and the broader community through social media. This might range from mechanisms for fostering discussion in a forum, through moderation, or looser communication through social media. Similarly, the Collaborate C is about fostering mechanisms to enable collaboration or group work. Finally, the Consider is concerned with ways learner reflection and demonstration of learning achievements can be promoted. These are typically assessment-related learning outputs. Assessments might be diagnostic, formative or summative. Create,
Communicate, Collaborate, and Consider have enabled a variety of pedagogical, social, and motivational learning to occur within the courses. Creating learning situations where knowledge can be acquired, organized, and applied, then, is a vital consideration for business educators.

**Instructivism**

Instructivism also referred to as direct instruction is instructor-centered rather than the instructor being a facilitator of learning. Even further, “according to instructivist principles, learning flows in a mostly unidirectional path, proceeding from the knowledgeable authority (teacher), or from instructional content, to the passive learner,” (Diaz & Bontenbal, 2000, p. 52). The instructor is the authority and learning is a passive process where learners absorb the content through four phases of instruction: presentation, practice, assessment, and monitoring (Huit, Monetti, & Hummel, 2009).

Several courses within the Online MBA focus on direct instruction including Operations, Services, and Supply Chain Management, Managerial Economics, and Financial Accounting for Decision Making. Each of these courses includes narrated presentations created by the faculty developer to more deeply explain the materials, add emphasis, and/or compile ideas to assist students with mastering the material. Following high-quality initial instruction, educators administer a formative assessment (Bloom, Hastings, & Madaus, 1971) that identifies precisely what students have learned well and where they still need additional work. The formative assessments include feedback on where learners are struggling and excelling. Bloom believed that nearly all students, when provided with the more favorable learning conditions of mastery learning, could truly master academic content (Bloom, 1976; Guskey, 1997). Although exam questions are multiple-choice, they provide a reasonable amount of critical thinking and require
graduate-level analytical skills, as some questions require students to apply their own analysis first, using various models learned in the class, to find the best response

**Constructivism**

The courses that utilize the instructivist pedagogical framework also include student-student interactions to support the constructivist framework. In the constructivist approach, the learner constructs new knowledge through a process of analyzing new information and comparing it to previous knowledge. Interactions with a learning environment provide the stimulus for learning through cognitive conflict as learners continually compare new knowledge with old knowledge and make a determination concerning which is more valuable (Duffy & Jonassen, 1992). Constructivist learning environments present the learner with opportunities to build on prior knowledge and understanding to construct new knowledge and understanding from authentic experience. Driscoll (2005, pp. 394-395) recommends using the following five principles in developing constructivist learning environments: 1) embed learning in complex, authentic environments 2) utilize social integration to promote learning 3) support multiple perspectives while using multiple representation forms 4) encourage learning ownership and 5) encourage knowledge construction.

Two courses that highlight the constructivist framework in different ways are Global Conditions and Macroeconomic Policy and Human Resource Management. Global Conditions and Macroeconomic Policy utilizes the discussion board in two ways: opened discussions and workshops. The discussions and workshops require students to synthesize the information presented within the module. The discussion prompts include open-ended application questions to encourage students to take a deeper dive. The discussion prompts during weeks 2, 4, 5, and 7 ask students to provide a supported opinion that highlights their ability to critically think in the
formation of their opinion. In addition, the discussions in weeks 4 and 7 ask students to find a recent article on economic issues to summarize and discuss. Moreover, the discussion prompts in weeks 1 and 3 ask students to relate the information from Modules 1, 2, and 6 to their personal life. Finally, students provide their own analysis of various economic policies in weeks 5 and 7 workshops. On the other hand, students in Human Resource Management conduct debates where the debate arguments are formulated within groups. After the debate lead group has posted their arguments, the other groups will respond to these arguments by asking the debate group questions. At the end of the debate, the each member of the lead debate group will post a reflection.

**Case-Based Learning**

Case-based learning (CBL) has been extensively used in several areas of professional education such as law, medicine, clinical health, and business as an alternative to the traditional lecture as an instructional method (Artan, 2007; Garvey, O’Sullivan & Blake, 2000; Marcus, Taylor, & Ellis, 2004; Williams, 2004). This instructional method is prevalent for teaching and learning in a business school context in particular. Instructors use business cases as the foundation of their teaching across the curriculum (Magjuka, Liu, & Lee, 2006).

CBL has advantages over direct instruction, such as students being actively engaged and focused on higher-order learning. When students analyze cases, they do not write summaries, essays, or executive summaries. They do not regurgitate case facts. A case analysis is a specific evaluation technique used to understand a firm’s problems and a way to come up with solutions to these problems.
The practical application of skills and knowledge learned in a business school is a key consideration for MBA students as well as their instructors and designers. The review of prior studies on case-based learning in online environments implies that three aspects of online learning should be considered: (1) instructional design for case development and delivery; (2) facilitation for student engagement in online learning; and (3) technology support for effective case-based activities. From a perspective of instructional design, developing well-designed learning materials and activities is critical to effective teaching and learning. Several courses within the Online MBA utilize cases including the Capstone course that utilizes several Harvard Business cases.

Reflective Learning

Reflective learning has three components: learning from experience, thoughtful deliberation and systematic, critical and creative thinking about action with the intention of understanding its roots and processes. Schon (1983) defines reflective practice as: “The capacity to reflect on action so as to engage in a process of continuous learning.”

During Leadership and Managerial Assessment engage in reflection by following Kolb’s experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984). A core principle of Kolb’s work is that learners learn through discovery and experience. The four aspects of the learning cycle are:

- Concrete experience—where the student is assigned a task with a focus on active learning.
- Reflective observation—where the student steps back and reflects on his or her learning.
• Abstract conceptualization—where the student makes sense of what has happened; this involves interpreting the events and understanding the relationships between them.

• Active experimentation—where the student considers how he or she is going to put what he or she has learned into practice.

Motivational and Pedagogical Learning

The program has two concentrations, where each concentration has a unique learning design. The Business Analytics concentration focuses on gamified learning. The use of gamified learning has increased within the educational community over the last decade in an attempt to enhance student learning in multiple ways. Gamification involves integrating gaming-principles into non-game settings like education to engage people, motivate action, promote learning, and solve problems. Gamification elements draw on human needs to collect, compete and succeed. The group activities in the analytics courses are being gamified to promote competition and collaboration. These courses focus on providing students with information to make strategic business decisions by developing the following skills: technical, analytical, communication, decision-making and leadership.

Second, in developing a Supply Chain Management (SCM), personalized learning was incorporated into each of the three courses. Walkington and Bernacki (2014) frame different approaches to personalization as differing on three key dimensions. First, personalization can occur at variable degrees of depth, which captures the extent to which instructional tasks take into account and capture the lived, authentic experiences of learners. Second, personalization can occur at different grain sizes where the experience is personalized for each learner individually, for small groups of learners matched on specific dimensions, or larger groups based on more
general parameters. And finally, personalization can vary with respect to ownership – the degree to which learners are given control and choice in the learning situation.

The SCM courses are offered as electives in the MBA as well as students from other programs may take these courses if they are interested in the field of supply chain management. These courses are beneficial to students entering any field of work, as decision making subject to a finite set of resources occurs in both for profit and nonprofit organizations in the manufacturing and service sectors. As supply chains become global, managers have to consider cultural, regulatory, and communication differences to create and operate within the global village. The courses cover a wide range of outcomes such as immersing students into responsible supply chain practices around the globe. Each course contains foundational materials and resources, but students are encouraged to find their own materials based on their own unique needs. The goal of the courses is to provide an online learning environment that combines structured learning with the flexibility and personalization that PLE offers.

**Synthesis and Implementation**

The final two Cs: Combine and Consolidate round out the learning design by having the design team reflect on the variety of learning designs. The Combine C enables the educator/designer to step back and reflect on the design process to date and look at the design from different perspectives. Finally, the Consolidate C is about implementing the design in a real-life context and evaluating its effectiveness.

**Discussion**

In summary, a key educational challenge of online courses and programs is how to develop pedagogically effective technologically mediated environments that enhance the quality of education (Benbunan-Fich & Hiltz, 1999). It is recommended that online instructors,
instructional designers, and support staff acknowledge that the success of online business courses depends not on merely introducing advanced technology tools or systems by themselves but also on integrating appropriate uses of pedagogy in business contexts. The Online MBA provides a diverse set of experiences to achieve mastery of student outcomes based pedagogical, motivational, and social learning aspects of design.