Creating Effective Instructional Design: Feedback Loops And Habitus

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Creating an effective instruction design for an online course requires an analysis of the feedback loops embedded throughout the course and the foundational element of habitus. Current literature acknowledges the framework of the instructional design as a key necessity for online success (Merrill, 2006). Feedback loops grab data at different intervals of the learning process within the instructional design. Each loop returns information on the interactions and knowledge-building relationship between the student and the content, the student and the instructor, and the student and his peers. Feedback loops enhance teaching and learning, provide motivation and coaching, inspires hope and confidence (Sadler, 1998), enhance a learner’s self-evaluative capabilities (Price, Handley & Miller, 2011) and are considered one of the most powerful influences on how people learn (Hattie, 2012). Like a roadmap for the learner and teacher, feedback loops provide evidence, relevance, consequence, and action (Goetz, 2011). Underpinning the instructional design is the theory of habitus, which impacts an individual's propensity for learning institutional and organizational designs for learning and teaching.

Instructional experiences which make the acquisition of knowledge and skill more efficient, effective, and appealing. Merrill, Drake, Lacy, and Pratt (1966) affirmed that instructional design creates learning experiences and learning environments. Merrill’s instruction design components involved teaching and learning instructionally designed around a problem-centered, real-world task. Merrill’s (2006) five principles of instruction include the principles of demonstration, application, activation, integration, and task-centered engagement.

New technologies bring additional challenges to embedding feedback loops into the instructional design. Text, audio, video, images, as well as augmented reality (AR) and virtual realities (VR), must each include a feedback loop from the learning and the teaching environments. The ASSURE model (Smaldino, Lowthere, & Russell, 2008), ADDIE instructional design model and other instructional design models include assessment, evaluation, and the inclusion of feedback, they do not specifically look at the inclusion of feedback within individual components of feedback related to new technologies. AR handheld displays and world-fixed displays allow the learner to keep one foot in the real world while venturing two steps into an augmented virtual world. While the traditional classroom and the instructor may be present, the capturing of feedback within the augmented, virtual world is problematic unless the instructional design has allotments for measuring this feedback from the student within these environments. VR is even more problematic as the learner now has both feet (and often hands) immersed within a virtual world; as the learner maneuvers this learning environment, he is at the mercy of the software design and not within earshot of the instructor or the traditional learning environment. New instructional design models that employ a wide variety of relevant feedback loops, visual, auditory, social, and academic need to be re-examined. Dregg, Grover, & Kacierek (2010) contend, “Faculty teaching practices must be carefully evaluated in order to ascertain if faculty are creating an online learning environment that promotes interaction, communicating effectively with students, and providing adequate and timely feedback.

Internal and external feedback loops within a digital setting need to be established to allow for interaction and ultimately academic success. Whether the feedback is ensconced in the pedagogical methods and strategies of the instructor or is embedded within the instructional design of the course, it functions as a necessary communication component. When the feedback is looped and measured, it becomes a mechanism that can assess student achievement, engagement, and motivation. Feedback loops force all parties--the learner, the instructor, and ultimately the institution--to analyze and evaluate its purpose in the symbiotic educational environment. When each loop communicates the needs of the learner and the instructor, it creates a mutually beneficial tool garnering data to implement future change within the classroom practices of the instructor and the instructional design of the course. Each feedback loop lends itself to the essential understanding of course goals and student insights by creating communication channels between the instructor and the content, the instructor and the students, the students to their peers, and the students to the content, and finally, the course to the institution. Feedback loops foster interactions between students, instructors, and peers, and each with content (Moore, 1989). The course is a feedback loop because it answers the question, “What am I supposed to do with all of this information?” The result should be that the course leads students to action.

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As blended and online learning can pose difficulties for learners, the feedback loop captures the strengths and deficiencies within the course, and seeks to offer suggestions as to how students might learn to adjust to using new media under different paradigms and how instructors must adapt pedagogies, methods, and attitudes to the new media, recognizing that the new media is a possible vehicle for improving teaching and learning. As instructors adjust, they must also fashion their courses with viable feedback loops to encourage a dialogic process that does not solely respond to a conflict or disruption in the educational process but rather focuses on continuous improvement.

Learners advance along proposed academic paths through feedback. In a learning context, feedback can be used to improve the educational output of teaching and learning. In educational settings, feedback occurs from instructors, mentors, and peers. This can occur formally, such as formative or summative assessments, or informally during conversations or other similar means. Getzler, Perry, Toffner, Lamarche, and Edwards (2009) define feedback “as information provided from instructors to students about course activities in which students were engaged, including written assignments, conference postings and course interactions (p. 3).

Feedback is just not a technical process but it serves as communication to the learner, it has motivational and coaching value, and it inspires hope and confidence in the student (Sadler, 1998). Bain and Swan (2011) summarize research about feedback and note the qualities of effective feedback that include feedback from multiple sources, including peers, timely, accurate, positive, specific, corrective, focused and concrete. This is consistent with guidance for practitioners that feedback to students is “descriptive, constructive, frequent, and timely” (Chappuis, Stiggins, Arter & Chappuis, 2006, p. 124.)

Schimmel (1988) categories feedback into four separate areas: confirmation feedback, correct response feedback, explanatory feedback, and bug-related feedback. In confirmation feedback, the instructor simply confirms the answer is correct or incorrect. In confirmation feedback, students are presented the correct feedback whether the student provided a correct or incorrect answer. In explanatory feedback, the instructor provides specific guidance to help the student’s thinking move toward the desired answer. In bug-related feedback, the instructor provides feedback to correct the student’s misunderstanding of the learning concept. Like all other social interactions, feedback does not occur in distinct categories and frequently Schimmel’s categories are mixed in a single communication.

Without modification from feedback, teaching and learning occur on unchanging tracks. Action occurs in the direction guided by the feedback; this, feedback becomes iterative as the learners understanding moves closer to desired outcomes. Like the feedback in an electrical amplifier, feedback becomes a loop. Information is returned into the process for change toward desired learning goals or output expectations. Goetz (2011) describes the components of a feedback loop: evidence, relevance, consequence, action. In the evidence stage in learning, students demonstrate their learning through artifacts (e.g., verbal responses, board work, written work, etc.). The instructor reviews the students’ work, immediately or during a grading cycle and responds to the students in a meaningful fashion to them: relevance. Further, the instructor’s guidance and direction “illuminate one or more paths ahead” (para. 8). Finally, the students must act to make changes in their understandings. The loop begins with students providing evidence of their learning. Like in electronics, the impact is an amplified student learning. For feedback to be effective in an educational setting, it must bring action, the feedback loop.

An individual’s propensity for learning is sculptured by the theory of *habitus*, which is more readily explained as “the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them” (Wacquant 2005, as cited in Navarro 2006, p. 316). Yet, when the already sculptured individual enters a classroom, he enters into another *habitus*, and in higher education, this *habitus* is generally one in which he has chosen to engage and learn. Because of this, his predilections can often become as malleable as pliant clay through his eagerness to learn. As a result, even though the individual carries with him a personal *habitus* of “deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that we possess due to our life experiences,” he opens his mind up to the concept gaining the cultural capital of that organization’s institutional *habitus* (Bourdieu, 2005).

To better visually this environment, one needs to examine the theory of *habitus* as it can apply to virtual learning spaces when knowledge is exchanged in an academic nature. Mauss (1934) defined the theory of *habitus* as those aspects of culture that are anchored in the body or daily practices of individuals, groups, societies, and nations. Another assertion of *habitus* views each learning environment as consisting of the set of dispositions, which result in practices, and representations that an individual can adapted to his environment with bias (Bourdieu, 1990). Combining what Mauss and Bourdieu assert translates to cultural practices (such as the inclusion of core values) which expedite, but do not compromise, the end result of the teaching experience. In addition, Bourdieu further identified the theory of *habitus* as the system transposable dispositions and principles, which generate and organize practices necessary by a group.
To the 21st century online academic community, the *habitus* of the learning environment can be used to explain the hidden agenda and the unique standards of core values, which can build the framework for academic interactions and knowledge exchanges. Within each blended or online environment, which is governed by the theory of *habitus* (Luke 2005), lies a hidden agenda. Hidden curricular issues are practices that may or may not impact the learning environment and ultimately student achievement (Jackson, 1968; Luke, 2005; Snyder, 1970). Freishtat and Sandlin (2010) contend that social media interactions are knowledge and information sharing discourses. Recognizing that each “socially oriented digital media produces a *habitus* within digital spaces” (Freishtat and Sandlin, 2010, p. 505), they claim it is critical to analyze not only the flows of information within cyberspace from the technologically mediated spaces (such as the social media or academic discussion forums) but also the social manner in which generations are conditioned to engage with others using the information they have received online. Because virtual communications have dramatically changed our communications and social interactions as well as a substantive effect on how people in our society behave and interact (Scheuermann & Taylor, 1997), the need to set the parameters for a hidden agenda are necessitated. When individuals enter into an online academic environment in which the hidden agenda of conventional core values has not been established, the strongest voice creates its own set of values and manners. When individuals enter into an online academic environment in which the hidden agenda of conventional core values has been taught, reviewed, and demonstrated, the institution assumes the dominant role and sets expectations for the course.

When it comes higher education learning, “current literature suggests that there is a wide range of interacting personal and social attributes, as well as institutional practices, which impact on both performance and retention rates (Thomas, 2002, p. 426). Specifically, some of these factors can be identified as a learner’s personal *habitus* and the institution’s *organizational habitus* and *institutional habitus*.

When it comes to online academic learning in higher education, one of the most influential personal and social factors influencing the non-traditional learner’s learning experience and his ultimate retention include centers on the individual’s *habitus*. Personal *habitus*, which is acquired through one’s familial or early academic training, can help maneuver or hinder one’s educational experiences. Because an individual’s *habitus* formulates the foundation of socialization skills and value-centered expectations that an individual uses to make their subsequent choices in life’ (Robbins, 1993, p. 159), he faces adaptation into a new *habitus* (specifically, institutional *habitus*), or he faces retaining his own personal *habitus*. While, other personal and social factors influence the non-traditional learner include academic preparedness, academic experience, financial and employment considerations, and family support and commitments (Thomas, 2002), recognition of one’s *habitus* becomes akin to recognizing and supporting diversity and social identity. Social identity usually refers to the processes of interaction by which one identifies ‘others’ and is also identified by them; these processes then become the basis of self-identification as well (Kuhl, 2000).

On an organizational level, such as within an institution of higher learning, organizational *habitus* can have a major impact on a non-traditional learner’s learning experience and his retention. Organizational *habitus* is “a mechanism linking individual action and the macro-structural settings within which future action is taken. *Habitus* also links past fields to present fields through the individual actors who move from one to the next” (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008, p.4). The “mechanism linking to individual action and the macro-structural settings” refers to internal technological tool (device) that links formative and summative assessment, past performance of an individual to future assessment, outcomes, or the past performance of a group to the norms of others groups, past and present. The “individual players” refer both to the instructors and to the students. In summary, the organization brings to it a *habitus* formed under specific past conditions, some of which will be shared with other members and some of which will differ from them substantially.

As an institution of higher learning, institutional *habitus* is the band and integrity of the institution. Thomas (2002) emphasizes that “Institutional habitus should be understood as more than the culture of the educational institution; it refers to relational issues and priorities, which are deeply embedded, and sub-consciously informing practice” (p. 431). Further, it should be noted that institutional habitus is controlled by groups that control “symbols such as language, culture, and artefacts” (p. 430). This affects all strata of institutions from oversight panels to students. Institutional *habitus* most assuredly affects student retention performance and retention. Institutional *habitus*, while is most associated with branding, is similar to one’s personal *habitus*, but it conjoins the institution’s dispositions, attitudes, and assumptions which are derived not only from the vision, mission, and core values and it goes beyond the simple structure of the organizational *habitus*. Institutional *habitus* speaks to the purpose of the institution, as underpinned by its culture and beliefs. Reay et al. (2001) defined institutional *habitus* as ‘the impact of a cultural group or social class on an individual’ s behavior as it is mediated through an organization’ (para. 13). When the learner arrives at the academic online environment, he brings his personal *habitus*, but because he has chosen the institutional *habitus* as a personal match, and he is prepared to accept the habitus of the institution.
Personal habitus can be enriched and altered by the institutional habitus. “Quality matters” is the frame of the house; it is not the interior design. Instructional design is framed and relies on the pedagogy; the instructional designer takes the content and places it into the framework. However, while the institution maintains its institutional habitus, it recognizes that its brand is often times more powerful than the personal habitus. To many learners, higher educational environments must align with the individual’s perception of the academic and social match or the degree of academic and social integration from the institution (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 1997), and specifically to the institutional habitus. Tinto contended that a relationship must exist between the learner’s commitment goal to the institution and the institution’s academic and social characteristics and practices in order for the learner to obtain success. More importantly is the juxtaposition of personal habitus and institutional habitus within the online academic learning environment. If the online academic environment is not branded with the brands of the institutional habitus, the environment is blank and hollow and lacks the character of the institution. The environment then opens itself to hijacking by another individual’s personal habitus; the most vocal and the strongest habitus takes over. Brey (2007) contended that cybertechnology has certain built-in values and biases that are not always obvious or easy to detect. If this is the case, the institution must be forthright in not only branding the online environment, but also fulfilling the mission, vision, and core values of the institution through the institutional habitus.

Bourdieu’s concept of capital is associated with both organizational habitus and institutional habitus. Cultural capital allows the learner to profit from formal and informal education in ways that those lacking in cultural capital cannot. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) recognized that qualities of organizational habitus, or the academic and social accolades of an institution, offered the learner benefits, to which they stated, “one must identify the forms of specific capital that operate within it, and to construct the forms of specific capital one must know the specific logic of the field” (p. 108). Symbolic capital refers to positive recognition, esteem, or honor by relevant actors within the field. This applies to institutional habitus because symbolic capital consists of special authority that particular institutions are able to exert over the market, thus functioning as a form of credit, trust, or believe that those who have gained the institutional habitus bear more credence than others (Bourdieu, 2005).

The connection that ties instructional design, feedback loop construction, and habitus so important hinges on this. Outcomes and assessments are linked to feedback loops that provide feedback for performance and instructional design (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008). Habitus is basic to the growth of the individual learner, the instructor, and the institution.

Feedback loops maintain the ebb and flow of the personal, organizational, and institutional habitus. Feedback loops force all parties who come saddled with personal and institutional values, objectives, and goals to analyze and evaluate their purpose in the symbiotic educational environment. When each loop supports the learner and the instructor, the loop creates a mutually beneficial support for desired learning. Students must adjust to using new media under different paradigms, and instructor must adapt pedagogies, methods, and attitudes to the new media, recognizing that the new media is a possible vehicle for teaching and learning. In the design and implementation of feedback loops within the context of virtual learning, it is essential that the instructional designer formulate them within the direction of the institutional habitus. In additional to these channels for learning, the designer uses a multitude of learning strategies and these courses are more than reading and responding to questions in the course. Feedback loops provide structured channels for iterative opportunities for students to move their learning closer to desired learning objectives or course outcomes.

**References**


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