Impacting Human Rights Education through Interdisciplinary Collaboration and First Principles of Instruction Methodology

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Abstract

Interdisciplinarity seeks to integrate knowledge and solve problems that individual disciplines cannot solve alone. (Jacobs and Frickel 2009). As a field, instructional technology has a history of interdisciplinary collaboration with neighboring fields such as psychology, communication, and information technology (Cho, 2017). However, it is not as common for instructional technologists and designers to collaborate with unrelated academic disciplines. This paper seeks to show how collaboration between unrelated fields can impact student learning and increase the understanding and respect for the field of instructional design by highlighting a design project related to faith and human rights. In this project, a single instructional designer directed a team of law students as they worked to learn and utilize instructional design techniques and First Principles of Instruction methodology (Merrill, 2002, 2020) in order to improve student learning in the area of freedom of religion or belief and human rights. This project has implications on how instructional designers work on interdisciplinary teams, how the field of instructional design is viewed by outsiders, and for the impact of First Principles of Instruction on student outcomes.

Introduction

This paper will highlight the processes and methods used in the development of the Faith for Rights Toolkit Online Conversion project, as well as the project itself. Instructional design (ID) methodologies such as First Principles of Instruction (FPI) (Merrill, 2002, 2020) can significantly impact student learning outcomes (Frick et al. 2010), (Lee & Koszalka 2016), (Tiruneh et al. 2016). In addition, the demand for online learning provides increased opportunities for instructional designers (IDers) to collaborate across disciplines. While collaboration with related fields such as psychology and human performance is common, collaboration between ID and unrelated fields during the design process itself is less common (Cho, 2017). Concentric collaboration, a style used in business to develop individual and collective leadership (Roberts & Coghlan, 2011), can be used to aid IDers and individuals of unrelated disciplines in working together to provide the best learning outcomes. Additionally, successful interdisciplinary collaboration with diverse stakeholders requires characteristics of Communication, Humility, Adaptability, Mentorship, Engagement, Looping, Empathy, Oscillating, and Networking (CHAMELEON) (Bawa & Watson, 2017). The actions of IDers during collaboration with stakeholders and colleagues can contribute to the way organizations view learning design. Thus, IDers can be agents of change by sharing and in effect, teaching, the use of learning methodologies and ID practices (Campbell, Schwier, & Kenny 2007) to those
who are unfamiliar with such practices. This, in turn, can enhance the outcome of learning products by improving communication and understanding across disciplines.

Background

The purpose of the Faith for Rights Toolkit Conversion project is to convert an existing learning framework, the Faith for Rights Toolkit (FFRT), originally only available in pdf format, into an online learning resource useable by faith leaders and human rights proponents of varying educational and cultural contexts, thus enabling them to advocate for and teach about human rights in their respective communities. This project was sponsored by the Brigham Young University J. Reuben Clark Law School under the direction of Professor David H. Moore, Associate Director of the International Center for Law and Religion Studies (ICLRS). The project was completed in conjunction with the Human Rights Law Clinic course offered to BYU law students in an effort to provide these students with an opportunity to participate in a real-world project applicable to human rights law. Stakeholders included representatives from the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR), some of whom were the original authors of the FFRT. These stakeholders were consulted regularly throughout the project. Their goals were to provide a readily available resource for facilitators and inter-faith groups seeking to further the cause of freedom of religion or belief and human rights in their locales, educate faith leaders about how to incorporate human rights education into their ministries, and provide a web-based avenue for sharing the Faith for Rights program.

A unique aspect of this project was that the product (the FFRT) was already developed. The content, the learning activities, and some learning objectives were compiled previously. In spite of this, there were no measurable outcomes as far as learner abilities or the ability of learners to achieve learning goals. The stakeholders’ purpose in engaging in this project was to adapt the product to reach a wider audience of participants and facilitators. As such, our intent in analyzing the gaps was not to identify gaps in learner ability or knowledge, but to identify the gaps in the current product itself. This analysis included questions such as:

- Why is the FFRT not being utilized?
- How can the product be accessible to a broader (non-UN) audience?
- What adjustments could be made to the product to make it more user-friendly?
- What was needed to provide training on how to facilitate the Faith for Rights program?

In completing a user and product analysis, it was determined that the original FFRT was being utilized only by a narrow section of individuals with connections to the UN OHCHR. In order to broaden the reach of the program, the product would need to be modified to suit the needs of a wider variety of users. In addition, the original FFRT content did not provide the user a clear path to successfully facilitating a Faith for Rights session. Nor did the original content provide clear objectives or a strategy to achieve competencies. These gaps were not knowledge or ability gaps based on the user’s capabilities, but were gaps in the design of the original content. The FFRT contained broad objectives, detailed contextual information, many insightful and useful learning activities, resources, and suggestions. However, it did not follow an instructional strategy that would allow facilitators and participants of the Faith for Rights program to effectively achieve the goal of the program to “shift from abstract inter-religious
dialogues into individual and joint positive actions by faith actors in defense of human dignity for all."

As a result of user and product analysis, this project sought to narrow that goal into the following outcomes:

1) Develop a web-based resource based on proven instructional methodology for five of the eighteen modules included in the original FFRT. This included content on facilitation, religious or belief pluralism, gender equality, minority rights, and issues surrounding incitement to hatred.
2) Develop a web-based training course for FFRT facilitators that would familiarize learners with the background and purpose of the FFRT program, train in the use of peer-to-peer learning techniques, aid facilitators in engaging with participants in a manner that would allow them to avoid and resolve conflict and tension, and plan and present Faith for Rights events.

The resulting product is the Faith for Rights Online Conversion, a website hosted on the ICLRS server. The website contains five of the eighteen modules in the original FFRT, as well as an online facilitator guide course. Each of the modules on the website contains the following:

- instructional information on how to use the modules, learning paths, and peer-to-peer activities
- learning paths comprised of peer-to-peer activities, each focusing on a specific learning objective and competencies, following FPI methodology
- a complete list of all the peer-to-peer activities provided for the module in an a-la-carte list
- a Learning Library of resources related to the module

In addition, each peer-to-peer activity has been fully developed for ease of use including:

- a list of competencies that will be achieved by participants as they complete the activity
- step-by-step instructions
- discussion questions
- resources specific to the activity
- facilitator tips

Each peer-to-peer activity has been fully developed with the intent to provide a user friendly experience for both facilitators and Faith for Rights participants.

Collaborative Process

A central component of this project was the interdisciplinary collaboration between the fields of ID and international law. Law students worked not as subject matter experts, but actively engaged in ID tasks alongside a lead IDer who worked to facilitate ID processes, as well as gain understanding on the intersectionality of freedom of religion or belief and human rights. Stakeholders from the UN OHCHR were consulted throughout the process. The intent of this interdisciplinary collaboration was to impact student learning by combining ID methodology and broad experience in the subject matter, thereby providing learners a robust and adaptable
platform of resources and learning paths. This was accomplished utilizing a concentric collaboration (CC) method in which interdisciplinary team members extended the reach of their skills, making connections across disciplines. This style of collaboration (Roberts & Coghlan, 2011) in which team members’ roles were not traditionally compartmentalized provided an opportunity to broaden the reach of ID methods and thereby strengthen the impact on student learning by bringing a range of experience and viewpoints to the design table.

The team consisted of seven law students and one instructional design student. As such, it was necessary that the law students participate in ID activities, rather than participate solely as subject matter experts (SMEs). The utilization of CC allowed the law students to learn and gain confidence in ID principles. As described by Roberts and Coghlan, the process of CC is similar to a pebble being dropped in a pond:

As each ‘pebble’ or concept is dropped into the ‘pond’, the ripples of knowledge, learning, connection, and influence move from the individual leader (center) outward to his or her immediate team. The ripples expand to reach other departments, finally extending and connecting throughout the organization.

This was done by following a series of processes:

Process 1: Work sessions. Weekly work sessions were dedicated to learning ID processes, solving specific instructional design problems, and collaborating regarding ideas. Topics included the ADDIE model, learner/user analysis, learning objectives and competencies, instructional methodologies, development strategies and procedures, and evaluation.

Process 2: Working with templates. Several instructional design templates were created to aid law students in properly applying the ID principles discussed in the work sessions.

Process 3: Law students worked in pairs on ID tasks and were given feedback on their work. This allowed the law students to practice what they had learned both independently and collaboratively with a partner, building their confidence in engaging in design work.

Process 4: The team reviewed the product in stages and collaborated on next steps, relying on each other to develop a working product.

Process 5: Work was presented to the stakeholders for feedback and approval.

As a result of this ongoing process, law students reported that they had a higher understanding of the ID field and its methodologies. They also gained confidence in their ability to contribute to work for which they had not initially been trained. Most importantly, the understanding of the purpose and importance for intentional instructional design was elevated. For example, when asked how their personal understanding of ID changed as a result of their participation in this project, the students provided the following feedback:

I understand much more about what goes into creating a course. There is so much more behind the scenes than I realized, and I have much more appreciation for how much thought goes into each small detail.
SO much more knowledge and respect for this field.

The project has increased my understanding of the instructional design process and given me an appreciation for the principles we have employed and the structure they provide to enable learning.

I had no idea what it entailed previously, and now I have a stronger understanding of certain principles.

As more fields seek to make learning content available online, the need for collaboration between IDers and professionals in unrelated fields will continue to increase. As IDers, we can impact student learning by sharing our knowledge of ID principles and processes on a variety of projects in a variety of disciplines. Working with an ID can increase the understanding of learning processes, online learning facilitation, and ID methodologies across disciplines. This can impact student learning across fields (Bawa & Watson, 2017).

In addition to collaboration with non-ID team members, the nature of this project required collaboration with a group of stakeholders who were diverse in areas of education, culture, and thought and who were highly vested in the project. In their 2017 study, Bawa and Watson asserted that the increased need to collaborate with diverse stakeholders requires IDers to utilize characteristics that relate to both a metaphorical chameleon and the suggested acronym, CHAMELEON. The metaphor of a chameleon refers to the requirement that IDers be adaptable to change, willing to listen to the ideas and needs of others, and have an ability to apply what they learn from others to the development of a product. In this case, these principles were utilized in the following manner in order to build and maintain rapport and trust with the stakeholders, as well as to continue momentum on the project. See Figure 1.

Figure 1
CHAMELEON collaboration principles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Communication</strong></th>
<th>Frequent and open communication via zoom with stakeholders regarding content modification, methodology, and technology occurred.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Humility</strong></td>
<td>Humility was displayed as law students worked to understand and utilize ID principles, and as all team members worked to understand the needs of users from a variety of belief systems and international settings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adaptability</strong></td>
<td>The ID, law students, and UN OHCHR stakeholders worked to be adaptable to change throughout the process. This was seen in the ID being able recognize the ideas and contributions of non-ID team members as new ways of doing things, the law students being able to put aside their own views of how a course should be developed, and the stakeholders being able to see their original content modified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mentorship</strong></td>
<td>The area of mentorship was another area in which all participants contributed equally based on their own expertise. The ID mentored law students in ID techniques and processes. The law students mentored the ID in the nuances of conflict resolution and international human rights.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The UN OHCHR stakeholders mentored both groups in international law. All team members were determined to engage with the content in an effort to understand the complexities surrounding religion and human rights in order to develop a product that would be impactful to users around the world.

The team followed an iterative design process, in which ideas, designs, and content was presented for collaboration with the team and stakeholders. The process was repeated (or looped) throughout the development process.

Empathy included forming relationships of trust, focusing on needs of other team members, being transparent about the process, defining roles and expectations, and having understanding for the viewpoint of others.

The team utilized a process of collaboration in which content and materials were developed and then reviewed in a back and forth fashion. Multiple versions were considered. In this way all contributed equally to the development of the product.

Networking included forming an extended network of individuals not directly involved in the project. These included ID professionals from the BYU Department of Instructional Psychology & Technology, the Board of Directors for the BYU Center for Law and Religion, individuals with prior connections to the UN OHCHR and the Faith for Rights program, and an ID team working on a separate Faith for Rights product at the US Institute for Peace.

The increased demand for online learning in a variety of contexts has created a greater necessity for interdisciplinary collaboration. By utilizing CC and CHAMELEON techniques, IDers can increase awareness of and respect for the field of ID. Interdisciplinary collaboration also allows for a greater variety of contribution when designing learning products, thus increasing the impact on student learning.

First Principles of Instruction Methodology

The original FFRT consisted of a 124-page document made up of 18 learning modules, each containing lists of peer-to-peer learning activities. The document was the product of workshops attended by a group of legal, religious, and human rights scholars affiliated with the UN OHCHR. As such, its development did not consider ID strategies. Problems with the toolkit included densely written academic language, a text-based format that provided little structure for learning sessions, a high number of learning activities without logical sequencing, broad learning objectives, and the absence of an effective instructional methodology.

It has been shown that instructional methodologies such as First Principles of Instruction (FPI) (Merril, 2002, 2020) can significantly impact student learning outcomes (Frick et al. 2010), (Lee & Koszalka 2016), (Tiruneh et al. 2016). Therefore, it was determined that the most effective instructional methodology for this project would be FPI. However, a significant challenge encountered in this project was implementing FPI methodology within a pre-established framework of peer-to-peer learning modules, rather than within an instructor-led
framework. To assist in this effort, three key instruments based on FPI (Merril, 2021) were developed. The instruments were intended to aid in the development of sequenced learning paths, identifying competencies and learning objectives, and identifying a progression of problems. These design instruments were as follows:

First, Applying Merrill’s Principles of Instruction (Figure 2). This instrument helped law students determine the problem and the subsequent principles of instruction that would help learners solve the problem using the FPI sequence: Activate, Demonstrate, Apply, Integrate. Instructions given with this instrument:

1) Identify the main problem that participants will work toward solving in the module.
2) Determine the activities you would like to use. The activities will be problem-based, peer-to-peer activities.
3) Identify the principles of instruction that will be used in the activity: Activate, Demonstrate, Apply, Integrate
4) Explain how each principle will be implemented in the activity.

Figure 2
Applying Merrill’s Principles of Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem: Participants come from varied backgrounds and need to work in cooperation with each other to advance the cause of rights of women and girls in their communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Module/Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpacking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture and Context</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Storytelling</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Exploring</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inspiring</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second, Progression of Problems document (Figure 3). This instrument helped law students align a progression of problems with learning objectives and competencies. Instructions given with this instrument:

1) Identify the learning objectives in the module you are working on. (These are found in the F4R pdf).
2) Develop competencies based on the learning objectives. Competencies are what the participants should be able to do by the end of the module.
3) Determine the Problems that will be used to help participants master the learning objectives and complete the competencies. (These are the learning activities that will be used in the module)

4) Arrange the activities in the chart in a progression from beginner to advanced.

5) Create a separate table for each module. Modules may have multiple learning objectives and competencies.

Figure 3
Progression of Problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module 4: Religious or Belief Pluralism</th>
<th>Problem-based Activities (Peer-to-Peer Learning Activities)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Objectives</td>
<td>Competency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants realize the risk that both notions of “state religion” and “doctrinal secularism” could lead to discrimination and the required vigilance by both State and non-State religious actors in this respect.</td>
<td>Participants identify positive ways to counter discrimination within their own sphere of influence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Third, the Faith for Rights Module Checklist. This checklist was used to ensure that FPI methodology was included in each module, that competencies were aligned with learning objectives, and that activities included in each learning path followed a progression. See Figure 4.

Figure 4
Faith for Rights Module Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faith for Rights Module Checklist</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Element</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Objectives &amp; Competencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you use a maximum of 4 learning objectives from the module?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the competencies define and clearly state what the participants will be able to do after completing the module?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do the competencies align with the learning objectives?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peer to Peer Learning Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are the activities problem-based?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you identify the principles utilized in the activity? Example: Activate, Demonstrate, Apply, Integrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the activities presented in a progression of difficulty format? Or is a suggested order of activities given?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the activities identified by their strategy, i.e. Unpacking, Critical Thinking, Tweeting, etc?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, several presentations were designed to help law students understand ID principles and techniques, as well as FPI. For example, a presentation on developing competencies helped law students to convert broadly written learning objectives already present in the FFRT into action-oriented competencies upon which to build a progression of problems. The following examples were part of this presentation (Figure 5, 6):

Figure 5

*Participants discuss inspiring examples that expand their creativity in both preventing and remedying discrimination against religious minorities; they develop operational skills in both areas.*

What “operational skills” can the participants develop during a Faith for Rights session? What will they do to develop these skills?

Figure 6
As a result of the analysis completed on each module, it was determined that Learning Paths would be developed in order to better follow FPI methodology. The placement of activities in the original FFRT was random. Each module contained a list of peer-to-peer activities from which a facilitator could choose. The Faith for Rights Toolkit online conversion contains three designated Learning Paths that allow facilitators to identify specific competencies that they feel best meet the needs of their learners. The Learning Paths are built upon a progression of problems that will meet the objectives of the module. Each Learning Path allows the learners to activate prior knowledge, demonstrate their understanding, apply new knowledge, and integrate what they have learned into their own context. The Learning Paths simplify preparation and follow a proven FPI methodology. As requested by the UN OHCHR stakeholders, complete lists of peer-to-peer activities were included within each module to allow facilitators to modify Learning Paths as they deem appropriate.

Conclusion

Instructional Designers can improve the impact on student learning by changing the way interdisciplinary design teams work together. The result of this project is a robust online learning platform which provides clear FPI methodology that can be used to impact student learning around the world. By utilizing principles of concentric collaboration and CHAMELEON, IDs can become agents of change in how interdisciplinary ID teams collaborate, and thereby improve the impact on student learning, as well as the understanding of the field of ID in a variety of disciplines. In addition, this project highlighted the use of FPI in a peer-to-peer learning program used to advance the joint causes of freedom of religion or belief and human rights. The relevance of this project can be observed in two key areas:

1) As a result of the growing demand for online learning in diverse fields, opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration have increased, highlighting the need for IDers to adjust the way in which they work and collaborate with interdisciplinary team members and diverse stakeholders.
2) Evidence-based ID techniques and methodology can be used to impact student learning in diverse international environments by providing action-oriented and logically sequenced learning paths and activities.

References


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