

Assignment 9 – Final Assessment

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Journaling

For this activity, **new text is in this format.**

Who are the students you will likely be teaching? Describe a typical student in your teaching environment.

As an instructional designer in a corporate environment, I don't directly teach learners by leading a classroom; however, I design and develop training materials that our trainers use to teach in the classroom, as well as self-paced eLearning courses for the associates to review at their own desks. Even in this role, though, I see myself as a teacher because I am responsible for the creation and maintenance of training materials to support and develop our associates. My primary audience is in the call center environment, which means the typical student is an adult learner who is comfortable with the use of a computer, accustomed to the culture of the company, and understanding of our products and services. I also support corporate, field sales, and retail store associates, all of whom are also adult learners with these same characteristics, but with a primary role that differs from the call center. **In terms of socioeconomic status, the majority of these students are in the working class, consisting of somewhat stable positions that do not require higher education (Slavin, 2009, p.93). Other than associates who are new to the business, my students are already comfortable with what they know in terms of the organization, which is an important implication of constructivism (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003, pp.83-84).**

What is learning? Tell me what your students should be able to do or how you'll know your students have learned something after they've worked with you.

I think learning is the receipt and application of knowledge or skills. When I produce a course, the learners should be able to understand the policies or procedures presented in the course. In the corporate world, most of our training content essentially centers upon the behavior of our associates. This means that the learning objectives are action statements that focus on driving toward specific behaviors in the workplace. I can know that the learners have learned something by their practical application of the concepts on the job, which I can learn about through reporting, conversations with management, results of learning assessments, and the amount and types of questions and comments submitted both during and after delivery of the course. **Even though learning objectives in this environment tend to focus on associate behaviors, there are other ways that students learn and one of my challenges as an**

instructional designer is to leverage the best option to lead associates to succeed. The social interactions among associates in our team-oriented culture call for learning through social constructivism (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003, p.79). Therefore, evaluating student learning involves not only observing changes in behavior, but also involves assessing team achievements and associate-customer relations. Learning that takes place through construction of knowledge or an “aha” moment can still have an impact on associate behavior or performance.

What is teaching? Paint a picture for me of an ideal teacher. Draw freely from any great teachers you've had.

I believe that teaching is the elegant transfer of knowledge or skills from one individual to another. An ideal teacher is able to connect with his or her audience by having a strong understanding of the learners' needs and the context of the materials being presented. In the business world, the ideal teacher would be one who knows the subject matter thoroughly, presents the material confidently, understands the audience, conveys the appropriate message while keeping at least an indirect reference to our core values, and tailors to the needs of the group being trained. An ideal teacher also has a passion for the subject matter and for helping the learners better themselves by achieving the objectives of the lesson at hand. **Furthermore, the ideal teacher primarily serves as a guide who facilitates the construction of knowledge in learners, as opposed to a dispenser of information (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003, p.85). Great teachers use clear instructional objectives and are careful to link those objectives with assessments to accurately measure student achievement and guide instructional decisions (Slavin, 2009, p.416).**

Look over your old and new responses. Has your thinking changed much? List three adjectives that describe any changes you see in your own writing.

When this course began, I didn't realize that I had essentially subscribed to a behaviorist perspective in terms of learning, since I immediately called out the importance of behavioral objectives in our organization. However, my thinking and writing have transitioned from a purely behaviorist perspective to a combination of behaviorism and constructivism. My answers have shifted from reflecting a single approach to and understanding of learning to a perspective that considers that there are several ways that individuals learn. Adjectives I would use to describe changes in my own writing include:

- progressive (see things from multiple perspectives)
- broad (see the greater picture of education)
- relevant (see the importance of what I've learned in terms of today's environment)
- applicable (see the need for applying learning theories on the job)

Lesson Plan

Learning Objectives & Orientation	<p>Overall Learning Objective – Organize documents that you develop and reorganize documents developed by others in such a way that complements how the human mind processes information.</p> <p>Orientation Questions – “Have you ever been given a long document with lots of paragraphs and too much information to be helpful? What about lengthy contract agreements with lots of fine print? Or what about process information or other documentation here at work? What was your reaction to the information and how helpful was it to you?”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• This approach connects with the learners’ prior knowledge and experiences. <p>Discovery Goal – Students should make two discoveries during this lesson:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Working memory is limited to around five to nine small bits of information (Miller, 1956, as cited in Slavin, 2009, p.161).2. Complex documents can be more relevant and helpful to their intended audiences if they are broken down in such a way that readers must only focus on five to nine chunks of information at a time.
Prerequisites	<p>In order to successfully complete this lesson, students must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be familiar with some form of complex documentation either inside or outside the organization• Use documentation to accomplish complex tasks at work or to train others to accomplish those tasks• Be skillful readers with strong critical thinking skills• Be responsible for developing and/or delivering complex documentation in the organization
Introduction of New Material	<p>After the initial group discussion using the orientation questions provided above, guide the discussion toward the importance of keeping procedures and other documentation simple and relevant, with a constant focus on the intended audience. Discuss how complex documents, such as those the class has been discussing, can be intimidating and can lead to errors, whether those documents are used for instruction or reference.</p>

Learning Probes	<p>Throughout the lesson, and particularly during the cooperative learning portion, listen to what students and groups are saying and react appropriately. Use these opportunities to gauge comprehension and to guide students toward the objectives.</p>
Cooperative Learning Activity	<p>The following group activity is intended to lead the learners to the discovery moment.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Divide the class into groups of three. 2. Distribute the following to each group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A three page, complex document in paragraph prose that provides details about a set of processes that are common in the organization. ▪ A stopwatch or other device that allows them to track time in seconds. ▪ A handout consisting of ten questions that are answered in the three-page document. 3. Have each group designate one person as a timekeeper. 4. Inform the groups that the timekeepers have three responsibilities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Record the length of time it takes for her/his group to answer each question. ▪ Record any comments or questions her/his group has about the document or the questions. ▪ Record observations of her/his group, including each group's ability to recall and/or find answers. 5. Have each group read their document one time. 6. Have each group use their document to answer the ten questions. Allow no more than 10 minutes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This task emphasizes top-down processing, in which a complex problem is presented to the learners and the learners discover the skills needed to solve the problem (Slavin, 2009, p.233). 7. If the discovery objective has not yet been accomplished by the groups, ask the class if there are any thoughts as to what could be done to reduce the amount of time needed to answer the questions. 8. Have each group present its findings and discuss as a class.

Assessment & Feedback	<p>As the groups work through the activity, walk around the room to assess their performance, participation, and understanding. Converse with the groups as needed, working to guide them toward discovering that the document can be reorganized in a way. If necessary, ask questions such as,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “What do you suppose we could do to reduce the time it takes to find the information we need?” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Answers should reflect that the information can be better organized so that it flows logically. It can also be labeled and bulleted to call attention to various areas and to make it easy to find the information that is needed. • “Did you struggle with the question that asked you to recall the list of groups involved with each phase of the process? Why do you suppose that is?” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Answers should reflect that the list items were scattered throughout the document and that there were too many to remember (because only 5-9 things can be stored in working memory at one time). <p>Provide feedback to the groups as you walk around the room and as any questions are asked.</p>
Distributed Practice & Review	<p>Begin the review with a mention of the importance of keeping the intended audience in mind when developing documentation of any kind. Review the key points of the course, including the problems with using complex documents in a business or learning environment. Discuss how the activity should have shown that the capacity of working memory is limited to five to nine items and that documentation can be organized in a way that takes advantage of this on behalf of the reader. Conclude by implying that the next lesson will cover practical ways to apply this knowledge in the workplace both for instructional purposes and for process documentation.</p> <p>Review the key points at the beginning of the next lesson, when additional group activities will lead to discovery of practical ways to develop and deliver documentation in a way consistent with how the mind operates.</p>

Description of Students

This lesson is intended for business trainers and documentation specialists within the call center environment, as well as any other individuals who are responsible for developing documentation. Generally, these individuals belong to one or more groups within the organization: call center members, either associates or managers, and typically over-achievers. This means that the instructional approach can assume that the learners are fully accustomed to the organizational culture and are willing to go above and beyond the norm. The students are members of the call center microsystem, interacting face-to-face and virtually with other members of the team (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, pp.7-8). The interconnections among the individuals and groups with whom they interact make up the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, pp.7-8). While these two systems have the greatest impact on my students, they are also indirectly impacted by settings they may never encounter, known as the exosystem, as well as the overarching culture and ideology of the organization, known as the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, pp.7-8). As adult learners in a business environment, the socioeconomic status of my students has little relevance, as all associates are held to the same standards regardless of such classifications. My students are also comfortable with what they already know and are generally passionate about taking ownership of their own learning, making them an ideal audience for a constructivist-based approach to learning.

Intentional Teacher Questions

- 1. What do I expect my students to know and be able to do at the end of this lesson? How does this contribute to course objectives and to students' needs to become capable individuals?***

I expect my students to see the difficulty that lengthy, academic-style documents can present in the business arena, where quick access to exactly the right information is essential. My students should know that this is at least partly due to the way the human mind operates, holding a limited amount of information in working memory at any given time. While this lesson does not provide the learners with specific procedures or methods for developing documents that are designed to complement the way working memory works, it provides a foundation leads the learners to think of ways information can be organized to be more useful for its intended audience. This contributes to the course objectives in that it emphasizes the need for intentional and mindful documentation and it equips the learners to produce high-quality deliverables that support their intended audiences.

- 2. What knowledge, skills, needs, and interests do my students have that must be taken into account in my lesson?***

Most of my students are professional trainers and thus have a genuine interest in helping others learn and do their best. My responsibility is to equip and support the trainers as they seek to accomplish this objective. My students already have knowledge of how adults learn, particularly in the context of our organizational culture. They are skilled at documenting processes and delivering that documentation in the classroom as needed, however the purpose of this lesson is to help them better organize that information for an even greater impact on our associates.

3. *What do I know about the content, human development, learning motivation, and effective teaching strategies that I can use to accomplish my objectives?*

Research has proven that the short-term memory can only store from five to nine ideas, concepts, or items at a given time (Miller, 1956, as cited in Slavin, 2009, p.161) and this establishes the basis for the lesson content. Particularly in a business setting, lengthy documentation that does not logically break down information into small bits can be a hindrance to productivity. I have been trained on practical methods for accomplishing this goal and am therefore equipped to help the trainers acquire those same skills.

These students are very team-oriented and take full responsibility for their own growth and development, thus calling for constructivist approaches to instruction, in which individuals become more central in the learning process (Slavin, 2009, p.231). Additionally, using elaboration to connect the lesson with knowledge and skills the learners already possess (Slavin, 2009, p.189) can increase the intrinsic incentive, or the component that the learners enjoy and find motivating (Slavin, 2009, p.312). The lesson meets the students in their zone of proximal development, which is the level directly above their current level (Slavin, 2009, p.43), because it inspires thought about how they can develop documentation in a way that makes appropriate use of short-term memory on the job. It also sets the stage for the next lesson, in which actual methods will be discovered. Some time-related anxiety will be used because it is relevant in a call center environment in which time is a crucial element of business performance; however I will be careful to ensure time constraints do not negatively impact the learning experience (Slavin, 2009, p.312).

4. *What instructional materials, technology, assistance, and other resources are available to help me accomplish my objectives?*

There are both commercial and freely available instructional materials related to chunking information, making it relevant to its intended audience, and presenting it in a way that leverages the way short-term memory works. Some derivations of these materials are available within the organization. Additionally, I have developed a basic HTML and CSS framework to allow the trainers to better organize online documents. Templates are

available for Microsoft Word once the students have discovered the need for practical application. There are also a number of actual examples of poorly written documentation that is relevant to the topic at hand and that can serve as source materials for the activity. Finally, there are a number of other skilled individuals in the organization and outside consultants who can provide assistance both to my and to my students, as needed.

5. *How will I plan to assess students' progress toward my objectives?*

Assessment of student progress will primarily be in the form of learning probes, or questions that provide insight as to whether students comprehend what is being taught (Slavin, 2009, p.208). Other assessments will consist of walking around the room, observing each group and interacting with individuals as needed. Student progress toward my objectives will also be measured according to the information provided during the discussion at the end of the cooperative learning activity. As future lessons are completed, a portfolio assessment would prove to be a valuable assessment tactic because I can use it to clearly see how students have progressed (Slavin, 2009, p.437). All of these approaches seek to evaluate how the students are doing and whether they have achieved the objectives (Slavin, 2009, p.406).

6. *How will I respond if individual students or the class as a whole are not on track toward success? What is my backup plan?*

If a particular student is struggling with the lesson, I will approach that individual during the group activity and ask questions in order to understand what he/she needs for success. I will use this same approach if a particular group is struggling with a part of the cooperative learning task. This will allow other learners to continue their work and learning, optimizing engaged time (Slavin, 2009, p.333). If additional support is needed, perhaps a form of cognitive apprenticeship can be established, allowing the individual(s) to work closely with a model expert (Slavin, 2009, p.232). If the class as a whole seems to be off track, my backup plan is to work through the complex document as an entire group, guiding the conversation toward an understanding of the limitations of working memory and what can be done to enhance documentation in light of those limitations.

Review

While there was certainly some variation in the time spent on reading and activities, I spent an average of about two hours of reading and taking notes each week. The assignments each took four to six hours. Studying for the quizzes took about 30 minutes and the quizzes themselves took about 15 minutes. The midterm and final assessments took roughly 25-30 minutes each. I found the text to be extremely well written and very interesting. The external sources were also a delight to read and were very enlightening, particularly the Doolittle & Hicks article.

The variation of the activities in this course was extremely helpful because it provided several ways of approaching the topics rather than relying on a single method or type of activity. This was quite different from distance learning experiences I have had in the past and I applaud Virginia Tech for providing this experience. Most of the instructions were clear and the instructor notes were very helpful. There were a few lessons in which the instructions contained typographical errors or incorrect page numbers, although the instructor provided information to clarify these situations. The detailed rubrics and grading comments are extremely helpful and provide meaningful feedback on progress throughout the course. I also greatly appreciate the timeliness of the feedback.

References

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