

EDTC 7040: INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR DISTANCE

EDTC 7040: Instructional Strategies for Distance Learning - A Reflection

Amber Batten

East Carolina University - Fall 2016

## EDTC 7040: INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR DISTANCE

### EDTC 7040: Instructional Strategies for Distance Learning - A Reflection

EDTC 7040, Instructional Strategies for Distance Learning for the Fall 2016 semester, covered the Principles and theories of distance learning. These principles and theories included design, delivery and evaluation (A. Brown, personal communication, 2016). This course was a thorough study in the different principals and aspects of distance learning and a great addition to my knowledge of the subject matter. There are many parts of the course that I would like to reflect upon as these parts all aided in my understanding and learning of distance learning strategies, including my knowledge of design and teaching of instruction. I will reflect upon various things based on the instructional module of the course.

#### **Engaging the Learner**

Engaging the learner was the first instructional module of the course. This module introduced learning theory and technology as well as provided a history of learning and technology. I found quite a few interesting facts in our reading for this module out of one of the required textbooks, *Learning Theory and Online Technologies* by Linda Harasim. One of the topics of the text that I found extremely interesting was the steps in human development when it comes to learning and technology (Harasim, 2012, p 16). It was fascinating to me to see the condensed chronology of the four major socio-technological shifts including Speech, Writing, Printing and Internet (Harasim, 2012, p 17). One of the things that I never thought about was the history of human evolution when it came to learning and technology. However, when reading about these shifts, it all made perfect sense from the caveman using his club as technology all the way up to how we, as humans use the Internet as our current technology for learning. I will never look at a caveman's club the same before. I never considered it nor the use of hieroglyphics as learning and technology before. I most certainly never looked at these things as

## EDTC 7040: INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR DISTANCE

"breakthroughs in technology", but when putting it all in perspective, such events were huge breakthroughs in their time. After reading about this history of technology and learning, I pondered quite a bit on what the future holds for me as a learner as well as for me as a developer of instruction. While different behavior theories and learning theories have been presented throughout my tenure in the MSIT program, I never quite grasped the fact that understanding and knowing the history of how we as humans evolved would be extremely important and a crucial consideration when developing instruction now and in the future for distance learning. With so many distractions and ways to attain knowledge at our fingertips these days, knowing how to engage the learner and keep his or her attention is a huge task. Understanding the human history of development, learning, and technology together as one whole will be extremely beneficial and a crucial requirement for developing top-notch distance learning instruction that will greatly benefit the learner.

### **Objective Approaches**

The Objective Approaches module of our course was a little confusing to me. However, it did shed light on objectivism and constructivism. I guess I had never thought about the two, what they meant, or even their differences until being presented with the topic in this course. While completing the application assignment for this particular module, creating an objective assessment in our own lesson in our Blackboard sandbox, I had to research additional sources to help differentiate between the two types of approaches and world views.

It would only make sense that learning objectives were part of the objectivism approach and world view, given the name, learning objective. However, what was confusing to me was that the learning of these objectives elicited a certain type of behavior. What behavior would

## EDTC 7040: INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR DISTANCE

need to occur in order to meet the objective? What task would need to be performed in order to achieve mastery of the material?

It was also interesting to learn that instructional technology has its roots in behaviorism (Harasim, 2012, p. 41). I have always viewed learning as a constructivist approach. Learners build upon information at each stage. Learning is done in stages and the next state of learning is just an addition to the previous stage. What was learned in the previous stage sets the groundwork for the next stage. After reading more about the behaviorist learning theory, I came to my own conclusions that behaviorism and the behaviorist learning theory was based more on memorization and a trial and error approach. I developed the opinion that behaviorism is "old school" and an extremely insane way of creating instruction. However, it has its place in specific areas and history, such as in the military and during industrialization. I just have a hard time with any approach or learning theory that does not involve the mind as much as it involves mechanization. Taking the mind out of learning is something that I take issue with. Robots perform steps. They do not learn, unless you take into consideration artificial intelligence, which I referenced in my discussion board post for this module titled Computer Programmers and The Objectivist World View (Batten, 2016). Robots perform a set of programmed tasks. Humans are not robots and should not be treated as so. What is so surprising in my personal opinion and example is that I am a computer programmer where most everything is and has to be black and white. However, I fully believe in gray areas when it comes to learning. But, not everyone is the same or learns the same way.

### **Constructivism and Online Collaborate Learning**

I first learned about Constructivism in Dr. Abbie Brown's book, *The Essentials of Instructional Design* (2011) which was the required text for my very first course in the MSIT

## EDTC 7040: INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR DISTANCE

program at East Carolina University, EDTC 6020. I have used this book as a resource in almost all of my classes in this program, including EDTC 7040. When I first learned that constructivism was what an individual constructs based on prior learning and experiences, I was pretty much in agreement with it, versus behaviorism. One of the reasons that I feel I have been successful in school these last few years is that I have previous experiences to relate my new learning to which helps me grasp and understand the concepts easier. However, my very first semester in this program was terrifying for me because most everyone in my first class was an educator or had experience creating instruction, and I had not. It was very intimidating because I wondered if I was going to be able to cut it in this program. I felt I did not have any previous knowledge to relate to in order to understand and absorb this new material effectively. After reading Harasim's (2012) explanation of the social constructivism camp or perspective associated with constructivism (p. 61), I realized that while I may not have had any previous experience creating instruction, the setup and collaboration of the course, EDTC 6020, provided social interaction and encounters that allowed me to learn from others' experiences when I lacked my own. It did not occur to me that interaction and experience actually was a form of constructivism until reading Harasim's (2012) text.

### **The Online Learner**

The Online Learner module of EDTC 7040 is probably the module that provided the biggest takeaway of this course for me. While the lesson learned is probably not that big compared to some of the other things that I have reflected upon in this paper so far, it impacted me the most. For the application assignment in this module, I created a video using a tool that was introduced to me at a work retreat just prior to completing the assignment. While I thought the application was neat and different and pretty hip, the context in which I used it in was not the

## EDTC 7040: INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR DISTANCE

best. The feedback given to me was a little hard to take at first, but after I thought about it and pondered it, I realized I fell into a trap that I am usually so vocal about. I fell for the new kid on the block. I used a tool, mysimpleshow.com, that was shiny and new and grabbed my attention and interest. What I failed to do was see the big picture as far as it being generic and impersonal which made it a poor fit for the assignment. Being impersonal is a good way to alienate online students. With my netiquette presentation created with this "shiny and hip" new tool, I failed my learner audience by possibly alienating them. As a student, I like to have things be personal and relatable to me at that time in that particular course or situation. I do not like materials that are generic enough to be used from one class to the next. To me, it shows lack of interest on behalf of the instructor. It shows that the instructor does not really have my learning and ultimate success in their class as a priority.

### **Communities of Practice**

Authentic activities are still a little fuzzy to me. However, the concept of them is quite a bit clearer than when I was first introduced to them. Authentic activities seem to have to meet a long set of criteria. At first it was difficult to come up with an authentic activity for our application assignment that met all of the criteria. The fuzziness surrounds whether or not an activity is really authentic or if it could be considered a simulation. I appreciated the following comment from Dr. Brown in our discussion board for this particular module, "[An authentic activity must involve students applying what they are learning to a real life activity.](#)" (Brown, 2016). For some reason, this is what provided the "ah-ha" moment for me when it came to authentic activities. However, the fuzziness is still there in regards to an activity being a simulation or a real authentic activity. I think what sets them apart is what the learning goal is and what the objective is for the activity.

## EDTC 7040: INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR DISTANCE

### **Instructional Activities**

Activities that are not so black and white are difficult to work with at times because there is not a clear cut right or wrong answer. However, activities such as this allow a lot more flexibility and personalization from the learner. The learner is able to add their own experiences and opinions and insights or at least consider those when completing the activities. After reviewing the assigned reading and resources for this module, I realized that more constructivist in nature assignments can offer the most valuable learning experience because a lot of factors are involved when completing the activity. The learner can become more of a teacher or instructor in activities like this, especially if they are social or collaborative activities like discussion board posts where the learner's current knowledge is what is presented. That knowledge may not be exactly correct and sharing it with others may mislead other learners or cause confusion. As I mentioned earlier in this paper under the Constructivism and Online Learning Collaboration heading, if it were not for constructivist learning and activities, I am not sure I would have continued in this program after being horrified and intimidated by the experience of my classmates versus my own experience. Often times in constructivist activities and lessons, just a learner's shared experience can be a valuable lesson for another learner. The shared experience can open up avenues of thinking and approaching things differently and from a different perspective for other learners and even the learner who shares their experience based on the feedback and comments from other learners.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, this course was a very eye-opening experience for me. Creating instruction takes great skill, but the type and delivery of the instruction must be taken into consideration. Engaging and motivating a learner in an online or distance learning environment is quite a

## EDTC 7040: INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR DISTANCE

complex task. Instruction must be planned with many things in mind in order to keep their attention. Such things as authentic activities, understanding of different learning theories, using the proper tools for the occasion, and understanding the technology available to you as an instructional technologist should all be taken into consideration. While I found *Learning Theory and Online Technologies* by Linda Harasim (2012) difficult to read at times, it has been and will continue to be an invaluable resource for me in my career. Our other required text, *Engaging the Online Learner* by Rita-Marie Conrad and Ana Donaldson (2011) will be a go-to book for me when looking for examples or different ideas on how to properly engage and spice up and add variety to my instruction. I have thoroughly enjoyed this course. As a student, this course was extremely engaging and set up in a productive way. It provided authentic activities, even on authentic activities themselves. I greatly appreciate and will always value this experience.



## EDTC 7040: INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR DISTANCE

## References

1. Batten, A. (2016, September 18). Computer Programmers and Objectivist World View. [Online discussion board]. Retrieved from [https://blackboard.ecu.edu/webapps/discussionboard/do/message?action=list\\_message&conf\\_id=\\_302108\\_1&forum\\_id=\\_452039\\_1&nav=discussion\\_board&course\\_id=\\_413005\\_1&message\\_id=\\_12622479\\_1 - msg\\_\\_12622479\\_1Id](https://blackboard.ecu.edu/webapps/discussionboard/do/message?action=list_message&conf_id=_302108_1&forum_id=_452039_1&nav=discussion_board&course_id=_413005_1&message_id=_12622479_1 - msg__12622479_1Id).
2. Brown, A. (2016, November 4). RE: Batten - Authentic Learning Activity. [Online discussion board]. Retrieved from [https://blackboard.ecu.edu/webapps/discussionboard/do/message?action=list\\_messages&forum\\_id=\\_452042\\_1&nav=discussion\\_board&conf\\_id=\\_302108\\_1&course\\_id=\\_413005\\_1&message\\_id=\\_12742448\\_1 - msg\\_\\_12742448\\_1Id](https://blackboard.ecu.edu/webapps/discussionboard/do/message?action=list_messages&forum_id=_452042_1&nav=discussion_board&conf_id=_302108_1&course_id=_413005_1&message_id=_12742448_1 - msg__12742448_1Id).
3. Brown, A., & Green, T. D. (2011). *The essentials of instructional design: Connecting fundamental principles with process and practice* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.
4. Conrad, R., & Donaldson, J. A. (2012). *Engaging the Online Learner: Activities and Resources for Creative Instruction*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
5. Harasim, L. M. (2012). *Learning Theory and Online Technologies*. New York, NY: Routledge.