

**A Reflection on the Design & Delivery of a Pilot Language Science Course**

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## Course Design

The group I worked with created a pilot Language Science course. Initially we chose this topic because Jenna is an instructor in the Communication Sciences & Disorders program at USF-Sarasota Manatee, and will be teaching this course for the first time online in the Fall. She proposed creating our distance class using a chapter in the Language Science book as a way to prepare for designing the course to be delivered online. Caylen and I joined the project because we both found the topic fascinating. I am actually a graduate of the Communication Sciences & Disorders program at USF-SM, and Jenna was an instructor for several of my courses when I went through the program, so I had a little bit of background knowledge regarding the topic, though not as much as Jenna. Jenna was our Subject Matter Expert for the course, and Caylen and I largely worked with her to design the course and create extra content she would ideally be able to use for her class in the Fall.

In the design of the course, we used the Community of inquiry model which emphasizes three types of presences: social presence, teacher presence, and cognitive presence (Davey, Elliot, & Bora, 2019). One of the ways we were able to maintain a teacher presence was through the use of pre-recorded lectures, which Jenna created. She was also able to incite cognitive presence throughout the lecture by embedding quiz questions with a program called Kaltura. Adding these questions allowed us to check the students' understanding of the lecture content as they progressed through it. Jenna also added an open-ended question at the end of each lecture asking students if there were any points of confusion remaining after watching the lectures. This gave students the opportunity to let us know which concepts they were still struggling with and needed clarified to improve their understanding of the material. At the end of the week, Jenna sent out a class email which addressed the questions brought up at the end of the lecture.

To aid more visual learners, Caylen created an infographic for the second module outlining the main points of Second Language Acquisition, and to help students further assess their understanding of the lecture and reading material, I created an interactive self-assessment quiz for each module in Articulate Storyline and uploaded it onto CANVAS as the final task for each module. Having these various means for students to take in the material and reflect on their understanding of it allows students with different learning styles to remain involved in learning (Ko & Rossen, 2017, p. 371).

We also integrated *Mayer's multimedia principles* and *Quality Matters principles* for Higher Education courses. Caylen took the lead on making sure that our course was aligned with the Quality Matters principles, as she is currently an Instructional Designer for the Psychology department at USF, and has experience with making sure that courses meet the Quality Matters specifications. She also created the Course Alignment Map, which informed the students of the course learning goals. This clearly communicated our expectations as instructors as to what the students would learn and what knowledge they would be able to demonstrate upon the close of the course.

As we designed the assignments, we wanted to make sure that we gave students plenty of opportunities to connect the module topic to real-life situations. We accomplished this in Module 1 by assigning students to create media explaining a Learning Acquisition (LA) theory to a layperson. This assignment leans heavily on Constructivist principles, as it relies on providing learners with a sense of autonomy over the way they present information and allows them to participate in content creation for the lesson (Bostock, 1998). The discussions for both Module 1 and Module 2 were designed around Connectivist learning principles, which focuses on generating interaction between students while also promoting each other's learning perspectives and making interdisciplinary connections between content and previous knowledge (Siemens, 2004). In the Module 1 discussion, students were given the task of evaluating current language learning programs on the market such as Duolingo or Hooked on Phonics. The discussion required them to connect the language acquisition theories they learned about to the product they were examining. The Module 2 discussion relied more on the students' personal experiences as second-language learners. It required them to reflect on their experiences with learning another language and to make connections between their experience and what they learned in Module 2 regarding the different theories about second-language acquisition.

Certain assignments received more interactivity than others. For example, the discussion board where students were asked to relate their own language learning experience to second language acquisition theories had much more activity and student involvement than the previous weeks assignment where students were asked to identify language acquisition theories guiding language learning products currently on the market.

We designed each module to take a week to complete, and we split the various teaching tasks between the three of us. Again, Jenna pre-recorded lecture videos with embedded quizzes. She monitored the lecture participation and the student quiz results. She also addressed student questions regarding content whenever there was a concept that needed more explanation. She also graded and provided student feedback for the Module 1 assignment (create media explaining a learning acquisition theory to a layperson). I monitored, graded, and provided individual student feedback for the Module 1 discussion, and Caylen monitored, graded, and provided student feedback for the Module 2 discussion. We decided to provide students with personalized, individual feedback via the gradebook for each assignment/discussion. While we included the end-of-module self-assessments, those were purely for the students to use as a way to check their understanding of the course content and were not graded.

## **Reflections**

There are several things that I would do differently based on the student feedback and my experience instructing this online pilot course for two weeks. Regarding this specific course, I would make the following changes:

Our lectures were about 25-30 minutes, with intermittent quiz questions throughout to monitor students understanding of the content. Students received a participation grade for completing the lecture and the embedded quiz questions. Our student feedback indicated that even the 25-30 minute lectures were too long and that the students preferred shorter lectures.

Since each module was designed to take one week to work through, I would have created shorter but more frequent lectures. Having three 10-minute lectures would have given students smaller amounts of information, reducing the cognitive load and allowing them more time to digest the topics between each lecture. And while the entirety of the lectures would still have taken about a half-an hour of the students' time, the shorter lengths per lecture would have been less overwhelming for students to manage. I would, however, still include the embedded quiz questions in the pre-recorded lectures to signal to the students' which material I want them to focus on and to monitor student progress.

Another student mentioned they would have liked a few more reminder emails for assignments. If I were to redo this course, I would add a mid-week email check in to remind students of upcoming assignments due and encourage them to check the responses and contribute to the discussion board. I would also use this as an opportunity to address any questions which might have arisen regarding the lecture and/or reading content in the first half of the week. I think adding a mid-week reminder/check-in is the perfect compromise to adding additional reminder emails without overwhelming both myself as an instructor and the students with too many emails.

We were also challenged with fitting so much content into a two-week course. For this course, we took a unit out of the middle of the Language Science book, rather than starting at the beginning. Therefore, students did not have as much background knowledge going into the lesson as regular Language Science students. It was difficult for Jenna to explain the material in a short period of time for students who were lacking the necessary background information regarding the subject matter. The thirty-minute lectures seemed short enough to explain the necessary principles without being too long, but as we saw in the student feedback, even that was too lengthy. We also wanted to make sure that we did not overwhelm our students with content, especially since they were voluntarily taking our course and had other classes to focus on. However, since we approached this as we were designing a pilot course for Jenna to teach to dedicated Language Science students in the Fall, it was difficult to decide which content could be left out, as Module 1 provided necessary background information to Module 2. If I were to redesign this course, I would choose to do only one topic and stretch that out into a two-week module. For example, instead of doing *both* Language Acquisition and Second-Language Acquisition, I would do two modules on Language Acquisition *only*. In the first week I would cover the first three language acquisition theories, and the remaining theories in the following week. Then I would design another learning acquisition assignment and discussion board post which would allow the students to dive further into the topic and gain mastery over the content.

If I could do it differently, I would also add a section to the end of the modules containing extra resources. For example, maybe interesting TEDtalks regarding language learning, and other videos which maybe explain a different aspect of the language learning principles being covered in the lectures. I would also add links to a few scholarly journal articles regarding language acquisition, for the students who learn best through text and are interested in exploring the research surrounding the topic. Adding a variety of resources allows students of various learning styles to further explore the content, if they were so inclined.

Despite the challenges for instruction and the amount of content the students needed to complete, the majority of students participated and were able to connect their personal experiences as language learners to the content, ensuring that they learned more about language science through their experiences.

As an instructor, I really enjoyed designing the course. Jenna, Caylen, and I each got to try out new web-tools, applications or software to enhance our instructional techniques. As a former language science student, it was nice to be able to give Jenna input into her class that would help her improve it from a student's perspective. But I also really enjoyed the teaching. While time consuming, I enjoyed reading the students' discussion posts and seeing them make real-life connections to the material they were learning. Even though I did not grade the Module 2 discussion, that was my favorite to read. Students interacted with each other more and I got to learn about each student through their discussion post. Overall, this assignment was a pleasant and valuable experience.

## References

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