

## WEEKLY LESSONS: HOW TO EFFECTIVELY DEVELOP AND STRUCTURE YOUR ONLINE/BLENDED COURSE

### **Objectives**

This presentation will offer participants an effective and meaningful approach to developing and structuring their e-learning courses. First, the presenters will discuss the rationale for the weekly lesson plan organizer. Next, the anatomy of a weekly lesson plan will be presented and a series of example weekly lesson pages will be reviewed and discussed. Participants will have an opportunity to make suggestions to how to apply these templates to their existing online course content material and how to modify extant online courses to meet their students' specific learning needs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Developing a web-based course can often be a challenging and harrowing experience. However, there is a generative process available for instructors that not only synthesizes the course content, but also facilitates students' learning outcomes. Weekly lesson pages serve as a template that offers an external meta-cognitive support system for both learners and instructors (Ormrod, 2011). This system succinctly provides students with each week's content and materials in one organized space. Weekly lesson pages allow instructors to develop a focused and structured approach to delivering the course content material in easy and accessible way that addresses students' various learning needs through a multi-modal design.

“Weekly lesson pages” are a lesson plan presented to the learner, on a weekly basis. Lesson plans have been used for decades by educators. But what constitutes a good lesson? Gagné, (1965) was amongst the first to provide a list of events that should occur during instruction. Subsequently, Dick, Cary, and Cary (2009) refined his list of nine events to describe

five learning components. Both are classic Instructional Design models that have been extant for decades. Underscoring both approaches is the assumption that student learning can be enhanced by using an effective combination of instructional elements of an instructional lesson. The Weekly Lesson model builds on the components provided by Gagné (Gagné, 1965; Gagné, Wager, Golas, & Keller, 2004), and Dick and Carey to apply their components in the development of a lesson, for online or blended learning. The Dick and Carey model suggest five “learning components” (p. 172) that should be included in a weekly lesson:

(a) Preinstructional activities – these are activities to begin the lesson. As a part of our weekly lesson template we provide an audio podcast that reviews the weekly objectives to provide learners with guidance and motivate them. Next is the main (b) “Content presentation” (p. 172) for the week. There are a number of microstrategies or formats for presenting content (Dick, Carey, & Carey, 2014). (c) Participation is also important. One should not simply present content; learners should be required to apply what they have recently learned. Next is (d) Assessment. Some form of assessment should be included in the lesson plan (e.g. quiz, reflection, project, etc.) to ensure that learning has occurred. Finally, (e) “follow through activities” (p. 172) are developed for closure, and transfer.

### **Evidence to Support Argument**

In the 1970’s Bednar, Zelhart, Greathouse, and Weinberg argued that weekly lessons serve as reinforcement. They also demonstrated that improved learner performance could result from weekly lessons. In addition, due to the nature of the distance learning environment, Moore (1989) argued that learners develop schema as a result of learner-content interaction. Weekly lessons also offer a consistent approach to organizing the curriculum that helps students build schema concerning the content being delivered (Ormrod, 2011). Finally, the weekly lesson

format provides an advanced organizer of each week's activity, allowing learner's the ability to plan their time appropriately. Since this approach provides the lesson plan to the learner in advance, it offers a student-centered approach.

### **Conclusions**

The weekly lesson format is useful; it provides a complete lesson in a structured and well-organized manner. Continued use of this format reinforces positive learner behavior and promotes improved learner performance. Finally, serving as an advanced organizer, it offers a student centered approach that allows the learner to work independently and plan their workload according to their schedule at a distance.

### **References**

- Bednar, R. L., Zelhart, P. F., Greathouse, L., Weinberg, S. (1970). Operant conditioning principles in the treatment of learning and behavior problems with delinquent boys. *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 17(6, Pt.1) 492-497. doi: 10.1037/h0029884
- Dick, W., Carey, L., & Carey, J. O. (2009). *The systematic design of instruction*. (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Allyn & Bacon.
- Gagné, R. (1965). *The conditions of learning* (1<sup>st</sup> ed.). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Gagne, R.M., Wager, W.W., Golas, K., & Keller, J.M. (2004). *Principles of instructional design*. (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.
- Moore, G. M. (1989). Editorial: Three types of interaction. *American Journal of Distance Education*, 3(2), 1-7. doi:10.1080/08923648909526659
- Ormrod, J. E. (2011). *Human learning* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.