

Melody Buckner  
LRC 576 – Teacher Research  
Spring 2012

### **Mid-Point Progress Narrative**

#### **Research question:**

- How can we assist online students to become more successful in the LRC 320 online course?
  - How can the design of the LRC 320 online course help guide students to the content and to the learning objectives/outcomes of the course?
  - How can we clearly explain the learning objectives and help the students achieve the learning outcomes of the LRC 320 course?
  - How can the online discussions assist students in achieving the learning objectives/outcomes of the LRC 320 course?

#### **Emerging Themes or Patterns from the supporting data**

The only data I have collected are the notes from office hours, emails and online discussions. There are some themes emerging from this small amount of data. One is that students are frustrated with the ambiguity of the courses overall objectives and how to complete the course assignments. They come to office hours confused and perplexed about expectations for the assignments. They are not sure of the purpose of the assignments and how it relates to them and the course.

For example, today a student came in and was unclear about what subject she was to record for the podcast assignment. The assignment stated record anything that relates to the course, but she did not understand this statement. There were instructions in the assignment to go and listen to short podcast developed by others, but no real examples posted in the assignment. Another student from today's office hours did not understand the website assignment and was a bit overwhelmed by the technology. She wants to make her website look more professional, but lacks the skills to create a professional looking website.

From this early data the themes or patterns would be confusion over assignment expectations and overwhelmed or frustrated with the technology. As to

this date nothing has come up about navigation or discussions. I am hoping to gain some insight with the survey and interviews.

### **Evaluative Reflection on the Data Collection and Analysis Process**

I am collecting data in three different ways. First, I have been keeping notes on student's comments from the time I spend with them in office hours, both live and virtual. I also am noting the questions asked in discussions and through email exchange.

Second, I have administered a survey through "News" posting in D2L. The survey has 21 questions with a place for additional comments. I also send out an email to students in the class letting them know about the survey. I created a cover page for the survey telling participants about the survey and requesting their consent. On a side note, I attended an IRB training hosted by the Human Subjects Research Program. It was a very good session. I would recommend all graduate students who are considering conducting research attend one of these hour sessions. I asked some specific questions about my online survey and consent. She told me to write up a cover page telling students about the purpose of the survey, ask consent to use their response and finally ask if they are over the age of 18. I have included this in the first page of my online survey. She also told me that this survey might not have to go to IRB as it is anonymous and is being used for quality improvements of a program or course. However, the next part of my data collection would be subject to IRB if I interview 4 or more participants.

On to my next data collection, which is interviewing 3 to 5 students about their experience in this online course. I will be conducting these interviews in the next two weeks.

### **Findings in the Literature**

As I was creating my research questions I searched for articles about online courses and student success. One article found learners value several elements leading to success in an online course. The elements include: teacher presence, instructional design or organizational patterns of the course and direct instruction.

Other articles discuss the success of online students through building of communities with in the discussion forum. While others find that media and self-motivation are the key to student success in an online classroom. Basic, there are many viewpoints based in the literature pointing to many factors contributing to students successful completing and learning in an online course.

One of the main theories I am using to frame my research question is the Adult Learning Theory, popularized by Malcolm Knowles. The principles supporting this theory include: self-concept, experience, readiness, orientation and motivation. Merriam and Caffarella continue along this line by addressing transformative learning through experience, critical reflection and development. I will also be drawing from Communication Theory and Motivation Theory to complete my lens for this research.

### **Preliminary Answers to the Research Question**

My research question is: “How can we assist online students to become more successful in the LRC 320 online course?” I do not have any clear answers to my research questions at this point, because I have not had a chance to analyze the data. My current thoughts or insights are that students who are struggling with the online content seek assistance through the office hours either face-to-face or through virtual methods. Many of the issues deal with lack of understanding the assignments and difficulty with the technology. So to answer my question, we may be able to help students be successful in this online course by working on making the assignments very clear and explaining the assignments in various ways. For example, keep the existing HTML, but add a PDF for students to download and create a video for students to listen to or watch the instructions.

My sub-questions have not been thoroughly addressed with my limited data collection, but I hope to address these questions in the survey and through the interview process.

## **A Reflection: Why do teachers do research? How do I see myself as a researcher?**

At this point in time I can see the value of conducting action research in the classroom especially after reading the Funds of Knowledge book about the use of the ethnographer's lens. When a teacher steps outside of the role of teacher and becomes a learner, then remarkable changes can take place in the educational environment. I can see myself as a researcher both as a teacher and an instructional designer. There are many things I can learn from students about the online educational experience. The online classroom is a relatively new type of learning environment. There is much research that needs be conducted in this area and much room for improvement. The technologies alone are an area that I would be very interested in studying. An example of this might be to explore the use a certain technology in pedagogical best practices.