

Course Program Components Explored Through the Lens of Development and Learning

Theories

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*Abstract*

Program components for a recently developed online course will be explored through the lens of development and learning theories. Video tutorials, discussion threads, rubrics and critiques will be evaluated through examples to compare how applied theories benefit learner outcomes. The process reveals the strongest of the theories as developmental because of the specific subject matter used in the evaluation.

## Course Program Components Explored Through the Lens of Development and Learning Theories

Engaging adult learners through course components requires a variety of approaches to address learner characteristics such as age, learning styles, motivation and development.

Malcolm Knowles's (1975) theory of andragogy showed that adult learners were motivated by immediate use of the learning while being self-directed in their approach.

Kegan's (1982) work demonstrated stages of development for an evolving self which achieved balance at each successive stage in a progressive advancement from subjective to objective perspective.

Knowles' learning theory and Kegan's development theory will be used to lead the evaluation of course components that I recently created for *GD255 Digital Animation* at Westwood College. Each course component will include context and rationale for why it was chosen. This will be combined with evaluations of the components compared to learning and development theories to show evidence of which theory is the strongest.

### Course Components

The guidance provided for creating the course components for *GD255 Digital Animation* at Westwood College included recommendations for creating multimodal content to help students understand complex software tools and learning objectives. The course components that will be evaluated here are: video tutorials, discussion threads, grading rubrics, and critiques.

#### Video Tutorials

The reason for selecting video tutorials as a learning component is because of its effectiveness in helping the students see a model of what they will perform. The capacity to view and review a video tutorial of new concepts and techniques fits with the self-directed aspect of adult learners seeking immediate use of the content (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). Video tutorials are an example of Downes's (2010) research regarding a participation approach versus a retention approach. Self-directed learning can be supported by creating frameworks for participation for the student and their evolving personal learning environment that extends beyond the traditional classroom.

Learning theory and self-directed learning fits well with instructional video tutorials because of the potential for transformative and experiential learning. The context of a training tutorial is not as influential when viewed from the development theory perspective of Kegan's evolving self because of the focus on context rather than an emphasis on changing cognition (1982, p. 89). If the content of the video focused on an emotional presentation to increase epistemology or the different ways of knowing, it would be a more motivated use of developmental theory for the learner.

### **Discussion Threads**

Discussion threads were selected because of the interactive approach to the subject matter and learning. Erik Erikson's studies showed developmental stages of adulthood can be applied in teaching by inviting participation from class members from perspectives that are important to their appropriate developmental stages (Harder, 2002). Providing an opportunity for students to consider other approaches fits well with Kegan's (1982) progressive stages of the self which

began with the incorporative, impulsive, and imperial self before advancing to gain perspectives of others through interpersonal views and institutional understanding. The use of discussions for software training courses helps the learner gain perspectives on applied use of the skills in addition to troubleshooting strategies that may not have been considered.

### **Grading Rubrics**

Grading rubrics were selected because of the ability to direct the objectives of the material. Daloz used the analogy of a road map to demonstrate that learning journeys can be explored in many ways (1989, p. 46). Knowles's (1975) work demonstrated that much of the adult learner's experience was self-directed. The use of a rubric fits this initiative, however, including the rubric objectives in discussions can connect this component to the developmental stages of Kegan's (1982) evolving self.

### **Critiques**

Critiques were selected because of the potential to construct learning through shared works. Providing an opportunity for the students to construct learning contributes to their ability to make sense of their experience (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 291).

Reflection is an important part of self-directed learning theory, but it also plays a role in advancing from stages of learning by evaluating the current equilibrium and seeking out the next progressive phase of the evolving self (Kegan, 1982). This component uses learning theory and development theory to provide the learner an opportunity demonstrate created work while comparing and contrasting new perspectives gained through interactive feedback, observation, and reflection.

### **Evidence of the Strongest Theory**

The choice of development over learning theory or the other way around is dependent on the subject matter. In the case of a focus on skill development such as learning new software, the experiential and transformational work of self-directed learning theory and pedagogy concepts of immediate applied use of the learning provides the strongest match for the learner objectives.

### **Using Development and Learning Theories for Course Components**

By working from a perspective of learner outcomes and the subject matter, research and applied use of theories can be evaluated along with the multi-modal components for the class. Creating a hierarchy of objectives and matching them to informed use of theories will clarify the impact to the learning activities selected and designed for the course.

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