Three Tips for Instructional Design

Norio Hozaki

Teachers are sometimes lost in designing their course instruction.What you need to know when you design course instruction is, to a considerable extent, common, regardless of the subject you teach. It is called an instructional design. As a matter of fact, there exists a variety of instructional designs within the discipline of eductional technolgy. In each one of many available instructional designs there are three core stages (out of about a dozen) which you might not want to miss, especially if you struggle in designing course instruction in your own disciplinary area at the end of March each year.

The first thing you might want to do in the beginning of making an instructional design is a needs assessment. At this stage, you try to fill in the gap between the way things "are," and the way things "ought to be," or at least "hope to be." As we all know from our teaching experience at the college level, however, for some reason or other we often skip or disregard this initial important stage, and directly go into the stage of lesson planning, probably because we feel we already understand the students' needs or we believe we do not have to pay enough attention to their wants or needs toward their going into society. It is strongly suggested that you carefully analyze what YOUR students want to achieve in YOUR class for a semester or a year.

After you provide a needs assessment, decide the instructional objectives, design the lessons, and begin actual instruction, comes the stage of formative evaluation. One such method of evaluation is an open-ended questionnaire. Another method frequently utilizes the Likert scale, in which "like-dislike," or "agree-disagree" is measured on each question item by a continuous scale, often numbered 1 - 5 or 1 - 7. This evaluation is basically different from course evaluation, or summative evaluation done at the end of the semester in terms of the intended purpose. Formative evaluation can provide necessary data to revise and modify/change any part of your on-going instruction during the semester; whereas, the results of summative evaluation generally cannot be fed back to the students you have just taught. Also, formative evaluation should be done in a systematic way for effective analysis.

The third tip is course evaluation. At this stage, the entire course is evaluated overall for more effective course instruction in the future. Course evaluation is usually done by both the students and the instructor. This evaluation is necessary when you look back to what you have done in a given course, and how instruction has been provided in class. More importantly, data from course evaluation is indispensable when you design instruction for a new, related course.

Teacher-researchers are busy every day. We would like to use our precious time in an effective way. With these three tips your instruction will surely become more effective: and, at the same time, both you and your students may enjoy your class much more. Once you establish this design system, things will go quite easily. Good luck, my senpai colleagues !