Research Paper | Education

Organising the Content in Distance Education

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ABSTRACT *Well organization of anything helps to complete the work smoothly and provides good results. In distance education, organizing the content or learning material of a unit supports the distant learner and maintain motivation and develops interest and become reinforce learning. In organizing the content of a unit, selection of subject matter is very important. When subject teacher makes a plan for a lecture, he tries to determine best choices about how to proceed the topic or lesson and what type of learning materials are to be included. A teacher of economics in America, for example, will utilize examples taken from American Economy while a teacher in India will give emphasis on Indian Economy. A teacher of Sociology in the South India may make lectures on the social condition of south India while a teacher in India while a teacher of North India may make lecturers on the basis of social conditions of the people of North India. In this way the teacher tries to select the learning material relevant to the learners. Relevancy is the specific criterion for choosing learning material in a unit. For this purpose imagination is highly desired. The teacher belong to distance education, tries to make the prediction what learners all over the country will find relevant. If the selection of learning material is not relevant to the need and requirement of the distant learners, the distant learners will not take more interest in learning. This paper also highlights the criteria of selecting and organising content etc.*

KEYWORDS: ORGANISING CONTENT DISTANT EDUCATION

Well organization of anything helps to complete the work smoothly and provides good results. In distance education, organizing the content or learning material of a unit supports the distant learner and maintain motivation and develops interest and become reinforce learning.

Many variations on concept mapping techniques exist to help you decide on an organizational structure for your content. The key idea is to name, in a word or two, the major topics or concepts for your course, then try to visually place them on the page. You can use a hierarchical approach or put the concept in the centre of the page and work out from there. Put the words into boxes or bubbles and connect them with lines or arrows to show how the material connects. You may also want to put verbs on the connectors to clarify the relationships between ideas. For an even more flexible approach, try using an index card for each concept, instead of boxes on one sheet of paper, and physically move them around until you see an organization that makes sense. For more linear thinkers, creating lists of headings and subheadings is equally effective.

In organizing the content of a unit, selection of subject matter is very important. When subject teacher makes a plan for a lecture, he tries to determine best choices about how to proceed the topic or lesson and what type of learning materials are to be included. A teacher of economics in America, for example, will utilize examples taken from American Economy while a teacher in India will give emphasis on Indian Economy. A teacher of Sociology in the South India may make lectures on the social condition of south India while a teacher in India while a teacher of North India may make lecturers on the basis of social conditions of the people of North India. In this way the teacher tries to select the learning material relevant to the learners. Relevancy is the specific criterion for choosing learning material in a unit. For this purpose imagination is highly desired. The teacher belong to distance education, tries to make the prediction what learners all over the country will find relevant. If the selection of learning material is not relevant to the need and requirement of the distant learners, the distant learners will not take more interest in learning.

The aims and objectives of the course play important role in selecting the subject matter. A course in Economics for example, might be aimed basically Indian Economy The Syllabus of the course might be identical to that offered to undergraduates in many universities. The selected content must be related to the need of distant learners.

Another most important criterion for selecting subject matter is related to effective learning. In distance education most of the learners are passive. They only sit, read and memorise and learn without thinking. The course winter must select learning materials which stimulates thinking or helps the distant learners to solve problems. A topic related to the demand and supply, for example, might be constructed around the

central position of the market situation in particular area of any region of India.

Finding content
Check in department for past syllabi :
if we are offering a pre-existing course. Also be sure to check your institution's course calendar and read the course description to ensure that your course meets that stated description.

Locate similar courses at other institutions :
if our course is new (or we would like some new ideas). Talk to your colleagues in our discipline area or go to the web to find courses. One of the best interdisciplinary on-line resources is MIT Open Courseware.

Review textbooks in discipline area
This can be a very easy way to locate not only possible content to cover but also ready-made organizational structures. Publishers will send out texts for you to review. Keep your students in mind when choosing texts – not only their abilities and past experience with the topic areas but also their time limitations.

If texts are not available or not appropriate, we may need to create a reading package or course notes:
It will take more time to compile this type of resource, so set aside a few months for this activity. Also, be sure to factor in the time that may be needed to receive copyright clearance for copying and selling published materials. Our institution may have an agreement such as CanCopy which makes this less of an issue, but be sure to investigate what is possible in advance so we avoid basing part of our course on materials that we cannot easily secure for the students.

Selecting Content
In many cases the formulation of content is seen as the starting point of curriculum development. Some analogies may help illustrate the limitations of this approach:

· beginning to build a house by buying the building materials. Once we have the materials, we ask an architect to do a design that uses the materials and then buy the land.
· planning a holiday by first packing your suitcase. Once we have packed, we then decide where to go, how to get there and what to do on your holiday based on what is in the suitcase.

Often the outcome of a 'content first' approach is a list of topics to be covered - content is equated with knowledge.

Content is more than just knowledge. Content selection needs to give appropriate balance to subject knowledge, process skills and the development of the student as learner as well as to detail and context.

It is more constructive to consider content in the context of assessment and learning outcomes.
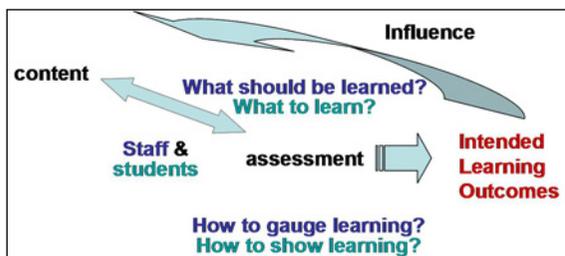
The key questions then are:

what knowledge (concepts, ideas, interpretations, applications) must/should/could be included to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes? what generic process knowledge and skills should the student have been taught by the end of the topic? what context in the discipline do the students need to have by the end of the topic? what is the appropriate balance of content: depth/breadth, knowledge/skills and processes/values? what content could contribute to the development of Graduate Qualities?

Each area of content should also be considered in terms of a number of criteria:

significance validity	how essential or basic is it to the discipline? is the content accurate, current and relevant to the aims and intended learning outcomes?
relevance utility	what is the discipline/workplace/societal value of this content? how useful will the content be to students beyond the confines of the topic or course? will it benefit them in 'real life' and/or professional practice?
interest learnability	will this content interest the students? will the students be able to learn the content (in the time available)?

The last criteria points to a further issue: the curriculum in any topic is bounded and finite. Not everything can be included so choices and exclusions have to be made. Compressing content is generally not a successful strategy.

One perspective on curriculum development argues that the selection of content is complete NOT when as much as possible has been put in, but rather when as much as possible has been taken out without compromising the integrity of the topic as a learning experience.

Once content has been selected it needs to be organized in relation to two main principles: scope and sequence. Time is a major factor in determining the scope of content and the balance between breadth and depth.

Integration is also a factor in relation to scope: students generally learn more when they are able to connect new content to prior knowledge and to seek and find real world applications for what they are learning.

Important Criteria for Ordering Material :

Teaching methods utilized by the teacher could be observed in terms of a continuum which starts from the highly prescriptive to entirely student centered. Each and every method of teaching used by the teacher affects the order of the learning material. In prescriptive way of teaching, the teacher starts to provide definitions, presenting principles, listing main points and take help of examples for maintaining more clarity in presentation of learning materials.

In discovery learning, the teacher could provide a simple problem or ask a single question. The teacher tries to provide guidance to the students in finding out the solution of a problem or answer of a question.

Students central teaching methods are fruitful but they are the learners. Teacher centered methods of teaching are not advisable in distance education. Some of the common approaches are as under:

1. Topic by topic or parallel themes approach
2. Chronological sequence of historical approach
3. Place-to-place or adjacent places approach
4. Concentric circle approach
5. Casual or cause effects chain approach
6. Structural logic or the disciplines own logical approach.
7. Problem Centred approach
8. Spiral approach
9. Backward chaining approach

In topic by topic approach topics are to be considered separate and independently. They could be studied in any order.

Topic 1
Topic 2
Topic 3
Topic 4
Topic 5
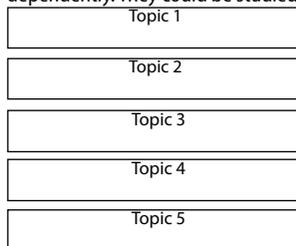
In chronological sequence events or happenings are to be organized in the same order in which they happened.

1997
1998
1996
1995
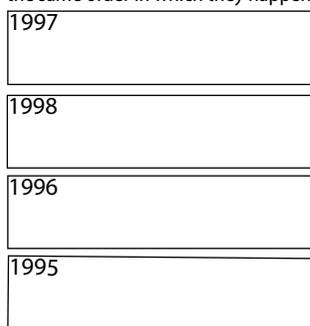
In place to place approach, the learning materials are to be presented from one place to an adjacent one. For example, in describing. Demnd in market situation, the course writer can start from the meaning of the Demand, then types of demand then move on factors affecting demand etc. This approach is shown in the following figure.
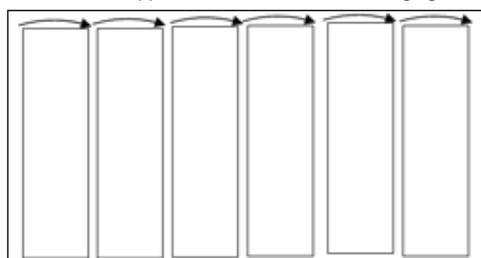

In concentric circle approach, one idea is to be incorporated in the next idea and so on. This approach is depicted in figure as under :
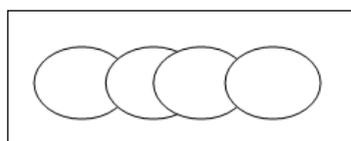
In casual or cause effects chain approach, learning material is to be presented in a cause and effect order. The distant learners act through the chain of causes and effects for some events until learners proceed ahead and could be able to explain the final effect.

In structural logic approach the logical structure of the discipline indicates the organization of content. The distant learner can not understand the topic without understanding the other topic. For example, in Economics, without understand demand, supply can not be understood. This is shown in the following figure.
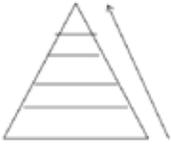
In problem central approach, learning material is to be repeated over and over further as the course develops with more complex level.

In backward chaining approach the rest step in the sequence is learnt first, followed by the second last step. It works backwards to the first step. For example the teacher teaches interpretation of research data before presentation of data and before collection of data, and so on.

The course writer would try to use the following criteria for ordering learning material :
1. Start from specific to general
2. Start from known to unknown
3. Start from simple to complex

The course writer may use other procedures for organizing learning material as under :
1. Specific to general
2. Easy to difficult

3. Basic to advance
4. Simple to complex

5. Familiar to unfamiliar
Set some type of criteria to help select appropriate content for your course. Course design literature suggests the following criteria. Course content should:

- Fit with your course learning goals
- Have importance in the discipline
- Be based on or related to research
- Appeal to student interests
- Not overlap excessively with student past experience or knowledge
- Be multi-functional (help teach more than one concept, skill, or problem)
- Stimulate search for meaning
- Encourage further investigation
- Show interrelationships amongst concepts

At the time of writing, the course writer must utilize all criteria for organizing content well in distance mode of education.

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