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OLIT 501 – Instructional Design: Dr. Kevin Brady, PhD

This was the very first course that I had in the OLIT program and I must say that it was a very good place to start. In fact, I was surprised to hear from the instructor that lots of people take other classes before this one and sometimes are taking Instructional Design right before they graduate. I feel very fortunate to follow the “correct” order as this course was an excellent foundation for the two years that I spent in the program. One of the reasons that I decided to apply for the program in the first place was the fact that I was already working with technology and with instructional design (in the beginning, I called it only design) and I realized that I was mostly self-taught in many of the things that I was doing. Although I was successful in my first design experiences, I longed to have more formal training in the field so that I could become an even better designer.

I found exactly what I was looking for in this course. I was especially pleased with the fact that Dr. Kevin Brady used a teaching method where we would submit multiple drafts of the different components of the instructional design model (ADDIE) and he would give us feedback on each stage so we could improve the next submission. I cannot think of a better way to learn instructional design than this. We were able to keep trying until both student and instructor felt confident that each step of the process had been mastered. I also enjoyed the fact that I was able to use one of my work projects for the class so that I could work on both things simultaneously.

OLIT 561 – The Adult Learner: Kevin Brady, PhD

Similarly to Instructional Design, this was a very good class to take at the beginning of my studies in the OLIT program. I have always been an instructor so the different theories of learning were not new to me. However, it was very beneficial not only to have a refresher on the
different authors and theories, but also to be able to study the learning theories in depth at the graduate level.

What I enjoyed the most about this class was the fact that I was able to use a lot of my experience as a foreign language instructor in the papers and assignments. One thing that I will never forget about this class was the idea of transformational learning. Ever since I learned this (I have to admit I wasn't very familiar before this class), I have been aiming to achieve this in all the instructional projects that I participated.

Transformational learning is a key concept when studying adult education and it is essential to understand one of the most important ways of learning in adulthood: the analysis and transformation of previously existing perspectives acquired during the socialization process. I have definitely seen in my professional practice the struggle of my learners to abandon their previously conceived notions of their own culture in order to acquire cultural values and therefore language functions of a different culture. It is challenging, but the positive outcome is undeniable.

**OLIT 514 – Theory & Practice of Organizational Learning: Robert Grassberger, PhD**

This was one of the best classes that I had in the OLIT program. Dr. Grassberger was able to perfectly achieve a very difficult balance: challenging students to achieve excellence without making them feel overwhelmed. The pace of this class was ideal. All the activities progressed in a logic way, the connections between the assignments not only made sense but also made the assignments more meaningful, and the instructions were crystal clear. That is no easy
accomplishment considering that we had several individual assignments and group assignments and they were all connected to each other.

Since I tend to focus more on the application of theories than on the theory itself, I really appreciate when a class gives me the opportunity to clearly apply my readings to concrete situations. Through this class I also learned what exactly organizational learning entails and the characteristics of a learning organization.

One of the most rewarding experiences from this class was the opportunity to work in groups. This experience has taught me a great deal about the benefits of team learning and how learning can foster in a collaborative group environment. I especially like the way Dr. Grassberger organized the assignments in way that each team member’s individual research would come together to develop the group assignments. I never thought that working in groups could feel so natural and make so much sense. Dr. Grassberger's approach to group work is unique in the sense that it leads group members to a whole new understanding of group dynamics and their own contributions in a team environment. It is safe to say that group work has never been the same since I took this class. It has become a more rewarding experience.

OLIT 507 – Designing Knowledge Management Solutions: Mark Salisbury, PhD

This class introduced me to a whole new world of innovative learning solutions and knowledge management. It is hard to imagine completing my degree without possessing this invaluable knowledge. That is one of the reasons that I was so grateful to have the opportunity to take this class with Dr. Salisbury before he left the program.
Through this class I learned that applying the theory of distributed cognition by Edwin Hutchin is one of the main steps to facilitate collaborative work in an organization. It states that cognition is distributed across individuals, that is, no one person knows all the steps of a complex process. Therefore, by simply following the Life Cycle of Knowledge – the starting point to build a systemic view point to analyze, design, and implement improvements for organizational performance – organizations are able to evenly distribute cognition across individuals and artifacts. I have applied this lesson in the organizations I work with on countless occasions. It has made me a better worker, a better team player and a stronger contributor to these organizations.

**OLIT 521 – Presentation Technologies: Eliot Knight, PhD**

I am a very is strong visual learner and for this reason, taking this class with Dr. Knight was a rare treat. She has a unique background in instructional design and in fine arts, which gives her a creative edge that few other instructional designers have. I felt very lucky to be able to learn from her as she presented a unique perspective on creating visuals for learning and performance.

Once again, I was able to use one of my work projects and advance my academic and professional life at the same time. As part of this class, I developed the tutorial Academic Integrity for Students which is one of the work samples that I present in my professional portfolio. This class has contributed immensely to my growth as a designer and one of the things that I carry out through my professional life from this class is the attention to font usage. It was one of the things that we focused for this class and it left a lasting impression on me. In fact, I constantly refer to the textbook from this class for my design decisions regarding font, and other graphic elements. I am very grateful to Dr. Knight for making such a lasting impression on me.
and for helping me challenge my previous notions, that is, for helping me achieve transformational learning in my life.

**OLIT 562 – Team Development: William James Vosburg, PhD**

This was definitely an unusual, yet productive, class. It was unusual mostly due to the fact that it was a summer class and it was very short (we would meet every day during the month of June). It was also a very small class so that we quickly developed a sense of community and intimacy. The instructor knew a lot about HRD, which I found very interesting because it is not a field that I have in depth knowledge.

I also enjoyed our final project very much because I had the opportunity to write about Game of Thrones, a popular fantasy television series produced by the HBO cable network. It is based on the equally popular novel series *A Song of Ice and Fire*, written by George R.R. Martin. In this fiction, the land of Westeros is ruled by nine noble houses, who in turn command hundreds of lesser vassal houses. In accordance with the theme of the class, I wrote about the team dynamics on each house, which are just as interesting as the intricate plot and play a key hole in developing the story. Most of the action takes places within these different houses that live in the land of Westeros. Some of these families have high values and a strict code of honor, while others are very selfish and have only their own interests in sight.

However, even more interesting than the fights that happen between the different families (or houses) is the team dynamics between each of these groups of people and how these dynamics affect the way they relate to each other and to other characters outside of their own house. Furthermore, the houses in the world of Westeros each have their own banner with an animal that represents the house as well as the house motto. The house mottos are extremely
important to understand the team dynamics of each house, as the meaning behind the motto is often metaphorical and greatly influences the way the members of each of the houses behave. My paper analyzed some of the houses and their mottos from the perspective of team dynamics.

**OLIT 525 – Instructional Multimedia: Victor Law, PhD**

I believe I learned a great deal in this class about instructional multimedia. As I was exposed to the theoretical perspectives that describe the process of instructional multimedia and used such theories in applied situations. I was able to value even more the principles and guidelines outlined by the main authors (Mayer, Morrison, Ross, Kalman, and Kemp) that we studied in this course. Since I tend to focus more on the application of theories than on the theory itself, I really appreciate when a class gives me the opportunity to clearly apply my readings to concrete situations. This will be extremely useful in my professional life because wherever I work from now on, I will be able to make conscious decisions about any design project that I develop, either individually or as a member of a team.

In addition to the very positive group experience, I have also thoroughly enjoyed the technical aspect of this class (learning to use Adobe Flash), as well as the instructional design aspect. One of the reasons that I was able to take full advantage of the learning process in this class was in great deal due to the selection of my group’s topic: English as a Second Language. In a way, this is a return to my roots because my entire academic and professional background prior to moving to the United States in 2009 is on English as a Second Language. I am very interested in this topic, especially Intercultural Foreign Language Education, the uses of computer-mediated communication to create intercultural speakers, the use of technology in
Foreign Language Education, and the role of technological advances in the social framework of today’s world.

I am very grateful and enthused that this class has allowed me to combine all my passions as well as my professional objectives. Now I can add another element (the use of Flash-based instruction) to my constant search for ways to apply technology to the field of foreign language teaching and learning. The many possibilities of using technology to make the connections between different languages and cultures are at the same time limitless and fascinating. All the knowledge that I acquired in this class has only enforced my perception of the infinite possibilities that technology can offer for education (in any field, not just foreign languages) when used correctly. Once again I have to say that this class has fulfilled (and even exceeded) my high expectations.

OLIT 537 – Culture & Global eLearning: Charlotte Nirmalani

Gunawardena, PhD

One of the most rewarding experiences from this class was the opportunity to work in groups. This experience has taught me a great deal about the benefits of team learning and how learning can flourish in a collaborative group environment. I especially like the way Lani organized the modules in a way that each smaller element represented a piece of a larger assignment that we put together at the end of the module. This way, each group member’s individual research and tasks would come together to develop the group project. This experience also taught me to work well with others, to value each person’s strengths and to adapt to unexpected situations, such as when I had to help a fellow classmate who found herself without a
final project. This situation was an added bonus to the final group work, as it gave me the opportunity to mentor this classmate and ease her transition into the group.

Through the magic of group work, I have also learned some important lessons about myself as a learner and as an instructor. The main lesson I learned about myself through this entire process is that I can actually work well in a group environment. This was surprising to me as I always thought that I work better individually. Even more surprising was the fact that not only I worked well within my group, but also that I have very good leadership skills, as I was always at the forefront of our group work and assignments.

**OILS 532 – E-Learning Course Design: Charlotte Nirmalani**

**Gunawardena, PhD**

This was probably the most challenging class that I have taken in the program. And for this same reason, it was also one of the classes that I enjoyed the most. Throughout this entire class I felt that I was learning new things and that I was being challenged to push myself beyond the limits that I had previously established.

The most interesting aspect of this class was having the opportunity to write my personal design framework. It is very important for every instructional designer to have a framework that can then be adapted into different design challenges. Even though I already had a framework in mind before starting this class, I did not have it written and organized. Putting into words my knowledge and beliefs about design was a rewarding and thought-provoking experience. Through my design framework I learned a lot about e-learning course design, as well as myself as a designer. I am very grateful to have had this opportunity and also to receive feedback from
such a knowledgeable and experienced designer like Lani. She is a wealth of knowledge and I feel truly blessed to have been able to learn from her.

**OILS 544 – Program Evaluation: Barbra Jill Portzline, PhD**

Program evaluation is a very well-designed online course. Probably one of the best that I have ever taken. Dr. Portzline has nailed to the letter how to teach this course, how to make us think about evaluation in a critical way, and how to foster discussion about the evaluation process. This class was also a very nice break due to its independent and individualized nature. Of course I enjoy group work and I thrive in a group setting, but it was a nice change of pace to be able to do individual activities for a change. Besides, the independent format matches the subject matter of this course perfectly. I cannot find a single negative thing to say about this class. It was in enriching experience that greatly enhanced my knowledge.

**OILS 596 – Internship: Charlotte Nirmalani Gunawardena, PhD**

For a detailed description of the internship, please check the internship report also available in my professional portfolio.

**Conclusion**

Overall, my experience in the OLIT program has been undeniably and overwhelmingly positive. It is rare to feel so welcome into a program where I was studying with some of the best instructors in the country. Furthermore, I was able to study topics that I am very passionate about and also to help others to foster their knowledge and professional experience. Now that I am finishing the program with a unique combination of academic knowledge, professional experience, and technical skills, I am confident in my ability to make a significant contribution in
the important work of meeting the diverse technical, administrative, and academic technology needs of students and faculty at a higher education setting.