

Online Pedagogy: Maintaining the Rigor and Relevance in Educational Leadership

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Introduction

With increased competition from online degree programs originating outside the immediate area surrounding our university, the need for an assessment of program strengths and weaknesses is obvious. Simultaneously with this competition, Levine's study (2005) criticized the effectiveness of educational leadership preparation programs on the basis that those responsible for teaching aspiring administrators have no professional experience in the field. Additionally, rising costs in higher education, largely as a result of the current recession, have contributed criticisms targeting traditional leadership programs.

As a result of a noticeable drop in enrollment, program faculty at my own regional university conducted a study in January of 2012. Five years of data validated the overall loss in enrollment. Discussions with colleagues in educational leadership from across the state noted similar losses largely attributed to online programs selling graduate degrees for a price much lower than a state university can offer. Decisions to modify the educational leadership program at my university without lowering expectations for graduates resulted in a series of changes to increase our competitiveness, including a "perceived need" (Scott, 2006) for changes in individual courses. Faculty had been updating courses each semester but as the pressure to improve enrollment increased, we examined the learning experience in more depth for its' value to students. Courses in this graduate degree program are aligned to the competencies upon which students are tested for state administrator certification. With the published criticism of leadership programs at the national level (Levine 2005) we reflected at an even deeper level over the rigor of current courses. Fortunately, the concern for a lack of practitioners teaching aspiring administrators was not our issue since our two faculty members are both experienced and certified. This self-study examines the redesign of a course that had moved from being taught on campus to the online environment out of necessity to meet these challenges. All changes to the educational leadership program will not be addressed in this study. Instead, the focus will be on the redesign of this single course and its impact on students as evidenced by an analysis of course development processes, course structure, and student evaluations.

Monitoring the redesign of this course with input from student evaluations as evidence of success or failure has the potential to impact future course designs. Historically, Blooms' Cognitive Taxonomy has been widely used in the traditional education environment to articulate educational objectives based on "six increasingly complex levels," (3) and, according to Eisner (2000), each level assumes mastery of the previous levels. Additionally, Erikson (1998) spent over 20 years studying teaching at the conceptual level and stated that, "...the power of a concept-based model," takes "thinking beyond the facts to facilitate deep understanding and the transfer of knowledge" (viii). The online environment has the reputation for its difficulty in facilitating active student participation for multiple reasons (Gudea xi). Benjamin Bloom believed in the "power of the environment to influence the performance of individuals" (Eisner 2000 p.3). The combined impact of Bloom (1956) and Erikson (1998) guided the rebuilding of this online course. Additionally, this study presents

the perspectives of students, revealing a relevant, stimulating cognitive experience coupled with the impact of course design decisions on those outcomes.

Literature Review

This literature review, although not exhaustive draws upon two dimensions of e-learning, which, according to Smith demonstrate "Learning theory is the study of how people learn (conceptual frameworks that describe how information is absorbed, processed and retained)." Instructional Design Theory is the study of how to best design instruction so that learning will take place. Instructional design theory, then, is drawn from learning theory." (1) MacLean and Scott (2011) refer to this as instructional design and learning design. They assert that learning theory informs instructional design in the online course environment, hence, the impact of understanding the learning theories, particularly of Bloom (1956) and Erikson (1998). As professors, we must understand the students' learning needs and write goals and objectives to facilitate that learning within the online environment.

The knowledge base for online teaching and learning is "growing rapidly" (1) according to Boettcher (2006). With the need to maintain and possibly increase enrollment, logic requires that the online learning environment is dynamic. A professor cannot develop a course and then declare its completion, never to be revised again. The course should continue to evolve to meet the needs of the students each semester and in doing so, the content presentation must also meet the needs of the digitally sophisticated student. Boettcher (2006) lists ten best practices for online teaching: faculty presence in the course, supportive online course community, shared set of clear expectations for students and faculty, variety of working groups and experiences, synchronous and asynchronous activities, informal feedback about the course, interactive discussions, focus on resources and applications, combination of core concept learning with customized and personalized learning, and finally, must plan the closing. Boettcher's ten best practices (2006) address the course content including student interaction with each other and faculty, but do not address the affective component, how the course looks, which also impacts students. Other authors and entities, including online sites share additional best practices for online learning. One such website, LERN, <http://www.teachingonthenet.org>. published twenty best practices. The National Education Association (2006 6-7) published an extensive brochure dedicated to online learning, listing eight "Core Beliefs on Effective Online Education." Table I lists these sources for best practices in order to facilitate a comparison.

Boettcher	LERN	National Education Association
1. Faculty presence in course	1. Organized by units	1. Instructor presence
2. Supportive online course community	2. Warm welcome	2. Student centered
3. Shared set of clear expectations for students and faculty	3. Expectations clearly stated	3. Collaborative learning environment
4. Variety of working groups and experiences	4. Announcements and updates posted	4. Coursework should maximize participation flexibility and provide a framework for student pacing
5. Synchronous and asynchronous activities	5. Welcome page for each unit	5. Courses should foster information, communication and technology skills necessary for success in this century.
6. Informal feedback about the course	6. Discussion rubric	6. Course format , expectations and instructions should be clear and concise
7. Interactive discussions	7. Some online text	7. Activities and assessments should account for different learning styles
8. Focus on resources and applications	8. Visual media (pictures, charts, etc.)	8. Courses should use the latest best practices
9. Combination of core concept learning with customized and personalized learning	9. At least one PowerPoint presentation per unit	
10. Plan the closure	10. One or more audio presentations per unit	
	11. One or more activities	
	12. Online discussion organized by units	
	13. Teacher involved consistently and constantly	
	14. Students make sufficient number of comments by week and unit	
	15. Evidence of replies/responses from students in online discussion	
	16. One or more ungraded quizzes	
	17. Good visual design elements	
	18. More than three assessments used in grading	
	19. Intuitive navigation, user-friendly	
	20. Additional feature not mentioned on list	

Table 1: Comparison of Best Practices in Online Teaching

When analyzed, three categories emerged from these sources: instructional design, learning design, and professor interaction, which might also be included in either of the other categories. However, when comparing best practices, 70-80 percent focused on instructional design (Boettcher 2006 and NEA 2006); 10-50 percent focused on learning design with the NEA(2006) at 50 percent; and lastly, 10-20 percent focused on professor interaction. Noticeably, the NEA (2006) addressed learning design the most. Of the three compared, the NEA (2006) is the only one specifically addressing public school. That may contribute to the noticeable difference in a weightier focus on learning design. Based on this brief review, Maclean and Scott's (2011) focus on instructional design and learning design seems to be validated by the small sampling of online best practices presented in Table 1.

Methodology

This qualitative self-study reflects over the complete redesign of a course entitled, "Educational Leadership and Group Dynamics." Additional content analysis on two course evaluations: one administered online by the university and one developed by the professor and administered inside the course, provide insights into the student experience in the first semester online.

Theoretical framework

Scott's "Pedagogic Planning Tool" (2006) for e-learning is the most appropriate theoretical framework because the circular model contains a comprehensive "course design, development and delivery" (559) cycle enabling a reflection over the change process in course development.

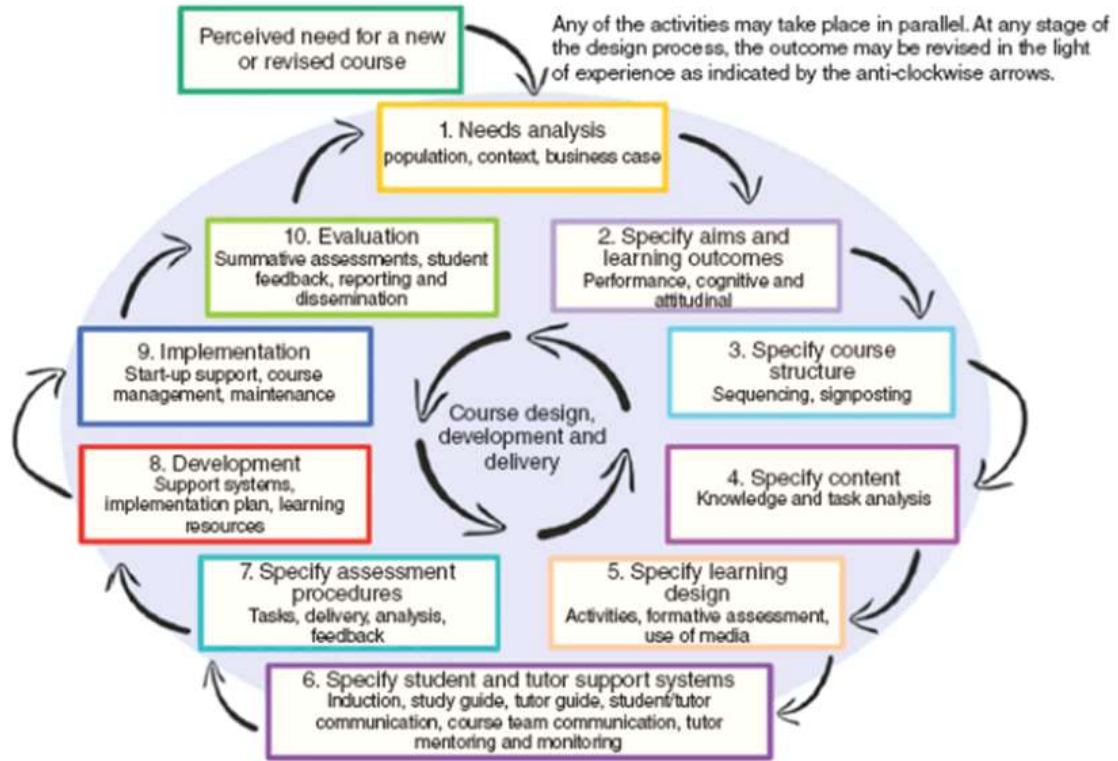


Figure 1: Course design, development and delivery (source: Scott, 2006)

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Figure 1: Course Design Scott (2006)

Step one is the needs analysis, conducted with the awareness of a necessity for change, particularly with a course revision or redevelopment. Step two is to articulate clearly stated and specific aims for learning outcomes in the form of statements. Step three is to specify the course structure in such a way that the course is sequenced and a 'shell' is used to organize the required materials. Step four specifies the content relevant to the learners, including consideration for the overall workload for the course within its organization. Step five specifies the learning design providing a clear indication of the learning outcomes for students with definitive feedback during the learning process. Step six provides student and tutoring support systems. Step seven specifies appropriate and fair assessments. Step eight requires the development of modules that must be planned and coordinated with others (if appropriate). Step nine regards course management, maintenance, accessibility issues and instructional technology support systems. Finally, step ten requires evaluation of the process to ensure design quality.

Historically, this particular course had been offered for over nine years by another professor who had since moved on. We taught the course as it was originally developed, but neither of us was satisfied with the content or presentation. Therefore, we decided to review textbooks to begin the change process. Scott's pedagogical tool (2006) provided a method to monitor the complete revision of this course and Table 2 outlines its basic development. The development of the course followed Scott's pedagogical tool (2006) closely with the exception of step six: providing student tutoring support systems. In my university, a drop

down window on the opening page of any course provides presentations to assist all students in using the technology and course software. Additionally, the university Instructional Technology department provides extensive hours with student assistance to answer any and all software questions individually. In addition to this online assistance, students can contact Student Services for tutoring if needed.

An explanation of course design in conjunction with learning design is supported by quotes from student evaluations directed at specific design components. Once we decided to completely redesign the course, only a short window of opportunity was available for both creative and pedagogic sensibilities. Table 2 contains the steps in Scott’s pedagogical tool opposite the approximate time and application of the tool for the course redesign. Units of study were built online and populated with the components necessary for teaching the identified objectives, i.e., presentations, assignments, assessments, and forums to name a few. Periodic discussions with my colleague in educational leadership verified completeness of each step of the process and offered an opportunity to share products designed, such as the recorded presentations, for critiquing.

Steps in Scott’s Pedagogical Tool (2006)	Timeline	Application of Tool
1. needs analysis	Jan 2012	Discussion with colleague in program; reviewed/chose textbook
2. specify clearly stated and specific aims for learning outcomes	April 2012	Made decisions about what was needed to be used from text by looking at text globally first; created general units of study
3. specify course structure (sequenced and organized)	April 2012	Made decisions about presentation of course; built it; built components
4. specify content relevant to the learners	April 2012	When designing assignments, monitored relevance to learners
5. specify the learning design providing learning outcomes and specific feedback	April 2012	Explained design of course in presentations included in lessons
6. provide student tutoring support systems	N/A	In place by university
7. specify appropriate and fair assessments	April 2012	Decided to make them concept and vocabulary based and scenarios
8. module development planned & coordinated with others (if appropriate).	April 2012	Developed course independent of other faculty except for review by colleague
9. regards course management, maintenance, accessibility issues & instructional technology support systems	May - July 2012	Course open 6/4-7/10
10. requires evaluation of the process to ensure design quality	August 2012	In-course evaluation data downloaded; University evaluation data received and made decision to run class with minor updates in the Fall, 2012

Table 2: Using Scott’s Pedagogical Tool for Process Analysis

The design of the course began with a thorough examination of the chosen textbook. University administration requires careful consideration for textbooks due to the additional expense to students. I created a narrated PowerPoint presentation to feature explanations for the academic strengths of the text accompanied with pictures of the book's pages. Comments on both the university-provided evaluation and the professor-created evaluation validated the textbook choice. The cost was mentioned twice, but one student said this, "I thought the book was pricey at the beginning, but now I think it's priceless." Multiple students echoed this sentiment, indicating it was a book destined for their professional bookshelf.

The aesthetic design of the course began with the creation of a banner used to head all pages. In this way, when a student enrolls in multiple courses, the banner identifies the course more immediately. The required syllabus is considered our contract with each student for the course and must include information such as: course description, faculty/instructor contact information, course requirements; textbooks, course outline; course objectives, explanation of course format; methods of evaluation; course grading, disability statement, copyright, scholastic dishonesty, and evacuation and safety statements. When meeting with a class on campus, faculty members review the syllabus with students. When conducting an online course, the syllabus is reviewed using a narrated PowerPoint presentation posted in the Welcome Unit along with the presentation explaining the textbook choice. Students seem to appreciate knowing the rationale behind decisions made in the course design based on comments on the evaluations, such as: "not too hard, but makes you think," "enjoyed the layout, very well organized and easy to read," "enjoyed how you narrated the presentations, we got to hear what you thought was important," and "appreciated you breaking down the material and showing us how you selected the material," and "gave me insight into getting started [in the course]."

Each unit has a similar look; the banner above a table divided into quadrants. The top left hand quadrant contains bulleted items providing a general overview of the unit of study. The top right hand quadrant contains course resources such as the recorded PowerPoint presentations broken into smaller segments (below 20 minutes each) for ease of downloading and listening time, course components such as the discussion forum, documents created for the unit and the unit quiz. The bottom left hand quadrant gives suggestions on how to proceed; what to do first, etc., in a bulleted list. The bottom right hand quadrant contains a bulleted list of course units with due dates. Each bullet is linked to the unit listed, facilitating movement between units.

PowerPoint presentations are compressed for uploading. Scripting the presentation in the Notes section of the software aids in limiting the length of the recording and has the additional benefit of adding text for hearing impaired students, if necessary. Students are expected to have the ability to download and access all course materials through their own hardware and software or by accessing the equipment provided in the university computer center.

Discussion forums are critical to the active participation between students online. Forum topics embrace broad course concepts introduced with the textbook assignments and unit presentations. Students are expected to converse with each other over the posted topics. They are given choices in order to meet the variety of work experiences and backgrounds characterized by our graduate students. Educators understand that often the

most valuable interactions occur student-to-student, instead of professor-to-student therefore, forums were built to encourage this kind of interaction. Students were required to post or reply a minimum of four times in each forum for full credit. The syllabus and narrated presentations explain that the responses must be substantive at the graduate level, not just simple comments made to meet the minimum for credit. I interact in the forums intermittently so that students are aware of my input. Since adopting this format, forum interaction has increased and has become well attended by students. In this digitally active decade, students generally enjoy the opportunity to converse with each other. Course evaluations support this awareness; "enjoyed reading comments on papers and forum," "you being active in the forum made me look at items from different perspectives," "...most active forum in a long time," "liked that the topic was so broad, allowed for variety of discussion," "made me feel like I was actually in class," and "gave us a chance to know each other." The completed course was ready on the first day of the semester and remained open the entire time, except for the discussion forums. Experience has demonstrated a need to set deadlines for forums to discourage procrastination. Postings made at the last minute are less likely to be truly interactive, providing less meaningful contact with other students.

I designed unit assignments to occur at the application level of Blooms' taxonomy, meaning that graduate students had to read, reflect and then apply learning to complete the assignment. For example, one assignment explains the impact of an "independent variable" in a group situation. For that lesson, students were asked to choose a group to which they belonged, and in a regular event, change an independent variable and observe the response of group members. One student reported that she had dinner weekly with her extended family and would host it at her house. They typically listened to country music while they visited before, during and after dinner. For her assignment, she changed the music to rap. She did not tell family members what she was doing or why, but she observed a marked difference in the comfort level of everyone all evening. Assignments were intentionally developed to encourage students to apply knowledge. As a result, this type of experience directly enhanced forum discussions.

I created assignment documents for the convenience of students and to standardize the work making the process of grading more efficient because all assignments arrived in the same format. A rubric provided at the end of the assignment required students to complete the self-score column before turning in the assignment. This served two purposes: 1) to reflect over the quality of one's own work and 2) to make sure all assignment components were completed. Course evaluation comments validated efforts in creating higher level, meaningful and aligned assignments and included these quotes: "assignments kept me on my toes," "assignments were meaningful and engaging," "the assignments went well with the reading," "the assignments were a great way to apply concepts," and "everything we read and did had meaning."

Quizzes are used to check understanding and took the most time to create for each unit of study. Biggs (1999) asserts the clear connection between what is taught and assessed. I decided to assess concepts in the form of vocabulary words, in part because, according to Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002), "vocabulary should focus on learning words in context" (3). Since vocabulary is important to building understanding, and this course was being redesigned to make it more meaningful maintaining the rigor for graduate students, quiz questions were written as contextual scenarios around vocabulary words. This is difficult to do because as Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) articulate, depending on

the experience of each learner, the scenario may be interpreted differently than what was intended. Based on the few students who asked questions about the answers given in the quizzes, this can happen. However, I enjoyed the opportunity to reflect over a question and the answer choices in order to have a discussion with those few students. Page numbers for vocabulary words were also provided in the quiz, to help students go back to the text to look for the most reasonable answer. Students seemed to appreciate the application of the vocabulary in scenarios instead of the typical definition types of questions. Comments about quizzes included the following: "putting ideas into realistic situations definitely makes it easier to comprehend," "tests were challenging," and, "the exams were practical and required application of the course materials rather than just a regurgitation of facts."

All assessments; unit quizzes, the midterm and final exam, were designed as untimed, multiple choice and students could take each twice. The highest score went into the grade book. About mid-course a student emailed me asking if the back track feature of the exams could be turned on. I asked the student to explain how that would be helpful to the experience. As an adult learner the student gave an excellent explanation which caused me to turn the back track feature on allowing students to go back as they took each quiz. As a result of this interaction, the student appreciated the addition of the feature but also the fact that the professor listened to the rationale and made the change mid-course. Course comments mentioned this and other impacts of the quizzes: "The exams were tough but we were allowed to take them twice. I believe this is the key to retaining the information. Once I saw the question and then looked up each answer and then had a second chance to do it again, I feel like I have had an opportunity to actually learn it and retain the information. It is the way all courses should be taught in order to get the students to see the information a number of times," "...I was able to work out questions I was not sure about instead of just taking a stab in the dark," and "the exams were sufficiently difficult to make you think and yet not so difficult that you had to spend too much time completing them." Obviously, students do not like to fail assessments, as evidenced by the appreciation for the way these quizzes were designed in this course.

The midterm quiz contained questions covering material learned in the first half of the course. The final exam was comprehensive, including questions from the entire course. Students were encouraged to bring materials to the setting as they took their exams. Acknowledging and encouraging the use of resources enhanced the experience for these students based on their comments.

Limitations

Admittedly, this initial study has a small number of participants, but revisions to a course for improvement cannot wait until the N size is larger. The study must be done in a timely manner in order to make necessary changes when needed and then to maintain and track feedback from student evaluations consistently to meet student needs and accomplish learning objectives successfully.

Goodness, credibility, and transferability

It must be acknowledged that a small self-study such as this one from a regional university does not necessarily transfer to other educational environments, therefore, it has

limited transferability, in part due to the small N of thirty-four students enrolled in the course. Additionally, when examining the two evaluations; one provided online by the university and the faculty-developed one in the class had differing numbers of participants. Online student evaluations provided by the university are completely anonymous, which should facilitate student willingness to provide authentic feedback, however, historically there are not a statistically significant number of participants even with encouragement and reminders from professors. Faculty-developed in-course evaluations are encouraged by university administration to supplement the online evaluations directly provided by the university. In this case, the online evaluation rate was 59 percent and the faculty developed in-course return rate was 94 percent.

Findings and discussion

Findings of both types of course evaluations were analyzed for discussion. Student evaluations conducted by the university in the online environment ensure their anonymity, hopefully also facilitating students' honesty when providing feedback. The professor-created evaluation required a great deal of consideration in order to get valid information, and often depends on the relationship between the students and professor.

University provided online evaluations

Online anonymous evaluation data are reported to individual faculty members and college administrators each semester and are used in the tenure and promotion process. Online university provided evaluations are designed in two parts. The first part collects simple demographics (gender, student status-senior, graduate, etc., expected grade) and then moves to a second part containing twenty-one questions. These questions use a Likert scale (agree strongly, agree, disagree, disagree strongly and omit) and can be categorized into three groups: course design, learning design, and questions about the professor. Forty-three percent (9/21) of the questions could be categorized as course design. Thirty-three percent (7/21) of the questions could be categorized as learning design, and twenty-four percent (5/21) could be categorized as relating to the professor. A separate component of the university evaluation includes room for handwritten comments over course content, instructors, objectives, text/homework/papers, exams, improvements and an overall evaluation of content in relation to value to the student. Those categories could be categorized as course design (71 percent), learning design (14 percent) and instructor (14 percent).

Although the number of graduate students in this one online course was small (thirty-four), for this initial study, there is an N of twenty for the online evaluation equaling a 59 percent participation rate. This provides enough information from which to analyze the first rendition of the newly designed course. It is expected that data will be analyzed comparatively with additional semesters in the future. However, for the purpose of this first study, each category of the university provided online evaluation will be discussed based on student comments.

Content

Comments received from the course were categorized as descriptive or affective. Descriptive comments about the content included phrases such as: "key to degree," "benefit

as a teacher," "engaging," "taught thoroughly," "critical to administration," "will use to make changes and advance myself," and "geared only to educational leadership." Affective comments about the content included phrases such as: "thoroughly enjoyed and liked." These comments are listed because they represent what was said repeatedly. The one criticism about the focus being on educational leadership seems odd since the course prefix is educational leadership. However, this course is also a core course which means that all students in the College of Education and Social Sciences are eligible to take the course. Therefore, in the design of the course, efforts were made intentionally to include assignment activities and quiz scenarios allowing for a variety of environments (i.e., business, personal, medical and educational).

Instructor

Instructor comments spoke to professorial interaction with students and respect for student input as to course structure and format or design. Personal comments included: "shares personal experiences," "open to student suggestions," "great teacher," "cares about students," "knowledgeable," "understands about teaching adults," "prompt with grades," and "great enthusiasm." Comments about course design included: "awesome format," "organized," "effective, and provided worthwhile content." Additional mention was made thanking the graduate student who worked as a grader. Comments about the instructor demonstrate student awareness of the effort made by the instructor to support student success. Clearly, students understood that I was interested in their successful completion of the course and that it was developed intentionally to facilitate that end.

Objectives

Course objectives listed in the syllabus articulate behavioral expectations for active student involvement for success. Additionally each lesson contained narrated PowerPoint presentations articulating broad course concepts. Course assignments applied course concepts and were guided by rubrics provided on each unit document. Evaluation comments indicated the awareness of the alignment of those objectives with aspects of the course and included: "stated clearly," "followed as stated," "stated multiple times," "easy to follow," "organization outstanding," "routine consistent," "interesting and [with] motivating activities," and "guiding questions provided." These comments demonstrated the students' understanding of the purpose of each lesson. Repeatedly, students were told that the course was not about reading the text because course content was chosen with the purpose of enhancing learning and with a long term expectation of application in a variety of personal and professional environments. Obviously, students had an awareness of the objectives as indicated by their specific comments.

Text, Homework, Papers

This category encompassed three items; text, homework, and papers. In recent years, university administration has actively encouraged professors to consider the impact of a textbook's cost in the interest of maximizing education value and experience. The text used for this course was one of three considered and was chosen specifically for the consistency of its design and content. To ensure student understanding of the process of the choice, I scripted and recorded the PowerPoint presentation to explain the selling points of the textbook and familiarize students with the text structure and format at the beginning of

the course. Comments about the text included: "enjoyed the text," "liked book format," "great book," "the assignments were a great way to apply concepts from the book," "assignments helped understand meanings," "pricey book," "obviously went to great lengths to choose a good book," and "will keep this book for professional library."

Documents were created for each assignment for two reasons: 1) to standardize the format received from students, enhancing the efficiency with which grading could occur, and 2) to standardize the format for students so the document presented would be similar across all assignments making progress through the course more user-friendly.

Another course component was a discussion forum included in each unit of study. The forums were intentionally designed to address broad topics of discussion over course concepts between students. I inserted comments intermittently on the forums to reassure students of my participation. Hence, the comment about assignments (homework and forums) included: "meaningful forums," "no busy work," "everything had meaning," "enjoyed the work," "realistic," "lots of work but achievable," and "appropriate for a graduate course." No additional writing assignments were expected in the course.

Exams

Quizzes were provided in the Welcome unit over the introductory PowerPoint presentations (two of them) and the syllabus, and over each of the six units. The university requires midterm and final examinations. The midterm included randomly selected questions from the previous three units and the final exam contained randomly selected questions from the complete course, making it a comprehensive examination. I created scenario based questions for assessments at the conceptual level over vocabulary words. Additionally, I added page numbers behind each word to facilitate the use of the text to verify the meaning during the actual assessments. Comments about the exams included: "liked the way it was done," "ideas were put into realistic situations," "challenging," "not rushed," "covered the content," "fair," "practical application of content instead of regurgitation of facts," "professor changed to allow backtrack," "tough but could take twice," "no anxiety," "sufficiently difficult to make you think," and "really learned the material."

Improvements

Comments about suggested improvements ranged from: "none needed (11/19)" to "fewer questions on final," "do not offer in the summer," and "do not focus so much on educational leadership." Since the course is and EDLD course which stands for educational leadership, it should be understood when a student takes this course that it will focus on educational leadership. Only through the intentional planning and design were opportunities offered in the lessons and quizzes that encompassed other professional environments.

Overall Evaluation

The final question on the university provided evaluation asks for additional comments from students about the value of the course content. Comments included: "satisfied with content (2)," "improved knowledge significantly," "able to apply information (2)," "very valuable," "organization helped me to actually learn," "made me think about groups I am in," "relevant content," "want all graduate classes to be this valuable," and "gained a lot that can be used [professionally] in the future." Obviously, students experienced a sense of value with this course based on these comments.

Faculty created in-course evaluations

Faculty developed in-course evaluations are not accessible by the university but results can be reported in the faculty annual summative report. In-course evaluations have the potential to provide valid feedback, but a relationship of trust between the students and faculty member is critical to the honesty and authenticity of the information provided. Appropriate interaction over the length of an online course can determine the amount of information provided on the professor-made evaluation. In this instance, the document was designed to collect input similar to the university evaluation. The categories were: the instructor (14 percent), course design (29 percent), and learning design (57 percent). There were fourteen questions with a space for comments below each and a place for additional comments at the end. Answers choices to questions included: yes, no and sometimes.

In this first semester of the newly designed course, thirty-two of the thirty-four students enrolled (94 percent) completed the professor designed evaluation. This high rate of return may be due to the fact that they received course credit (a "free" 100) added to the grade book for participation. Students were encouraged to provide honest feedback with the expectation that there would be no retaliation from me no matter what was said. As was previously stated, this will not be as likely to occur if a professor has not built trust with students. Course evaluations have the potential to provide invaluable information, guide modifications and changes to improve the course, and in this study specifically to validate the effectiveness of Scott's pedagogic planning tool (2006); the process used to develop the online course. A copy of the professor made in-course evaluation is attached to this study as an Appendix.

Summary and conclusions

Course design follows best practices from a variety of sources for online courses (Boettcher 2006; Gudea 2008; LERN 2012; and the NEA 2012). Best practices include: 1) design effects; 2) user-friendliness; 3) improved student interaction; and 4) concept level quiz design. As evidenced by the multiple quotes provided after each course component, design effects seem to be appreciated and enhanced with advance explanation in the form of recorded PowerPoint presentations embedded in each unit of study. One question from the professor-created evaluation addressed course navigation. Students commented as follows: "easiest I have ever had...", "very user-friendly," "easy to find assignments and required elements," "would recommend any course with [professor's name] to anyone," "format and table layout helped greatly," "I hope all my other online classes are this easy to navigate," and "I like the consistency." Those few comments seem to indicate that I had successfully met the goal of creating an easy-to-navigate course that accomplished increased student interaction but with an appreciation for the concept level quiz design. Additionally, based on student comments, teaching at the application level (Bloom 1956) and concept level (Erickson 1998) enhanced the learning experience for students.

Based on Scott's pedagogical tool (2006) for online course design, it would seem this initial redesign accomplished much to further our understanding of how to maintain rigor and relevance in the online learning environment for the educational leadership program. Processes followed seemed to result in a positive learning value to the students' experiences in the online environment. Because of item number six on Scott's pedagogical tool (2006), information about university tutoring services will be included in the syllabus and online in

the introductory PowerPoint. Additionally, consideration will be given to suggestions made by students from both evaluations in order to maintain the quality of learning for the graduate students choosing to take this course; Educational Leadership and Group Dynamics. Since this is the first course designed using Scott's pedagogical tool (2006), with content presented at the application and conceptual levels, the outcomes of these evaluations strongly suggest modeling other online courses in the same manner.

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Appendix: Professor Made Evaluation for EDLD 6311

DIRECTIONS: Place an "X" in the box that correctly identifies your response to the question and add comments that will assist me in improving the course. The document will expand as you type in your comments.

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR:	Yes	No	Sometimes
1. If or when you emailed Dr. Nix during the course, did she respond appropriately? Was she helpful?			
Comments:			
2. Do you consider Dr. Nix knowledgeable about the course content based on interactions in forums, emails with her or course content presentation?			
Comments:			
ABOUT COURSE CONTENT:	Yes	No	Sometimes
3. Was this course worthwhile to you?			
Comments:			
4. Was the course content too hard?			
Comments:			
5. Was the course content too easy?			
Comments:			
6. Was the textbook helpful ?			
Comments:			
ABOUT COURSE FORMAT/METHODS:	Yes	No	Sometimes
7. Were the PowerPoint presentations helpful?			
Comments:			
8. Did you participate in the unit forums?			
Comments:			
9. Were the forums valuable to your learning experience?			
Comments:			
10. Were the quizzes aligned with course content?			
Comments:			
11. Were the quizzes too easy?			
Comments:			
12. Do you like having the option to take quizzes more than once?			
Comments:			
13. Would you recommend this course to another student?			
Comments:			
14. Was the course format easy to navigate?			
Comments:			
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/INCLUDING SUGGESTED CHANGES:			

