

4.1 | Analyze: Context Analysis Examples

Learning & Performance Context Examples

Example #1: Getting Ready for the Art Market: Preparing a Successful Artist's Portfolio, contributed by Almut Haboeck

Career Environment: Higher Education

The learning context for this class approximates the performance context itself; i.e. the learning context will incorporate authentic contexts in the instruction to facilitate transfer of skills and knowledge to the performance context. Learners will complete an application for a job (e.g. at a university), for participation in an exhibition in a gallery or museum, for an artist's residency or grant money, scholarship, or an artist's exchange program, which is a real life task, i.e. the performance context itself.

The learning context differs from the performance context, insofar as the learning context will provide a support system of experts and peers to the learners that otherwise would not be available to them. The application which the learner will create in this course, can function as the basic material for any further job application that has to be revised and/or updated depending on the nature of the job.

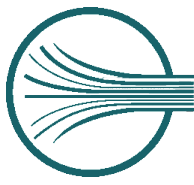
The learning environment will be a simple classroom, which will be equipped with the necessary hardware; i.e. a computer and/or slide projector. For one or two class periods, when technical issues about images will be discussed, it is recommended to book the media/art lab, which is equipped with a computer and the necessary software (e.g. Photoshop™, which some learners might need if they decide and are able to edit the images for the portfolio themselves.) for every learner. Further learning spaces are artist's studios, as well as a gallery and/or museum. The sites should be easily accessible to the learners with disabilities (both campus classrooms and galleries and museums usually provide the necessary access).

Learning itself will involve face-to-face meetings, group work in class and outside class (studio visits to each other), and asynchronous group work (email exchange, exchange of ideas via a discussion board.) While class time will be on a regular weekly schedule, learners will have to consider their own time constraints and their colleague's time constraints when organizing studio visits with other peers. Also, homework might require learners to visit a museum or a gallery. Such a visit would have to be organized by students themselves due to transportation and time constraints. The instructor will make sure that exhibitions in the museums and art galleries on campus will be available to accommodate student schedules and will resolve access problems if necessary.

Example #2: Fourth Grade Instructional Unit on the Native American Tribes of Tennessee, contributed by Elizabeth Bradley

Career Environment: K-12

The performance and learning contexts were analyzed by thinking about the resources available in the classroom and then thinking about the classroom setup and the students' preferred way of learning. Since the designer is employed on-site where the learning will occur, the only assumptions that needed to be made about the context were concerned with time constraints and the range of student abilities. These assumptions have been confirmed by the Subject Matter Expert (SME), Mrs. _____, the lead teacher in the designer's classroom, who has been teaching fourth grade for many years and is highly qualified to determine the validity, necessity, and time allotment of the content in this design.



The physical characteristics of the context will be almost identical to the performance context that students will encounter during the next year they study Tennessee history, in the 7th grade. Computers, SmartBoards, TVs and DVD players, and textbooks will all be comparable; only the textbook will be at the 7th grade level. In terms of continuing support for the instruction, the new learning will be valuable in later school years with the 7th grade teacher. Socially, students will work in groups, since almost all of their work at the school is done as groups competing against each other, and the knowledge will be engaging and interesting so the students will want to share it and be praised in front of the group. The new skills are relevant because they will be tested on it, and there are few constraints because the information will only help the students.

The learning context's physical characteristics are simple as well, since learning will take place in the classroom. SmartBoards, computers, and books will be the primary equipment and resources available. Learning will be synchronous, face-to-face instruction with a teacher. The site is convenient to all learners, none of whom have any specific needs in terms of learning impairment.

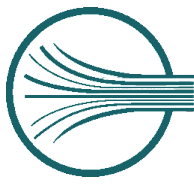
A final context that is important to consider is the school's philosophy and resulting curriculum, which emphasizes student engagement and collaborative group work. Fortunately, the school's curriculum demands are not strict, which allows teachers to adapt curriculum to topics and subjects that are most engaging for the students. The final design would, ideally, be built with some flexibility in terms of length of time spent on any particular topic within the design, because it is difficult to predict which topics will be most interesting and engaging for the students. Spending more time on the topics that are most interesting to the students will put learning at a maximum, so long as all the other essential topics are addressed.

Cultural Context Example

Current trends in instructional design practices emphasize both learner-centered instruction and the nurturing of communities of practice. When instruction is learner-centered, it is designed with attention to the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs that learners bring to the educational setting, and can therefore be termed "culturally responsive" (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999, p. 120). A community of practice is a sustained, collaborative social network of individuals who share a common set of values, knowledge, and interests (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Both concepts are situated; that is, they are both impacted by, and impact, the people, situations and cultures involved. Because of this, the degree to which learning environments are learner centered and foster a community of practice (CoP) often reflects culturally-determined values (Bransford, et al, 1999).

Two of Hofstede's (2004) five cultural dimensions are helpful to illustrate this point: power distance (the degree to which the *less powerful* members of society expect there to be societal differences in the levels of power); and individualism versus collectivism (the degree to which people are individualistic or prefer to identify with a group or organization). The degree to which an educational system is learner-centered is often related to power distance. For example, a culture's respect for authority figures may result in more teacher-centered instruction. In addition, the success of communities of practice in a given culture may be related to the degree of individualism versus collectivism in that society. Communities of practice could be expected to thrive in those cultures with a strong emphasis on collectivism that value collaboration over competitiveness.

During the summer of 2005, the Faculty Development Institute (FDI) at Virginia Tech, along with several other campus entities, entered into a contractual agreement to provide faculty development services to about 60 faculty members from a large Saudi Arabian university. The conference presenters were hired to design and facilitate a three-week workshop for 30 of those faculty members on the topics of



instructional design and the International Computer Driving License (ICDL). The workshop presented an excellent way to foster collaboration between the two universities and cultures, and to encourage the development of a global community of practice.

However, issues of cultural difference began to impact the design of the workshop almost immediately. For example, the Saudi Arabian university maintained separate men's and women's campuses, and for that reason, requested gender-separated classes during the workshop. The designers, both women, had intended on using the highly successful faculty development model used at Virginia Tech, which featured multiple presenters and a learner-centered design. They were unsure whether to retain only male presenters for the men's class and women presenters for the women's class. Communication with the foreign university administration was complicated by issues of power distance, and clarification of these cultural issues was difficult.

In an effort to conserve paper, the designers placed all supplemental resources on a web server which could be accessed by learners once they returned to their home university. Once the instruction began, however, the designers discovered that the lack of handouts was interpreted by the learners as an inability on their part to provide sufficient, worthwhile resources. The learners expected that as authority figures, the instructors would provide a wealth of handouts, and the lack thereof made them question the worth of the workshop.

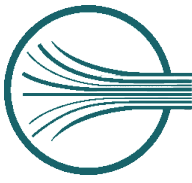
On the other hand, efforts to teach about and foster a community of practice among the visiting faculty were quite successful. The strong collectivist values held by the learners resulted in a willingness to help each other and a desire to collaborate on workshop projects. The workshop designers learned that when the cultural background of instructional designers differs greatly from that of their intended audience, a great deal of reflection and introspection is required to avoid erroneous assumptions concerning the cognitive structures of the learners (Driscoll, 2005; Thomas, et al, 2002). The workshop designers realized it was probable that the learners would, in fact, have quite different cognitive structures from their own, resulting from dissimilar life experiences and prior learnings. Knowing this, the designers sought to use subject matter and instructional strategies that would foster relevance and transfer, and to consider their own cultural biases throughout the design and implementation process.

The workshop designers were in agreement with the premise that "the designer's world view cannot be divorced from his societal context; therefore, it becomes critically important that the designer becomes introspective in his [or her] approach when designing instruction" (Thomas, et al., 2002, p. 44). As a result, they made attempts to educate themselves about the Saudi culture in advance, and once the workshops began, they regularly interacted with the learners to ensure that they were not operating under faulty assumptions. Despite cultural and administrative barriers to effective communication which hampered attempts to make the instructional materials culturally sensitive, the designers gained a rich understanding of Saudi university culture, gained an appreciation for the alternative perspectives that are inherent in international work, built a deeper understanding of their ID craft, and made many wonderful new cross-cultural friendships.

Final evaluation results indicated that the Saudi faculty were very satisfied with the instruction, and later communications indicated that many had transferred the concepts learned in the workshop to their professional practice. Additional details on the evaluation results, the strategies used, and the designers' cross-cultural experiences will be shared during the conference presentation.

References:

- Bransford, J.D., Brown, A.L., & Cocking, R.R., (Eds.) (1999). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience and school*. Available: http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=9457
- Driscoll, M. P. (2005). *Psychology of learning for instruction*. (3rd ed.). Boston: Pearson.



- Hofstede, G. (2004). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. McGraw-Hill.
- Powell, G. (1997). Understanding the language of diversity. *Educational Technology*, 37(2), 15-16.
- Tessmer, M., & Richey, R. C. (1997). The role of context in learning and instructional design. *Educational Technology Research & Development*, 45(2), 85-115.
- Thomas, M., Mitchell, M., & Joseph, R. (2002). The third dimension of ADDIE: A cultural embrace. *TechTrends*, 46(2), 40-45.