

Needs Assessment and Media Analysis

Needs:

Addressing the topic of needs assessment, Lee and Owens (2004) advise that “taking the time to systematically uncover the root of a perceived problem keeps you from wasting your time and your organization’s resources on multimedia projects that do not solve a business need” (p. 12). Looking back to a previous text from our program, we see George Piskurich (2006) echoes this sentiment in his book *Rapid Instructional Design*, stating “Determining your organizational needs will help you to determine what training you need to do. More important, it will help you determine what training you don’t need to do” (p. 16). While each text offers different methods for reaching design goals, I appreciate the shared sentiment that needs assessments are critical to the design process. These statements highlight the important fact that needs assessments not only guide your plan, they keep you from wasting time and money on the wrong plan. I took this message to heart when working on my learning object.

The course I am creating is designed to fit within a larger in-service curriculum that trains teachers how to enhance their Learning Point sites with digital media and utilize the Web 2.0/interactive functions of the Blackboard LMS. The goal of this course would be to assist teachers already familiar with Blackboard’s basic functions in expanding their lessons to the Internet to establish a meaningful online presence beyond calendars and announcements. My learning object is a tutorial on how to access, navigate, select, and favorite content on United Streaming (district approved video site).

Presently, the Blackboard LMS exists in a sort of “limbo” at my school district. Administrators publicize a progressive attitude toward technology and online content, but they have yet to embrace, support, and enforce a technology policy that keeps all teachers on par with student’s expectations. This situation has led to a widely varying quality of teacher Learning Point sites within individual schools and between schools in the district. Each school site is responsible for figuring out how to train incoming and existing teachers on how to use Blackboard. Thus, some school sites end up with a stronger online presence than others. A school district full of teachers unable to meet the demands of its students, their parents, and the realities of 21st century education is a school district with a serious performance gap.

- **Demanded Need:** Parents and students represent a demanded need, as they express anger in seeing their students learning from teachers who do not extend learning opportunities.
- **Comparative Need:** Teachers represent a comparative need, as they see other school sites achieve success using more rigorous teacher requirements for learning point and want the same results.

- **Anticipated Need:** Administrators represent an anticipated need, as they see the value in the Blackboard LMS, but remain indecisive on a solid plan to move the district into the next phase of education.

This course takes teachers at my job site already familiar with Blackboard and trains them to utilize discussion boards, upload files/embed files, host chats, create quizzes, and explore combining simulations and games with their curriculum. It also raises the bar for what is expected of teacher's online offerings at my school site and ensures consistency among staff. The use of this course and associated learning objects supports a quick, cost effective, reusable solution to the problem for my school site. The training can take place on-site within schools' existing computer labs. Schools can schedule training at whatever time is most convenient for them because the web-based materials are always available and employees will most likely conduct the training. Having all learners training in the same room boosts productivity within this scenario, as they can interact and help/learn from one another. Finally, the reusability of the content allows teachers to access it indefinitely for their own learning needs after the initial training.

Media:

Important to my assessment process was Lee and Owen's (2004) assertion that designers should take "a rational approach to selecting media" (p. 68). Remembering to design instruction that achieves the desired results and meets learning objectives without focusing on entertaining the audience and getting them to "like" the content is a crucial aspect of solid planning.

My school district does not recognize or support audio, videotapes, video conferencing or distance broadcasts for training. Because this training deals with computers, the Internet, and web-based software, participants need access to their own individual computers as well as their own individual LMS control panels and the capability to search the Internet for related content. Connectivity and cooperation among school staff is always encouraged, so participants will need to interact with one another once they meet performance objectives to practice and hone their new skills.

Lee and Owens (2004) advise designers to "always consider using a blended solution consisting of whatever media are required" (p. 55). Considering my media analysis results, a blended approach is indeed the right method for my project. Instructor-led, computer based, and web-based media rated very highly when I plugged the numbers into my analysis form. This confirms the feelings I initially had about the course of my project and how I would design and carry it out. Instructor-led computer lab training sessions assisted by Internet based learning objects and software is the best solution to achieve learning results. The instructor facilitates a front-end lecture, walks teachers through various demonstrations, then allows students to access the web-based instructions, content, and tutorials while circulating the room and providing support where needed. Once the instructor conveys the basics, learners will be able to gain deeper understanding and familiarity with the content by reading additional web-based instruction on more complicated features while exploring those features in a constructivist setting.