A CONSULTATIVE APPROACH TO ONLINE COURSE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

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The study analyzed the skills and strategies used by instructional designers (IDs) during online course design; the goal was to describe how and when IDs from UW Extended Campus facilitate learning about online course design and teaching online. Current skills and practices are described to identify areas of potential growth. In the current model of consultation, learning that happens as part of the process is informal and not documented. Since faculty have limited time to devote to professional development, UW Extended Campus has an interest in documenting the work that occurs during the course development process as a way to recognize this learning. How would this change the consultative approach to course design? Data was collected through interviews and analyzed through the lens of cognitive apprenticeship. The results will be used to develop skills of current staff and contribute to professional development planning for instructional designers.

A Consultative Approach to Online Course Design

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN extended campus

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Background

At UW Extended Campus, instructional designers (IDs) work closely with faculty to develop online programs. Faculty enter into the design process with a range of experiences. For those with little or no experience designing an online course, the consulting ID often teaches best practices for designing a course and teaching online. In the current model of consultation, that part of the process is informal. The goal of this study was to describe how and when IDs facilitate learning regarding online course design and teaching, and to answer the following questions:

- Is it possible and worthwhile to formally recognize the learning that occurs during the work of course development?
- How would this change the consultative approach to course design presently used?

What do you think?

By analyzing the strategies currently used by IDs during online course design, we can begin to answer these questions.

Preliminary Findings and Next Steps

Preliminary results indicate strong evidence of coaching practices and paying attention to faculty motivation throughout the consultation process (Group A, Table 1).

Table 1: Evidence of Practices used in the Cognitive Apprenticeship Model of Instruction

The second tier of evidence (Group B, Table 1) shows that these IDs also worked to create an environment where cooperation and community of practice are valued. Evidence suggests that they are using teaching methods and trying to create learning environments as part of the course development and revision process. This shows clear alignment with the cognitive apprenticeship model. With second level coding and continued analysis, specific and actionable insights about teaching within ID practice are gained.
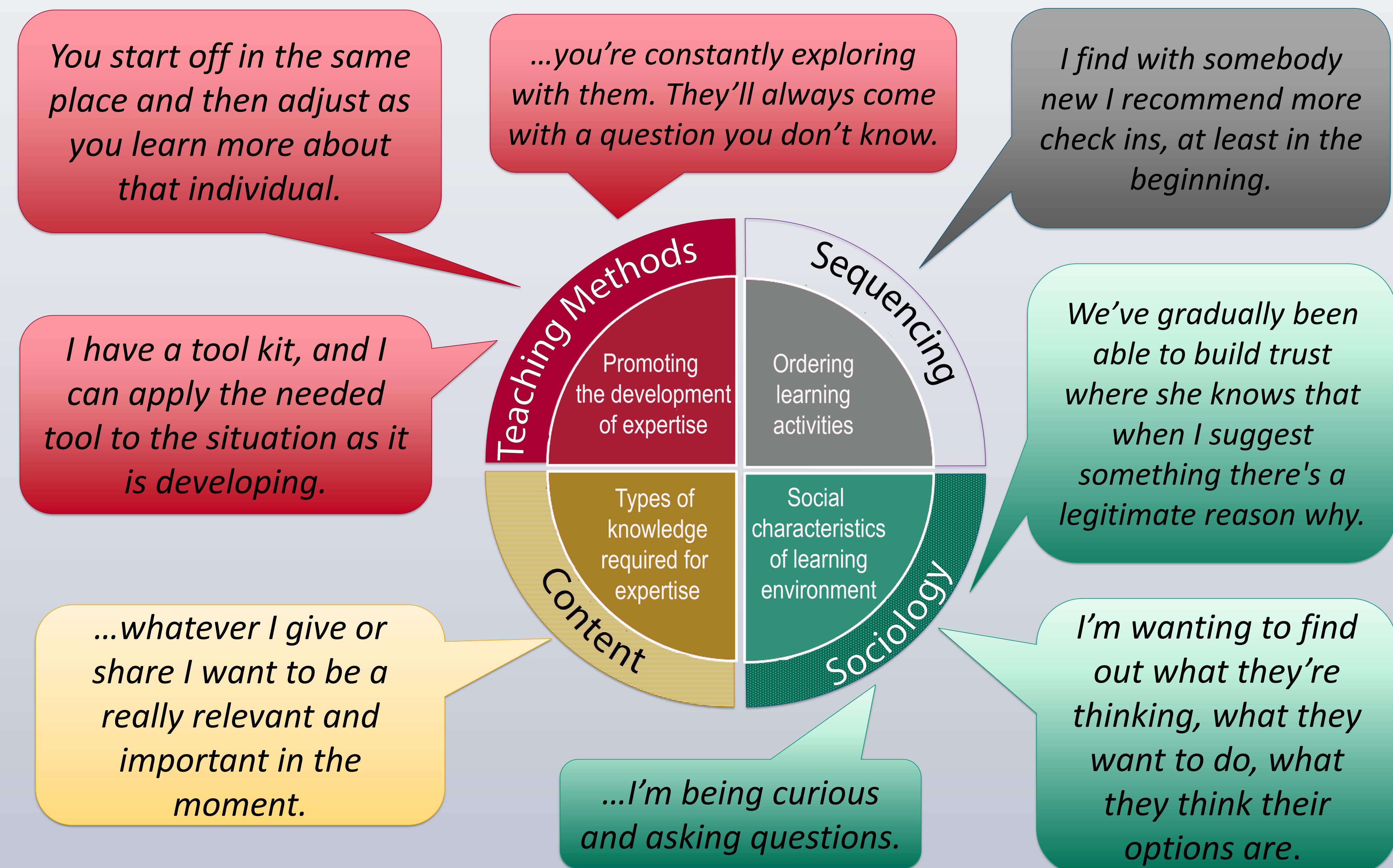
Participant Profile

Four IDs from UW Extended Campus self-selected to participate. Two participants have over ten years of experience working as an ID while the other two have five to ten years. All four participants have advanced degrees in the field of education, and three reported experience working formally as a teacher.

Methodology

Through structured interviews, participants discussed current approaches to course development. The interviews focused on how IDs manage relationships, what influences their processes and decision-making, and the resources used during online course design. A review of existing literature on instructional designer competencies and inquiry-based approaches to faculty development indicated that there might be evidence of the cognitive apprenticeship model of instruction (Collins, et al. 1991) within UW Extended Campus instructional design practice. Using qualitative research processes, first level coding was deductive and searched for evidence of cognitive apprenticeship dimensions and practices.

Dimensions of the Cognitive Apprenticeship Model with Selected Evidence

You start off in the same place and then adjust as you learn more about that individual.

…you're constantly exploring with them. They'll always come with a question you don't know.

I find with somebody new I recommend more check ins, at least in the beginning.

I have a tool kit, and I can apply the needed tool to the situation as it is developing.

We've gradually been able to build trust where she knows that when I suggest something there's a legitimate reason why.

…whatever I give or share I want to be a really relevant and important in the moment.

…I'm being curious and asking questions.

I'm wanting to find out what they're thinking, what they want to do, what they think their options are.

Selected Reference
Collins, A., Brown, J.S., & Holum, A. (1991). Cognitive apprenticeship: Making thinking visible. *American Educator, 15* (3), 6–11, 38–46.