

Leveraging Tech to Enhance Learning, Strengthen Relationships,
and Introduce Diversity in Online Classes

Mikah J. Pritchard

Eastern Kentucky University

Amber N. Hughes

Morehead State University

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O'Brien

Author Note

Mikah J. Pritchard, Office of e-Campus Learning, Eastern Kentucky University. Amber
N. Hughes, Foundational and Graduate Studies in Education Department, Morehead State
University

Abstract

The purpose of this case study was to demonstrate the role of technology in course planning. In this case study, backwards design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) was applied to an online graduate career counseling course. Through the use of backwards design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), the course development becomes easier and a more effective way to share content with students. Backwards design is comprised of three steps: 1) identifying learning goals 2) proof of learning mastery 3) learning activities (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). In traditional classrooms, it may be easy to focus on weekly content and dissemination of information. However, faculty may be overwhelmed or excited by technology when transitioning to online classes and allow technology to become the focus of course design. Using a backwards design keeps the content at the forefront when teaching online. In this paper, backwards design is described in a step-by-step process by using an online course as an example to demonstrate its application.

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The task of transitioning a traditional class into the online environment can often be overwhelming. Instructional designers can help with this process; however, many times faculty are tasked with completing this process alone. By employing a backwards design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), faculty can take the focus away from the latest technology craze and place it onto the course content. While there are a lot of technologies that can be used to design the course, these choices should be made after working on the pedagogy. This paper considers pedagogy, a career counseling course example, and technology tips. The purpose of this paper is to provide an explanation of how online courses can leverage technology to fit within a strong pedagogical foundation.

What is Backwards Design?

Wiggins and McTighe (2005) stated that design “is not so much about gaining a few new technical skills as it is about learning to be more thoughtful and specific about our purposes and what they imply” (p. 14). Backwards design is comprised of three steps: 1) identifying learning goals 2) proof of learning mastery 3) learning activities (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). In traditional classrooms, it may be easy to focus on weekly content and dissemination of information. However, faculty may be overwhelmed or excited by technology when transitioning to online classes and allow technology to become the focus of course design. Using a backwards design keeps the content at the forefront when teaching online. While backwards design focuses on the course content, technology still deserves consideration in an online class. Faculty may be tasked with both learning new technologies while simultaneously teaching students how to use the same technology in a course. While technology support may assist students with

troubleshooting, faculty still become the first line of communication in instances of technology problems. Therefore, introducing students to the technology they will use becomes a necessary component of online teaching.

Backwards design is extremely effective when attempting to integrate final group projects and assessments into an online course. The concept of identifying the overall goal of the course and acceptable evidence of mastery before considering content covered will help focus the final course design. In this sense, the entire course is designed with the end goal in mind. Through this approach, faculty can integrate teaching content and technology by scaffolding projects and technology seamlessly in a course. Scaffolding is the concept of providing support and direction to assist learners in gaining foundational knowledge that can be built upon as difficulty and complexity increases (Hannafin, Land, & Oliver, 1999). For example, a collaborative final paper could be broken into several assignments throughout the course, rather than being submitted as a whole. These “benchmark assessments” become natural learning checks for students to receive feedback on projects at different stages during the course. Similarly, the integration of online presentations through specific tools can be made less burdensome by incorporating them during the first week. To further illustrate how backwards design can be used when creating an online course, we will address the application to a particular Counselor Education course.

Case Study

Morehead State University offers a master’s degree in school counseling in an entirely online format (Morehead State University, 2017). This case study focuses on one course within the school counseling program. Introduction to Career Counseling is a course required of all school counseling students. However, this course has no pre-requisites and is open to all students

in the Graduate School (Morehead State University, 2017). Introduction to Career Counseling provides a review of career counseling theories, technology used in career counseling, a review of research in the field, and a look at the specific career issues of diverse populations. When taught in a traditional format, this course involves discussions, role plays, and multiple opportunities to practice career counseling techniques. Using backwards design allowed the instructor to transition this course effectively to an online environment.

Step 1: Desired Results

The first step in designing the career counseling online course was to identify the desired knowledge and skills of students after completion of the course. This particular course is part of the school counseling program that prepares students to be certified as school counselors by the Kentucky Education Professional Standards Board (2017). The standards for the school counseling programs are derived in part from the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) Standards (2016; see Appendix A) and provide the foundation for determining the desired results for the course.

Ask Yourself:

- What are your course objectives?
- Are objectives identified by your program, institution or accrediting bodies?
- What knowledge/skills do you want students to possess?

Step 2: Acceptable Evidence of Mastery

The next step is to determine if students have the knowledge and skills identified by the objectives. Once specific knowledge or skills have been identified through the objectives, the assessment is used to determine level of mastery. In the case study, mastery for the identified objectives was determined by the two assignments listed below. Using two assignments as the main assessment allowed for scaffolding, leading to a larger group project while also determining mastery of objectives at the individual level. Students were given the opportunity to

practice and reflect on skills and theories at the individual level before discussing concepts as a group. The two main deliverables used to demonstrate mastery of the course content were an individual project (Phase I) and a group project (Phase II). The individual project was the recording of a role play counseling session that was used in the group project to create a wiki.

Ask Yourself:

- What assignments address the course content and objectives?
- Will students interact?
- What type of assignments do you want to grade?
- Can you identify grading criterion for the final deliverable? (*Rubrics or Checklists are recommended for grading!*)

Step 3: Plan the Course

Course planning is the final step of the backwards design model (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Creation of a weekly or module outline of the course sets the structure for this component of the backwards design process. The outline can organize the course chronologically or topically. The smaller assessments that scaffold to the final project are identified once the outline is finalized. A multi-step, multi-technology approach was used in the career counseling course to best assist students in producing the desired final project. The final project was broken up into multiple steps for each phase. Appendix A provides the alignment between course objectives, module objectives, and assessments.

Phase I. The individual project required students to digitally record a mock counseling session using a multicultural career interview by use of role playing the session. Students administered a modified version of the Culture in Career Interview (Ponterotto, Rivera, & Sueyoshi, 2000) – a structured interview of 10 open-ended questions. Students submitted a digital recording of the session along with a conceptualization of the session. The conceptualization of the session included a brief description of the client, a discussion of the client’s career issue, a reflection about the session, and plans for future sessions. This assignment

required students to record themselves, upload the video, and share it with both the faculty member and with group members for use in Phase II of the assignment. The full assignment instructions for the interview and conceptualization are detailed in Appendix B.

Technology considerations must be taken into account when requiring students to submit digital recordings. First, students may have different comfort levels when dealing with technology. Providing tutorials, videos or written instructions with “quick tips” for the technology portion of the assignment can account for these differences. Some things that should be addressed are: quality of recorded video/audio, hosting of the video, and sharing of the video. YouTube is an accessible and user-friendly video hosting option. Second, in counseling courses, confidentiality becomes an important consideration when sharing videos online. YouTube videos can become more secure depending on the selection of privacy settings. While public videos can be seen and shared by anyone, private and unlisted videos are only accessible to select individuals who have the URL (Google, 2017). Students in this course shared an **unlisted** YouTube video by posting the URL along with their conceptualization in Phase I of the assignment. To account for confidentiality concerns, students were instructed to include verbiage in the client informed consent form that videos would be shared on YouTube as a component of the assignment. Students were also reminded that this assignment was a role play as opposed to a real counseling session. In accordance with professional standards, a real counseling session requires students to maintain confidentiality of their clients and to be under appropriate supervision (American Counseling Association, 2014). While these were simulated counseling sessions, the role play strategy provided students with experience using the tool and familiarity with the overall interview process.

Phase II. The group project was a collaborative student-created wiki that identified themes and relevant cultural considerations from the counseling sessions. The written instructions for the wiki assignment can be found in Appendix C. The wiki was created with the wiki tool within the learning management system (LMS). In order to facilitate this stage, students were broken into groups of 5-6 and required to post a URL to their recorded session on a course discussion board located in the LMS. Students were instructed to develop a group plan for completing the wiki which they posted on a group discussion board. In particular, students were asked to consider how their findings might help inform career counseling practice.

Two main technology considerations arose during the wiki creation. First, students were required to work in an asynchronous online group. Students' experiences with online group work may be varied, which makes including resources for success important. In order to scaffold learning, students were provided with instructions on creation of a wiki and how to work on a wiki in a group. Given that the final group deliverable was a wiki, group communication and collaborative work took place within the group wiki. Wikis track individual editing and allow for student comments. This leads us to the second consideration, which deals with how familiar students are with wiki creation. Depending on the wiki platform, templates can be used to provide students with a guideline of how to set up the wiki. Conversely, you can provide tutorial videos and written instructions that guides students through the creation of the wiki and leave the wiki as a blank slate for them to shape.

Ask Yourself:

- What technologies will facilitate group work?
- How will you scaffold learning?
- What kinds of technology tutorials/support will be provided?
- How will you scaffold technologies?

Discussion

Backwards design places emphasis on specific skills and knowledge that students gain from the course. Pedagogy becomes central during the planning process of online courses, while technology is only used to meet instructional needs. Both strengths and challenges were identified after the initial delivery of the course discussed in the case study.

Recorded Counseling Sessions

Phase I of the assignments contained both strengths and challenges. Students were initially intimidated by the role play counseling sessions. However, the majority of students gave positive feedback throughout the course regarding these assignments as learning tools. Students were able to manage technology issues with the videos without too much anxiety and were able to allow the content to remain central to the assignment.

This assignment did present some interesting challenges. Students often used their smartphones to record sessions. Using their phones created several: audio quality and storage. Students needed to place the phone close to themselves in order to capture the audio. If phones were placed too far away, the audio was of poor quality. Second, some students did not have enough storage to record the videos and had to re-record sessions or record sessions in parts. Finally, some students did not know where the videos were saved in their phones and had challenges “finding” their videos for uploading. Uploading videos presented a larger challenge for some students. Sometimes the uploading took much longer than students expected. Students also seemed to have issues simply managing the process of uploading the videos.

Group Wiki

Phase II of the assignment was far less popular with students. While the faculty member felt that students mastered the knowledge related to course-level objectives, the group project

aspect of this assignment seemed to overwhelm students. Students struggled with the communication and planning of the group part of the assignment. Finally, the students seemed to struggle to grasp the concept of the wiki. They did not seem to utilize all of the resources given (video reviewing the wiki, instructions for submitting the assignment). Likely, this lack of effort for the wiki was because struggles with group communication dominated the assignment, making the new technology an afterthought.

Suggestions for Practice

Since the course instructor is unable to support the plethora of different phone and cameras that might be used, students would be referred to independently explore technology support available for their device. However, additional technology scaffolding could be included by providing video tutorials for recording and uploading videos. These would provide a base of how the process typically occurs and where videos are often saved in phones. More video hosting options (YouTube, Google Drive, Dropbox) may cut down on student issues with uploading videos.

Group assignments often require more setup than initially built into a course. Providing more options for group communications may have facilitated collaboration for the wiki project. The Google Apps suite provides many free tools that support asynchronous and synchronous collaboration. Noting alternative communication options such as Skype or other services may have increased student communications and comfort during initial stages. One effective scaffolding technique to get students working with the wiki early would be to require the use of an introductory wiki where students post a brief bio and picture of themselves the first week of class. This could be placed in a folder with the tutorial information and a test wiki where students can practice use of the technology.

Conclusion

Creating an online class can be challenging for faculty, particularly when faculty are transitioning from face-to-face teaching to online teaching. Backwards design can help make this transition easier while keeping the focus on the course content rather than the technology. In this paper, a case study of a career counseling course demonstrated how backwards design can help faculty effectively teach concepts that can be challenging, while considering ethical issues specific to the program and balancing institutionally mandated standards. In a face-to-face class, managing these considerations can be overwhelming. In an online class, faculty must consider the additional component of choosing, and potentially learning, the technologies to best support student outcomes by using the step-by-step approach outlined by Wiggins and McTighe (2005). Faculty can take an overwhelming process and break it down into meaningful and manageable components.

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Appendix A

Course Objective	<i>(Students will be able to...)</i>		
	Apply theories and models of career development, counseling, and decision making.	Differentiate between approaches for conceptualizing the interrelationships among and between work, mental well-being, relationships, and other life roles and factors.	Utilize strategies that advocate for diverse clients both ethically and culturally.
Module Objectives	<i>(Students will be able to...)</i>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conduct a career counseling session. ● Apply approaches and strategies for assessing work, personality, and other factors that contribute to career development. ● Summarize findings from career counseling sessions. ● Analyze career counseling sessions to assess for how abilities, interests, values, personality and other factors contributed to career development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assess how findings from career counseling sessions might help inform career counseling practice. ● Synthesize themes and important points from career counseling sessions. ● Utilize approaches for assessing the conditions of the work environment on client's' life experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop strategies to advocate for diverse clients' career and educational development and employment opportunities in a global economy. ● Utilize ethical and culturally relevant strategies for addressing career development.
Assessment	Recorded Session, Conceptualization	Recorded Session, Conceptualization	Recorded Session, Conceptualization, Culture Wiki
CACREP 2016	2.F.4.a., 2.F.4.e.	2.F.4.b., 2.F.4.d.	2.F.4.g., 2.F.4.j.

Appendix B

Career Counseling Mock Session Instructions

For this assignment, you will record yourself conducting a 10-20 minute career counseling session using the Culture in Career Interview posted on Blackboard. You will then share the video with me and a small group of your classmates. This is a practice session, so you may use anyone as your client for this session – family member, friend, classmate, etc... You will need to have your client complete the Informed Consent/Permission to Videotape form I have posted. Keep this signed form in your files for this course. Once this course is over, I will delete the videos and you will want to do the same; at that time you can destroy the informed consent.

You may share this video with me in a variety of ways: Dropbox, Google docs, or YouTube. I will post instructions for each method on Blackboard.

****If you are currently seeing clients and want to use a session with a client, please make sure that you have permission from your site or workplace in order to do this. They may have a separate informed consent form for you to have the client fill out. If you use a client for this session, you will need to share the video via Google docs or Onedrive.**

****If you practice with a client under the age of 18, you must have the signature of the parent in order to videotape.**

Career Counseling Session Conceptualization Instructions

After completing each career counseling session, you will write a brief reflection, analysis, and conceptualization of your session.

Your conceptualization should include the following sections:

- Briefly describe your client (age, race/ethnicity, SES, work status, etc...)
- Describe your client's presenting career problem (why are they seeing you?)
- Summarize key points from your session
- Reflect on how you think your session went (surprises, learning moments, strengths, challenges)
- Discuss what you might do at a follow-up session with your client

Additionally, your paper should meet the following requirements:

- 1-3 pages long
- 12 point Times New Roman font, double-spaced
- APA style formatting

Appendix C

Culture in Career Wiki Instructions

In small groups, you will review your videos from your first career counseling session. Together, you will identify themes and important points from your videos. You will create a wiki, along with the rest of the class, describing the themes from these videos, summarizing your findings, and describing how these findings can help to inform your career counseling practice.

Your wiki should specifically include the following parts:

- Identification of the themes and important points from each individual video,
- Identification of 3-5 overarching themes that showed up in at least 3 of your individual videos,
- Summary of your findings,
- Implication for practice – how can your findings help inform career counseling practice.

Participation and communication with your group members is a large part of this assignment. Therefore, you will need to communicate with your group members in the assigned discussion board created within your group. This way I can track your participation. Additionally, you should post your work directly into the class wiki yourself. The wiki tracks individual participation. If you send your work to another member and he/she posts it, it will track that person's participation – not yours.

Additionally, as a group, you should create a group plan for the assignment. In this plan, you must identify which group member is responsible for which component of the assignment **AND** when you agree to have these components completed. You will submit this group plan to me on the assigned date.