Case Study 1 – Julie Oltman – LST 403 – Spring 2012

I approached this assignment from the perspective of being a consultant for the design team. I wanted to present to them a concept that would help them move forward with developing learning objects within the context of their project.

After reading the case, it was clear to me that the team had a plan to deal with communication and coordination issues with the other teams via workshops. They also had a pretty good understanding of the project organization. It seemed to me that the core problem the team faced was trying to incorporating two key pedagogical elements into their design. The first criterion was to create an authentic learning environment and the second was to adhere to a constructivist approach. The team had clearly struggled to incorporate these two elements into the writing team’s initial “Mission to Mars” suggestion and still seemed to fall short with their “Desert Island” and “Let’s Go Camping” modifications.

In the top half of the map, I diagramed the work and thought process the team had already completed highlighting the two key elements they had identified - authenticity and constructivism. In the bottom half of the map, I tried to clearly define those two elements and map out an alternative learning object, “Pick, Pack, & Go!”.

Since constructivism doesn’t really “fit” any one particular model, I tried instead to create a progression of activities that all included constructivist elements. My proposed learning object clearly tied activities back to constructivist principles such as learner directed activities, social validation of meaning, and interactive activities (Reiser & Dempsey, 2012).

I also defined “authentic” slightly differently than the design team had been interpreting the term. I feel that “authentic learning” means solving or doing a task via an authentic *process* and not necessarily in an authentic *setting* (Marra, n.d.)*.* The team had struggled with elements of fantasy versus reality. I don’t think that is really what the term authentic learning is getting at. Instead, I feel that the process of learning has to be authentic to the learner. Using real tools to solve a problem that *could* occur in real life makes an activity authentic. It doesn’t matter if that particular student will ever actually go to Mars but it IS possible that someone might plan that sort of trip. If the student chooses to plan a trip to go to Mars (which in my proposal, the student could very well choose that setting), then the authenticity of the activity is derived from the very real process and tools that the student engages with. By doing real research, asking real questions, and validating their conclusions against their peers’ interpretations, the student is participating in authentic learning. The context doesn’t have to be “authentic” because it isn’t even defined by the teacher or learning object, it is defined by the learner! The learning object and the teacher, as facilitator, help to create an authentic process by providing real tools, real feedback, and raising real questions.

My goal was to redirect the team’s thinking from a very structured design to a more flexible design that better reflected a true constructivist learning environment.

Marra, T. (n.d.). *Authentic Learning*. Retrieved February 14, 2012, from <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~tmarra/authenticity/authen.html>

Reiser, R. A., & Dempsey, J. V. (2012). *Trends and issues in instructional design and technology*. Boston: Pearson.