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Critical Discourse Analysis as an Interdisciplinary Research Methodology for Interdisciplinary, Intercultural and an Inter- Institutional Assessment Tool for Student-Perceived Learning Compared with Instructor-Perceived Teaching of Interdisciplinary Online Courses

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Abstract

Examining perceived effectiveness of learning objectives and outcomes from a pluralistic view using critical discourse analysis (CDA) will produce analytics from language, discourse practices, and discursive events. Although traditional assessment methods of student learning objectives and outcomes provide feedback regarding learning objectives, results are one-dimensional, often ignore diverse learning styles, lack interdisciplinary synthesis, and rarely consider diverse cultural frameworks of students and instructors. Reasons for assessing student-perceived learning and instructor-perceived teaching of Interdisciplinary Online Courses include (a) the perceptions that are often held as notions of truth, are promoted as truths; (b) student perceived-learning is analogous to a consumer's perceived-value of a service; and most importantly, (c) learning outcome-assessment is the measurement for institutional effectiveness.

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Keywords: critical discourse analysis, interdisciplinary, research methodology, institutional assessment tool, online courses

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1. Introduction and Problem

1.1. Assessment is a major concern for higher education. John Ebersole, wrote in his article, “Top Issues Facing Higher Education In 2014” in Forbes Magazine (2014) that:

assessment has become a major concern for higher education. Increasingly, regulators and accreditors are moving away from input models and instead are asking, “What is the country receiving in return for the billions being spent on higher education and how do we know if it is effective?” Learning outcome-assessment has become the basis for determining institutional effectiveness. However, the availability of valid, widely-accepted tools and methods needed to determine learning and skill acquisition are proving hard to come by. (Ebersole, 2014, p. 77-78)

1.2. The availability of tools and methods needed for determining skill acquisition is the problem my study is addressing. According to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE, 2010), the question that the assessment of Institutional Effectiveness had to answer was, “How well are we collectively doing what we say we are doing?” This research project is based primarily on employing critical discourse analysis as the methodology from which a tool or tools are developed to analyze teaching and learning effectiveness.

1.3. Background

There are three evolving, multiple, competing, and overlapping priorities in education that serve as the backdrop of this research project. These three priorities are developing and progressing rapidly. They are (a) distance learning, (b) institutional effectiveness, and (c) intercultural and global interactivity. In an effort to give clarity throughout this paper, I will refer to distance learning as Priority I (or P-I), student-learning assessment as Priority II (or P-II), and intercultural and global interactivity as Priority III (or P-III). Keeping these evolving, multiple, competing, and overlapping priorities in the forefront of new and improved educational programs and curricula, it seemed necessary to employ all three priorities while testing assessment tools for perceived learning. How do I accomplish this daunting task? I did not need to search far. I was assigned it. I was assigned the daunting task of designing, redesigning, and developing an entire program of study for online delivery (P-I). These courses have student learning outcomes that needed to be measured for institutional effectiveness (P-II). The courses are intentionally interdisciplinary and the target audience primarily consists of culturally- and linguistically-diverse populations who are both traditional and non-traditional students (P-III).

Distance learning (P-I) environments have both advantages and disadvantages. A significant advantage of distance learning, particularly online digital environments, inherently have the capability within the platform time-stamp documentation. This is a passive activity, meaning that neither the instructor nor the student must actively remember to document and date-time-stamp interactions, whereas face-to-face learning environments require a conscientious effort for documentation. The second significant advantage of distance learning is the ability to reach students all over the world (P-III). Distance learning enables the opportunity to effectively deliver courses to the target audience of culturally- and linguistically-diverse populations who are both traditional and non-traditional students.

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