

Rethinking Interest Approaches with Animated Hooks

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Need for Innovation

During the redevelopment process for an online leadership course, it became evident the objectives and learning outcomes were delivered without an interest approach. Phipps et al. (2008) suggested gaining the focus of learners through a mental set which can include storytelling, metaphor, video, and other forms of presentation. My solution was to combine these tactics and innovate a collection of mental sets to hook learners with hand-drawn, narrated, and animated video clips. These video clips, what I call an animated hook (AH), were a direct solution to the mundane, text-heavy introductions previously written in the online version of the course. The primary objective of this innovation was to determine a practice for increased clarity of objectives, diversify engagement methods, as well as prime students' minds for learning about topics related to team and organizational leadership.

How It Works

Pre-production

I carefully reviewed the objectives and outcomes of each week of the leadership course and started a brainstorming session on various stories, metaphors, or statistics that were both interesting and relevant to the topic. Next, I wrote out a short script incorporating these mental sets and the objectives of the module. The most time-consuming element of planning for success was the storyboard process. This meant I needed to not only determine the words and illustrations that would make connections to the script, but also I needed to ensure the layout was well organized, legible, and visually appealing. To do this, I created a series of step-by-step illustrations to guide where illustrations would be located, their size, color, and when they should be added to the final product. This process was repeated for all ten weeks of course objectives.

Production

Through the Zoom video conference platform, a document camera was selected as the primary source for video. Short, test recordings were sampled to verify the document camera was the primary source of input and not the built-in camera of the computer. Next, I (the illustrator) followed the pre-scripted storyboard of how the illustration should be constructed in order and recorded the drawings underneath the document camera. According to Guo et al. (2014), sketched illustrations during lectures are more engaging for students, especially when recorded. After the illustration was recorded, a second recording captured the narration following the pre-written script. Variation in emotion and pace were intentionally included as well as brief moments of ad-lib for the audio recording as a means to achieve engagement.

Post-production

During this phase, both audio and video files were merged into the editing software program iMovie. All audio was muted on the illustration video so the background sounds were eliminated. Editing allowed for the removal of filler words, increasing volume in quieter areas, and splicing sections that lagged in pace or interest. Additionally, the illustration videos were sped up to match the final length of the audio. The average recording without this modification was about thirty minutes, and after editing the timing to align with the audio recording, the final AH was between thirty seconds and three minutes. Guo and colleagues (2014) determined that media clips of less than three minutes achieve the highest degrees of engagement by learners. The completed file was uploaded to YouTube and the course website to be viewed. The videos were directly embedded into the course so students did not have to navigate through YouTube.

Results to Date

Ten total AHs were developed and embedded as the first thing students would view prior to engaging in any of the course content each week. AHs are quick, entertaining, and designed to be salient to students' expectations for weekly content. Here are three examples of what student's noted:

Student A: *I like (animated hooks) because they are quick, concise, and insightful.*

Student B: *The animated hooks are interesting and a cool addition to get a quick overview of what the week's material will be presenting. I think that it's unique bringing in the overview to an animated clip and it's nice to see something different.*

Student C: *I am a visual learner and I feel like these videos help me get on track with learning the material for the week. I don't think I gain a bunch of knowledge from it, but it gets me ready.*

As you can see, during the Fall 2020 course, students provided qualitative themes favorable to this innovation. The purpose of an AH is not to be the source of knowledge or instruction, as Student C mentioned. Instead, most students recognized AHs as a tool that piqued interest for content, was a positive divergence from other online course experiences and sparked a sense of readiness of what was to come. Quantitative measures in the final course evaluations were parallel to what students shared.

Future Plans

Creating an AH requires thoughtful pre-production planning. Considerations related to the clarity of handwriting, illustration ability, video editing, and layout are all vital to the success of this innovation so as to ensure the final product is organized and visually appealing. As time went on, the creative process became more challenging, so fresh perspectives from colleagues should be leveraged. Leverage the talents and strengths across your own programs to identify a team that possesses these skills to initiate production. Otherwise, an existing paid animation program (\$39.00-\$69.00/month) called *Doodly* mirrors this innovation to eliminate the need for drawing, but still requires time and a thoughtful vision to piece together pre-made illustrations.

Evaluation of each AH is the next step in this innovation to determine its effectiveness for each module. I believe not all AHs are equally engaging or creative, so it is my goal to move this towards a research-oriented project to determine at what point the student's engagement or interest decreases with each video. Further, existing AHs are inconsistent in sound quality, pacing, and editing. If a budget allows, I hope to invest in the support of a professional recording studio to produce these videos so that both sound and visuals are consistently high quality. Lastly, I would advise integrating AHs across learning materials as a check-point for understanding, a prompt for discussion boards, or at the end for summarizing content.

Costs

The technology necessary for this production included a document camera, audio/visual recording application (Zoom), and video editing software (iMovie). Resources used to create the AHs included pencils, 18" x 24" white paper, and a set of markers. Time must be accounted for if adopting this idea and will vary based on the scope of the project and illustrator skill.

References

- Guo, P.J., Kim, J., and Rubin, R. (2014). How video production affects student engagement: An empirical study of MOOCs. Paper Presented at ACM Conference on Learning at Scale, p. 41-50. Atlanta, GA. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2556325.2566239>.
- Phipps, L. J., Osborne, E. W., Dyer, J. E., & Ball, A. L. (2008). *Handbook on agricultural education in public schools*. Thomson Delmar Learning.