Oregon State University
College of Education

Examining Learners Own Ideas:
Personal Dimensions of Free-Choice Learning

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Course Description:

The Contextual Model of Learning, a conceptual framework that posits that learning is influenced by the interaction of variables within three contexts: personal, socio-cultural and physical, frames three core free-choice learning courses exploring the why, when, how, where, and with whom of free-choice science and mathematics learning. This sequence will support future education leaders' understanding of the critical and unique ways in which individuals come to know and utilize science and mathematics in their daily lives.

Personal Dimensions of Free-Choice Learning is the first course in this sequence and investigates the fundamental roles that identity, motivation, interest, emotion, prior knowledge and experience, choice and control play in supporting learning and how learning leaders can build on these dimensions of learning in order to successfully engage lifelong learners. The course will be richly illustrated by real world examples of learning in free-choice settings and be designed to support future learning leader's efforts to engage diverse audiences and facilitate lifelong science and mathematics learning.

Measurable Student Learning Outcomes:
Overall Course Outcomes (OCO): As a result of the class you will gain experience in:

1. Being an active reader and critically evaluating key pieces of empirical and theoretical research.
2. Synthesize a coherent point of view using evidence-based arguments.
3. Applying learned concepts to real world problems by carrying out a front-end evaluation project:
    a. Choosing a research topic of focus for a project study
    b. *Operationalizing* a concept from the course (defining it in observable or

measurable terms)

    c. Supporting an argument for the research with theoretical statements

    d. Arriving at a research question(s) from the literature

    e. Designing and conducting a front-end evaluation to investigate a research question(s)

    f. Connect findings back to current literature and theoretical approaches in the field.

The objectives will be assessed through the weekly discussion assignments, reflective journal entries, activities and a final project.

Specific Learning Outcomes (SLO): Participants will be able to:

1. Describe the nature and importance of free-choice learning as a component of lifelong learning.
2. Articulate the roles that identity, motivation, interest, prior knowledge and experience, and choice and control play in lifelong learning.
3. As learning leaders, describe how they can leverage the personal context to support learners of all ages and backgrounds across a diversity of settings.

Learning Resources:

In addition to the two required textbooks, there are a variety of readings for each module posted online or linked electronically. See the readings section under each module in the Canvas course.

Required Texts: (all reading is provided in Canvas in each module)

- ✦ Falk, J. H., & Dierking, L. D. (2000). *Learning from museums: Visitor experiences and the making of meaning.* Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

- ✦ Falk J. H. (2009). *Identity and the museum visitor experience.* Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Guidelines for Major Assignments:

Weekly Discussions – You will be receiving a starting prompt for all modules. It is important that you:

> **Read your classmate's posts and respond to them** during the week so as to facilitate the discussion. In the spirit of collaboration and co-construction of our understandings of the personal aspects of free-choice learning, we will be using discussion board assignments heavily. We expect participation, engagement, and kind respectful discussion focused both on our own experiences and the

class readings. There is no minimum number of posts per week but you are expected to participate in every discussion board with more than a single statement. The discussion board is only as good as each individual's contribution.

Module Assignments – In addition to reading assignments and postings, each of the 4 modules will include some kind of hands-on assignment. These will range from individual thought experiences and write-ups to small scale data collection exercises. Each assignment should be completed on time, and show completeness and evidence of application of appropriate concepts and ideas.

Reflection Assignments –Students will respond to reflective journal prompts provided at the end of each module. Students will also be asked to write a personal reflection about what they have learned over the course of the past two weeks. This is a fundamental part of the course; the timely completion of these bi-weekly reflections contributes to the overall outcomes of the course.

Final Project – Each student will conduct a front-end evaluation of a free-choice learning experience. The front-end research should be designed to investigate one or at most two of the Personal Context variables of identity, motivation, interest, prior knowledge and/or experience. Below is the breakdown of criteria for the successful completion of this project.

> **1. Frame the Problem**: Students will describe a learning activity/experience they wish to implement (e.g., a new exhibit or display, an educational website, an after school lesson), the intended audience for the activity/experience and a general statement of what the expected learning outcomes of the activity/experience are to be.

> **2. Literature Review**: Students will write a one-page literature review that summarizes the key Personal Context issues that are likely to impact learner accomplishment of the activity/experience they wish to implement. The literature review will summarize how Personal Context variables might influence the success/implementation of the activity/experience and provide a justification for why one or two Personal Context variables needed to be investigated prior to development of the activity/experience. In other words, why do we need to know more about what the learners bring to the activity/experience?

> **3. Assess the Personal Context:** Students will develop, implement and analyze a front-end evaluation study of the target learner audience. The study will assess the relevant (as defined and described by the literature review) characteristics of the target learners' Personal Context (e.g., identities, pre-existing motivations, interests, prior knowledge and experiences and individual differences) as they relate to the proposed learning experience. Data will be summarized and the key findings described. Conclusions of the front-end should describe how the results

would inform educational practice; specifically how the learning activities/experiences proposed in Step 1 would need to be designed so as to accommodate what was learned in the front-end study.

The final product will be turned in by the last day of class (end of Module 5). Plan for a 5
page paper (not including reference list, and not more than 10 pages). Use the APA 6th edition manuscript guidelines to format your paper, including citations of literature, double spaced, 1" margins, 12pt Times New Roman.

Course Content and Evaluation of Student Performance

The course is broken up into 4 two-week modules. Each module begins on a Monday and ends on a Sunday and consists of readings, data collection and analysis activities, reflective writing, and online discussion. All coursework is designed to lead to the final front-end evaluation project, by which the student learning outcomes will be assessed.

Module	Topics		OCO	SLO
1	Overview of Learning; Contextual Model of Learning; Interest	Assignment + Reflection	1,2	1, 2, 3
2	Prior Knowledge; Advance Organizers; Individual Differences	Assignment + Reflection	1,2	1, 2, 3
3	Motivation; Identity	Assignment + Reflection	1,2	1, 2, 3
4	Front-End Evaluation	Assignment + Reflection	1,2	
	Final Project	Final Project	1,2,3	1, 2, 3
Overall	Participation on Canvas Discussion		1,2	1, 2, 3

Link to PCTE Conceptual Framework: This course supports the Professional Teacher and Counselor Education (PTCE) unit at Oregon State University. The PTCE unit Conceptual Framework is based on four foundational or core values that are listed below. To find out more about how the knowledge base relates to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) guidelines, review the Conceptual Framework at the website: http://oregonstate.edu/education/accreditation/
  ✦ Ethics and Professionalism
  ✦ Reflective Practitioner

- ✦ Lifelong Learners
- ✦ Diversity and Equity

Link to National Standards: With respect to national standards, this course includes application of NCATEcontent knowledge, professional and pedagogical knowledge and skills, dispositions, and student learning. NCATE Unit Standards:
http://www.ncate.org/public/unitStandardsRubrics.asp?ch=4
 Link to State Standards: The Oregon TSPC Standards embedded in this course include the following:
- ✦ Standard 1: Plan Instruction that supports student progress in learning and is appropriate
- ✦ for the developmental level.
- ✦ Standard 2: Establish a classroom climate conducive to learning.
- ✦ Standard 3: Engage students in planned learning activities.
- ✦ Standard 4: Evaluate, act upon, and report student progress in learning.
- ✦ Standard 5: Exhibits professional behaviors, ethics, and values.

Course Policies:

Expectations for Student Conduct: Student conduct is governed by the university's policies, as explained in the Office of Student Conduct: information and regulations.

Academic Integrity: Students are expected to comply with all regulations pertaining to academic honesty, defined as: An intentional act of deception in which a student seeks to claim credit for the work or effort of another person or uses unauthorized materials or fabricated information in any academic work. For further information, visit Avoiding Academic Dishonesty, or contact the office of Student Conduct and Mediation at 541-737-3656.

Conduct in this online classroom: In an academic community, students and faculty, and staff each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment, whether online or in the classroom. Students, faculty, and staff have the responsibility to treat each other with understanding, dignity and respect. Disruption of teaching, administration, research, and other institutional activities is prohibited by Oregon Administrative Rule 576-015-0015 (1) and (2) and is subject to sanctions under university policies, OSU Office of Student Conduct.

Canvas: This course will be delivered via Canvas, your online learning community, where you will interact with your classmates and with me. Within the course Canvas site you will access the learning materials, tutorials, and syllabus; discuss issues; submit assignments; email other students and the instructor; participate in online activities; and display your projects.