

## **LEARNER ANALYSIS ASSIGNMENT**

*EDTC 6020 Module #2*

*MAEd in Instructional Technology*

Wes Bullock  
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Johnston County Public Schools

### **Definition of Learner Analysis**

When developing the most relevant and meaningful forms of instruction, one should consider the target audience throughout the process. As an instructor, it is not good enough to just include the correct curriculum, but also to relay that information in methods that are both interesting and accessible to all learners involved. As Brown and Green (2016) point out, it is an imperative task to become more knowledgeable of one's audience prior to creating the instruction.

Therefore, what practice might be utilized in order to accomplish this task? One answer is to conduct a learner analysis of the expected audience. A learner analysis explores "the learners' approach to the instruction—including prerequisite knowledge, skills, and attitude toward the task" (Brown & Green, 2016, p. 73). In other words, a learner analysis is a tool used by instructional designers to assist in the development of meaningful instruction based upon the audience's needs and desires.

### **Benefits of Conducting a Learner Analysis**

As humans, we all have basic needs and desires. For example, children, as well as adults, want to be comfortable when engaged in learning. Many other needs are outlined in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (as cited in Brown & Green, 2016). The purpose of the learner analysis is for the instructional designer to determine a foundational understanding of his or her audience.

This is especially true when working in an environment with a diverse spectrum of people, such as with a large range of age groups or ethnicities. However, even in the middle school classroom, where ages and ethnicities may be very similar, one can easily find an array of different mindsets and goals for the future. It goes a long way to helping develop relevant and mean-

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ingful instruction when one can get a basic knowledge of who is going to be a part of the learning process.

### **Challenges of Conducting a Learner Analysis**

One of the biggest challenges during the process of conducting a learner analysis is the importance of knowing that no analysis will provide the all-around, perfect answers to the best way of designing instruction (Brown & Green, 2016). Understanding that humans can be very heterogeneous in their desires, it is obvious that this fact can provide a challenge in determining the best instructional approaches.

This does not mean it is impossible; one can still drill down and gain key insight through a well-designed learner analysis. However, care must be taken in selecting the appropriate questions for the audience. For example, in a 7th grade math classroom, the instructional designer would probably not need to ask about the age group. Most likely in this setting, one could expect most students to range in age from 11-13.

It should be understood that the best possible learner analysis needs to be planned as unique to each situation where it will be utilized. Perhaps the core of the challenge comes in selecting the right questions. What is the end goal? As stated before, it is to deliver instruction that is both appropriate and accessible to the learner. The designer of instruction cannot do a very good job choosing the right questions without truly recognizing the multitude of inequalities amongst the human population, as Herrnstein and Murray described in *The Bell Curve*, inequalities perhaps considered positive or negative depending on one's perspective (as cited in Beatty, 2016).

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In addition, take a moment to consider the mantra of school leadership, describing how children may be auditory, visual, or kinesthetic learners, and that teachers need to adapt instruction to match. Carey points out that researchers have found no proof that this concept is actually worthwhile in improving learning (2010). Still, despite the lack of data, should this idea be thrown to the wind for us to grasp at the next “big thing”? Is it not advisable to consider these differences about the learners as the analysis is developed? Perhaps there is a lack of evidence to prove that this approach improves test scores, but this author also sees no evidence suggesting this approach does not engage learners in instruction that meets their needs and desires.

### **Methods of Learner Analysis**

One method of analyzing learners is to develop a chart that illustrates the learners' range of skills. First, data would be collected from the learners via carefully chosen survey questions. Then, the information is compiled and organized into “groups” of learners (ex: challenged vs. average vs. gifted). The abilities of each group could be compared across various skill sets (Brown & Green, 2016). This method may be effective for a classroom that has decidedly placed students to result in a mixed environment. Some instructional designers may also prefer this approach based upon personal preferences.

Another approach to the learner analysis process is for the instructional designer to develop a more specific profile of the average learner in his or her audience. This method requires the designer to be a bit more inventive, as some of the information must be created as filler material for the profile. There may be some extrapolating of personal information, and this approach is not going to provide as much up-front data about each learner group in the audience. As

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Brown and Green mention about the profile method, it may be somewhat diversionary from what is most important when compared to the chart method (2016).

### **Sample Survey Questions (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/GJTHYB6>)**

1. Please share more about your family, who you live with outside of school, and any family traditions you value.
2. Other than where you currently live, are there any other town(s), state(s) or country(ies) that you have lived in? If there are none, please type "None".
3. Which language(s) do you feel most comfortable speaking, writing, and reading? You can choose one or more answers.
4. Are there any hobbies (outside of school, doesn't have to be science-related) that you are interested in?
5. Are there any school-related extracurricular activities (clubs, sports, etc.) that you are or plan to be involved in?
6. In terms of how much you enjoy reading (when it's your choice of text), do you consider yourself to be a passionate reader, an occasional reader, or not much of a reader?
7. What is your experience with using technology in school?
8. Identify at least two topics/concepts you have had the most trouble understanding in previous science courses.
9. Consider the best teachers you have had so far in your life. Name at least three traits they exhibited that made them "good teachers".

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10. What is at least one thing I could do/offer in class this year to help you explore or make progress toward your goals for the future?

### **Rationale for the Survey Questions**

When considering the 10 questions that I would ask of my learners, I first took the advice given of Brown and Green (2016), that discussed above, in knowing that I will be facilitating learning of science to 7th graders. I am already aware of their ages, genders, and a little of their background knowledge (ex: what is taught in previous grades). Therefore, I decided to focus my questions on a few other key areas that I felt would prove useful in the course of the school year.

One area is the personal lives and history of my students. This is certainly an area I am not familiar with for roughly 96% of the students in my classroom. Question #s 1-3 and #9 should allow me to develop a better mental picture of past experiences, including cultural influences, on the learners. It is helpful to know this information in order to build the positive relationships needed and to avoid any unintended insulting or negative connotations that would disrupt the learning process.

Another area of focus in gaining insight into the learners' interests and comfort with tools that may be used in class, found with question #s 4-7. For one, I find it important to gear the learning toward my learners' interests in order to keep the learning relevant to them. In addition, I would like to know their familiarity with technology, as it is a big part of our classroom. Knowing ahead of time who may need help with these tools will allow me to prepare for such.

Finally, question #8 looks at science-specific issues that may arise during the year, and allows me to shore up those weaknesses to prevent future distress. Question #10 attempts to

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gather information about my learners' future goals, as well as help me to provide that meaningful

and relevant learning experience as much as possible. Despite having a set curriculum to cover, I

still prefer to find ways to incorporate my learners' goals and make it relevant to them. I do not

expect them all to be scientists, and I recognize they are a captive audience (Brown & Green,

2016).

### **Impact of Learner Analysis on My Profession**

Though I have appreciated the prospects of “knowing my learners” prior to their arrival to my class, I had yet to think of it as such a science and process as I see it now. Reading, discussing, and considering the many aspects of the learner analysis process has encouraged me to even more see the importance of such. In addition, I have been able to explore methods to carry it out, while understanding and being prepared for the challenges one may face.

In my current role, I can now carry out the learner analysis for my own learners. This will allow me to design instruction more appropriate and accessible even this school year, while sharing the importance and results with my own colleagues. For the future, I may consider a possible transition to a tech facilitator or digital coaching role. Even then, I will be able to apply similar methods to gain insight from my audience, especially knowing the audience may be more diverse or diverse in other ways than the present group. Regardless, I am excited to be able to comfortably implement this process and to be able to assist my colleagues in doing the same, as we help our school to reach the tenets of our district's vision (#JOCO2020), which includes relationships, relevance, and innovation.

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