

CASE STUDY 6  
I DID IT MY WAY





## Case Characteristics

The profile of the professor in Case 6 was quite different from that of the other cases (see Table 11). For instance, it was the first time that I had been involved in a case of this type. The professor was well into his career and had considerable time available for our work on the design process. In addition, unlike most of the others, he had previously taught at a distance. Despite these differences, there were also some similarities. This professor, like the others, had a minimal knowledge of the instructional design process. Although he was an experienced professor who, throughout his career, had developed a significant number of courses for institutions around the world, he had never developed a course in conjunction with an ID, nor in coordination with a technical support team. From the very beginning of our sessions, the professor expressed misgivings and was decidedly cautious (his guard was definitely up). Like his peers, he too had to design his course for organisational reasons. Also important was the fact that his course would be offered overseas.

Table 11: Characteristics of the subject matter expert

Gender	Rank	Reason	Time	Availability	No. of sessions	K/ Design	K/ DE	GO/ SO
M	FP	0	2	3	8+	2	2	1

**Gender:** male

**Rank:** FP = full professor

**Reason:** 0 = organisational

**Time-to-delivery:** 2 = beginning in 2 to 4 months or two courses at a distance

**Availability:** 3 = 31 to 45 hours

**Number of sessions** = 8+

**Knowledge of Design** 2 = intermediate level

**Knowledge of DE:** 2 = already offered one

**General Obj. /Specific Obj.:** 1 = no objectives

Although some of these characteristics might normally be considered advantageous to course design and development, once again, a familiar scenario seemed to be emerging: we only had a few months ahead of us to get the work done. This time constraint, which has become a constant organisational feature (as in “plague”) since the beginning of this study, created difficult conditions for proper course design.

Before our first meeting, I asked the professor, as usual, to send me a copy of his current course syllabus. Against my better judgement, I also

gave him the address of my website where I had posted the tutorials on congruency and method and asked him to take a look at them to get an idea of the instructional design model that I was proposing. I also sent him a copy of the most recent version of the horizontal course syllabus (HCS) grid that I developed while working on Case 4 and improved during Case 5. When we met for the first time, the course was not about to begin. We had approximately a six-month time frame within which to work. This was more than I had originally thought we'd have. As a result, I eagerly looked forward to the possibility of carrying out our work at a relatively normal pace. But it was not too much time.

After talking with the IDC (Instructional Development Coordinator) assigned to the course, we decided to meet with the professor to explain our respective roles. I knew that the design (and development) process is relatively new for most professors and, consequently, they are unaware of what they can expect in terms of technical support. In addition, I considered our meeting to be important, especially at the outset of this process, as it would give both the IDC and me the opportunity to listen to the professor talk about his course, his objectives, and so on, and to start the process off with a mutual understanding of what lies ahead. Finally, sensing a degree of disillusionment in the team (especially among the IDCs) with regard to understanding the big picture, i.e. the complete design process from initial analysis to actual course delivery, I also wanted the IDC assigned to this course to feel more involved in the process from the get-go.

*Sometimes, IDCs with little actual university experience do not understand the kind of didactic documents that most professors produce or even the nature of the tasks that they will be called upon to coordinate. As a result, sometimes they can be disappointed by the relatively simplistic nature of the production work to be carried out. While the project administrator may have informed professors that they would have access to leading-edge multimedia production technology, many of these professors still seek to use their websites merely as a "download centre" (or, "dump site") for digitized documents. This is because, in the minds of most professors (especially in the Humanities), didactic materials are still primarily texts their students are expected to read. Some have ideas about various visual representations they would like to have the technical team produce but these professors are*

*in the minority. Most professors use visual means sparsely in their teaching and, as a result, the media aspect of their course has little immediate effect on the kind of work IDCs and the technical team actually produce. Only after faculty grasp the technological possibilities can they start thinking in such terms. And this is something which usually takes some time.*

*During my work in previous cases, I gradually came to see the importance of having the IDC present during my first meeting with the professor. Up until now, I got IDCs involved in the process only when the initial design work was over (there was always, of course, the feedback loop after the fact, which required redesigning some items). As a result, as mentioned, some IDCs, given the lengthy design process and depending on how many courses were stacked up waiting to be designed, experienced times when there was little to do. As developers, they were in between design and delivery and, as such, I believe they sometimes felt as though they were simply there to fill a purely technical, almost mechanical, role and didn't realize the high degree of creativity inherent in their jobs. The whole issue of teamwork (or a lack thereof) in an environment where such was not the custom, I observed, was turning out to be more and more awkward, even complicated, as we moved forward in the process. All kinds of jealousies, hurt feelings and suspicions of power-tripping seemed to be lurking just below the surface of our daily exchanges.*

*At this point, we had a change in overall Project Manager (PM). A former IDC took over as PM and this seemed to cause the axis of our project to shift away from what I felt was the centre (course design) and turn increasingly towards the end product (course production). In other words, it had moved away from matters of process and moved towards matters of product. The result was that overall project policy and, consequently, resources were increasingly being focussed on outcomes rather than on processes, which affected my access to resources previously devoted essentially to design. I found this unacceptable. Design necessarily precedes production, does it not? The architect must first do his work before the construction foreman comes on the scene. When such a power shift occurs, from design to production, an executive mindset takes over; executives tend to want to explain to the planners what to plan and how to design, but without any design expertise. As a result, their instructions/orders cannot be followed. Viewed in military terms, it was as though the tacticians start telling the strategists what to do (like a captain on the front lines who is seeing only*

*part of the action getting the authority to start dictating to a general how to run the war). This does not mean that strategists do not need input from tacticians, that is, those who are on the front lines every day. They do, and very much so. However, this input must flow up through an organisational hierarchy; nothing is served by turning the whole hierarchy upside down. The end result is predictable: miffed feelings, heels dug in, bad blood plus low design and even production values. The Résistance, however, is organising behind the lines...*

**Session 1:** The first working session took place in my office, with the professor and the IDC who had been assigned to the course. After the usual introductions, both the IDC and I explained our respective roles in the project. The professor asked a series of questions regarding the support he could expect to receive and the IDC, jumping in with both feet as it were, spent some time (a bit too much in my opinion) elaborating on technical aspects and production technologies, which appeared to have a soporific effect on the professor. I managed to bring the conversation back to discussing the immediate tasks at hand, the instructional approach I was proposing and fundamental differences between classroom-based courses and distance education courses. I asked him if he had looked at the tutorials (on congruency and method) and while he told me that he had, he did not seem the least bit interested in discussing their contents.

*I realized that he may have had a look at them but that he had certainly not viewed them in their entirety. I got the clear impression that he had not understood them either. Whatever the case, it was obvious that he did not consider the contents to be of any importance. In my view, the contents pertained directly to the method that the university had decided would be used for the design/development/delivery of his course. For this reason, I felt it important for us to come to an understanding on how our work together should proceed. I decided that, from this point on, I would simply start each working session by showing professors the contents (congruency and method). That way we would all be able to get off on the same footing.*

All of a sudden, hearing the IDC mention a pilot project that we had just begun (a synchronous-mode, virtual classroom software solution for course delivery<sup>1</sup>), the professor became keen to discuss the subject

of course delivery (apparently wanting to avoid any further talk of design at all costs). He brought the discussion back to the IDC and asked about the delivery means available for his course. As it was going to be delivered overseas, he was interested in knowing more about using the synchronous-based platform, now that site-to-site videoconferencing was no longer a viable option (given funding and technical limitations at the receiving end). A long discussion ensued on the advantages and disadvantages of this type of instructional medium. The IDC, not having any experience using it for teaching purposes, began talking about how the software worked, its technical requirements, and so on, subjects which, in my view, were premature at this point. So I tried to steer the discussion back to course design. Using certain elements from the method, I tried explaining (and also to the IDC who seemed to have forgotten about them) the steps in the design process which necessarily *precede* those of development and delivery.

*As I did so, I understood that the professor was much keener on the technical side of things. He had almost reached the age of retirement and did not seem interested in listening to someone 20+ years his junior talk about pedagogy (or, andragogy). He was also an early adopter of technology and seemed to be thinking he'd seen it all before. According to informal feedback from my ID colleagues, his attitude is common in the early adopter population segment. Few professors seem willing to listen attentively to an educational sciences specialist who is there to offer advice on instructional methods. The result is that IDs have limited room to manoeuvre and, consequently, often find themselves having to justify, even fight for, what they are proposing. Of course, this does not foster a very positive working environment. Nonetheless, I forge on...actually, it was more like trudging ahead...*

The professor went on to make some flattering comments about the design aspect of the method; however, they were obviously artificial and he could barely hide his interest in more delivery-related issues. The IDC, having finally found a spark of interest in what must have seemed to be a “dark night of the soul” in the project, got caught up in it all and kept the focus unwaveringly on delivery.

*We still hadn't discussed what the professor was going to be teaching or how he was going to be teaching it yet we were already discussing how he was going to deliver it... now there's a dilemma for an ID if I ever saw one!*

I finally managed to bring the discussion back to the professor's current course syllabus which was, of course, a very typical, vertically-arrayed, one-page presentation outlining thirteen weeks of course content distributed among thirteen themes. That was it! With the "analysis" step of the ADDIE model firmly in mind, I asked him if he knew about the other courses in the program and if he had ever looked at any of his colleagues' course syllabi. The professor answered that he had a pretty good idea of what the other courses were about but seemed somewhat miffed by my question. I went on to explain. We then agreed to meet again later in the week to carry out a global analysis of his course and locate its position with respect to the other courses in the program to be developed for distance education.

*After perusing his syllabus, I saw that the professor was using the same compulsory textbook as another professor in the same program. Apparently, none of the students had ever pointed this out to them and, having never seen each other's course syllabus, they were unaware of the other's course contents and resources. Unwittingly, they were allowing their students to have what I'd call a "free ride." I am just now realising that this is the second time I've seen this phenomenon during this project.*

*I'm also realising that it is not a good idea to invite an IDC to the kick-off working session with a professor. From what I've seen, the IDC puts the proverbial cart before the horse and, for that reason, I was unable to get the professor to focus on design, i.e. getting him to start looking at his instructional strategies and activities with regard to his resources. Course delivery of a finished product is the final step in the process and talking about it prematurely only serves to deviate from, or perhaps more appropriately, derail our train of thought!*

**Session 2:** This time, the professor has brought all of his course materials with him. The diachronic analysis I intended to undertake with him would allow us to properly position his course with respect to the other

courses in the program, that is, if the professor was ready and willing to do so... I had my doubts.

*I believe that an ID's first task is to make sure that course objectives are clear and distinctive with regard to other courses in a program, both with regard to courses offered concurrently, a priori or a posteriori. This positioning task of each course within a given program is typically undertaken by a Programs Committee when a program is launched. However, over time, I have noticed that a certain degree of what I term "course drift" may occur because of new currents in ongoing course development as undertaken by new faculty, as older faculty retire. As a result, the actual position of individual courses tends to shift around. I think of the global analysis phase in the design process as I do the functioning of a GPS: it is used to determine a course's objective position and relative position within a given program at a given time. However, carrying out this task properly and to its full and logical conclusion takes time, time which the professor in question was definitely not willing to lose, understandably so. Consequently, I had to be content with a cursory look at the other course syllabi which were just as underdeveloped as his. I noticed two things:*

*1) From what I have observed, program development in higher education is at times a relatively murky process and far from being systematic, especially when you compare the process as it naturally occurs in traditional universities as opposed to, for instance, its occurrence in distance education universities. The approach that I advocate, however, is systematic and hence the cause of constant conflict between myself as an ID and faculty. The result is this: I am forced to adopt an approach which is less systematic than I had initially hoped for and less in conformity with the most fundamental principles of ID. I have to adopt an approach which is more "hand-crafted" than "manufactured," an approach which reacts to both the desires and objections of professors. (Mamma mia!)*

*2) Issues of power and influence in the professor-ID working relationship are never far below the surface. Intellectually speaking, professors accept the "ID concept," although when it comes to actual practice, they refuse it. Since the university has guaranteed the teaching profession absolute control over their courses, the ID can only serve as a mere advisor to them. The result is this: even technical-pedagogical decisions fall within their*

*jurisdiction. The ID is thus relatively limited in his ability to carry out the design process in a rigorous, systematic manner.*

*Consequently, the end-product of design will necessarily be a compromise between how much professors are willing to contribute (i.e. in terms of time and effort) and what the ID considers as a bottom-line. Once again, I observed that an instructional design model such as that proposed by Dick and Carey is not at all applicable in the university context because time, i.e. adequate time for design is simply not available. And it likely never will be.*

We completed the analysis of the other course syllabi and were ready to begin using the horizontal course syllabus (HCS) grid to design his course. At this point, the professor asked me to explain, once again, the means of course delivery available to him. Obviously, he was interested in talking about any other subject than design. I briefly answered his questions and tried to bring him back to discussing his course syllabus, which we then slowly proceeded to examine. His typical practice was to provide readings to his students (in the form of a photocopied compilation) which they were to study before coming back into class. This discussion of his course material appeared to interest him and, since it could potentially open up the door to our discussing design matters, I seized upon it and we then began looking at his texts. (I decided not to talk about objectives for the time being as I intuitively knew it would be a touchy subject.)

I asked him about how he divided up his readings from week to week, since a distribution pattern did not appear in the syllabus. He told me that he would typically inform students, one week at a time, which readings were to be done but he said he had never actually taken note of the exact sequence. I explained that, in distance teaching, having more structure (I avoided the term “order”) had proven to be beneficial, especially in light of his wish to minimise e-mail traffic and telephone exchanges between plenary sessions. There was a price to pay, however, for this expedience: his expectations and requirements would have to be specified in his course syllabus. Sequencing readings according to a course outline would mean that we would have to redefine his syllabus in terms of weekly themes and assignments. From a first glance, it appeared that he had a significant number of texts for some themes and only a few for others. Was this imbalance due to certain themes having more importance than others or simply because he simply had more material available to cover

them? We looked over his themes again and identified the course's sub-themes, which allowed us to delve deeper and deeper into the very heart of his course. As he spoke to me about the linkage between themes, I discretely started taking note of the specific objectives that emerged. I intended to discuss this with him later on. For the moment however, we focussed on identifying and sequencing the themes and sub-themes, as well as associating readings with each.

I asked him about how he covered the readings in class. He told me that the readings provided students with the basic concepts of a given theme and that he elaborated on them during the plenary session by way of lecturing but mostly by on-the-spot questioning (using the Socratic question and answer method). He said that he relished putting students on the spot, that it was good for their minds. I asked him if he had any personal notes on his presentations and he did have some rough notes and key sentences that he kept in a notebook but he emphasized that his classes were largely spontaneous events, as were the questions he asked his students. Being extremely familiar with his readings, indeed, having written some of them himself, questions came to him automatically. He also explained that his follow-up questions varied according to the answers he got from students. If he detected an error in a student's logic or a lack of understanding of a given concept, he would reformulate the question and then ask another student to determine whether the error was unique to a given student, whether it was in his wording or whether it was a commonly-shared misconception. If, indeed, it turned out to be shared, he would go back over the topic in question and clarify matters. If it was an individual problem, he would usually just tell the student where he or she could find the appropriate information on the subject and then move on with his presentation.

*This approach seems quite typical in higher education, at least in certain faculties, and is considered to be, quite rightly in my opinion, a major strength of the on-campus university teaching tradition: the withering interrogation followed by the exaltation of getting it right or the shame of publicly going down in flames, only to arise again from one's own ashes during the next class. The challenge is this: how to reproduce, or simulate this in distance teaching? In thinking this issue over, I recognized the importance, once again, of the role of dialogue in the construction and sharing of*

*knowledge. Socio-constructivists claim that knowledge acquisition must go through the crucial stage of negotiated meaning. Knowledge does not exist in and by itself, but only the mental representation that one makes of it. What a student cannot represent mentally will never truly become acquired knowledge. An environment which encourages the negotiation of meaning is one in which students can converse openly and directly with both their professors and among themselves. If the classroom model is the ideal model, and if the on-campus classroom is to be simulated, then the classroom in virtual space must be recreated in a way that offers the same dialogue and information sharing possibilities. This is exactly what we were hoping the virtual classroom (the synchronous platform with which we are experimenting) would be able to do.*

Predictably, the professor returned to the issue of course delivery, so we began talking about the synchronous platform and the results the team had been getting. Up to this point, none of the professors had used it in their teaching, and only some of them had participated in tests using it, mostly because of the agreement that had been reached between the Continuing Education Service, our corporate sponsor/videoconferencing service provider and its client groups, essentially requiring that all courses be delivered via videoconferencing (VC). However, as mentioned at the outset of this case, videoconferencing was simply not an option for the delivery of this course since the students were located abroad and did not have the technological infrastructure needed to access VC. Consequently, our discussions centered on how to use the synchronous platform, its functions and available tools. Given this overriding concern the professor had for course delivery, I asked the technical support team to set up a time for testing the platform with the receiving institution overseas, which I hoped would take place before our next working session.

**Session 3:** Since our last session, a series of technical tests between the receiving institution technical support team and our team had indeed been carried out but they met with only mitigated success. The platform we were using could technically and potentially allow hundreds of users online simultaneously, overall server speed and bandwidth permitting. Our team informed us of severe technical constraints at the receiving site in their lack of bandwidth. As a result, the receiving institution

would be forced to limit logins to one user at a time and have his/her monitor projected onto a large screen in a classroom. They planned to have a technician seated at the computer workstation, who would manage discussions by having a cordless microphone passed around the classroom, thereby allowing students to participate in turns. However, from a pedagogical standpoint, I felt the virtual classroom, not unlike a regular classroom, was optimally designed for about twenty-five students entering and using the site at any one time, with each student working from an individual work station.

An academic meeting with the program head of the receiving institution had been set for today. The professor came to my office and I logged on at the agreed-upon time, establishing contact with the program head some fourteen time zones away. After the usual introductions, I intervened briefly on the instructional possibilities of the synchronous platform software we were using. I discussed the educational value of the various system tools with the professor and his colleague and we all shared ideas on student and faculty needs as well as the system's technical requirements with respect to the institution's resources and limits. This arrangement would, in theory, enable a group of students to participate in a live (real-time) discussion with the professor.

However, despite our having limited the connection to one lone user at the receiving site, the connection speed was woefully slow and it considerably affected our ability to interact. At this point, the professor started to lose enthusiasm for the whole undertaking. He claimed that, although an avid fan of innovation and relatively experienced with ICT, he did not like the lag in discussions over the fourteen time zones we were spanning. He anticipated that this delay would be overly disruptive in his class activities and would be an impediment to his pedagogy. I wholly agreed with him and, towards the end of the meeting, we all agreed that the connection speed at the receiving site would have to be substantially improved before we could even consider the possibility of using this platform for his course delivery.

After the end of our meeting with the foreign program head, the professor and I started thinking about other technical means that would minimise his dependence on the synchronous platform but would still allow him to deliver his course in a suitable manner and according to his expectations. I talked about various tools he could use to develop and

deliver didactic material in a unidirectional manner and in asynchronous mode via the Web platform. I showed him an example of a course which I had recently completed with another professor. It basically consisted of a website that was relatively well-appointed with numerous readings and various documents such as sound-enhanced PowerPoint presentations as well as pictures, diagrams, tables and figures. It also had an internal email and discussion forum. He said that, at this point, aside from some texts that would require our reaching an agreement with the publishers on intellectual property rights, he had few digital documents to post on his site. He had his book which students usually bought from the university bookstore and a compilation of photocopied course readings but virtually nothing in digital format. He gave me a copy of his compilation so I immediately handed it off to the IDC to could get started on making the appropriate arrangements with publishers about digitisation possibilities. He considered his list of readings not an exhaustive one and wanted to add a few articles to it, yet it was a good starting point for both us and the IDC.

As for didactic materials, I suggested the idea of individual and team exercises. He told me he had never designed exercises of this kind but was willing to try. I provided examples from other courses (all quite generic and without specific contents so as to protect the anonymity of the authors involved) and we started to consider the extent to which these exercises could be useful in his instruction. At this point, I showed him an adapted version of the “pyramid” analogy that I had used in other courses and which aimed at enabling students to construct their own knowledge base through individual and team work. I explained that individual assignments were meant to prepare students for team assignments (second-level activities), which in turn prepared them for plenary session activities, located at the very top of the pyramid. The contents of the assignments could pertain to the various information elements that the professor felt it was essential for his students to know, that is, he could essentially draw from the same questions he would ask his students orally in class. In this case, I proposed that he write a series of questions in advance—a mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions—and post them on his course website. I also proposed that he write a series of questions intended for teams, this time more open-ended, thought-provoking questions which would likely raise student critical

thinking levels. Afterwards, I proposed that he start experimenting with the discussion forum and attempt to deliver part of his course in asynchronous mode. We could, however, attenuate somewhat the “asynchronousness” of the medium by his being online at the same time as his students, thereby being in a position to exchange messages with them and provide almost instantaneous feedback. I knew that, given his pedagogical style and penchant for direct verbal communication, this was not the ideal situation for him. However, I framed it as a temporary solution that would allow us to get the course off the ground so to speak, while we waited for a technical solution at the receiving end that would allow us to exploit the synchronous platform fully. He told me that he would try the forum out to see whether it would be possible for him to function in this manner.

**Session 4:** We began this session with the intent of writing an individual assignment (IA) and a team assignment (TA). We went through the professor's first text together. He identified the points which were important for the students to know and I highlighted them as we moved along. These highlights would allow me, firstly, to start writing up closed-ended questions for the IA but, secondly, and perhaps more importantly, to identify his true course objectives (which I continued to note, once again in a discrete manner). As we moved through his text, I asked for his feedback with regard to the questions I was writing and he adjusted the wording accordingly.

*I feel as though there is often, in the minds of a lot of professors, a degree of confusion between writing questions based on a text (as with test items) and writing specific objectives. I often have to explain that specific objectives (or SOs) identify skills and knowledge, among other things, that will enable a student to understand a text's contents while questions target the information contained in the text. This difference rarely seems obvious to professors at first but after discussing it with them further, I am generally able to help them understand the difference between the two. In fact, I often hear professors say that, after writing up their SOs, they start noticing the same objectives (or very similar ones) popping up throughout their course. Now that is substantial food for thought...*

Using these more close-ended individual questions as a starting point, we then started writing up more open-ended questions intended for the team assignment (TA). This assignment consisted of a series of questions which were less factual in nature, more open to interpretation and thereby likely to encourage a range of different answers, hopefully even a debate among team members. These team questions were written according to a constructivist bent, meaning that students would be called upon to confront the opinions, interpretations and inferences of their peers. I thus established an assignment template of sorts for both types of assignments that the professor could replicate once it came time to write up assignments for his other texts. As a result of this rather laborious process, the professor realized that, if he wanted his students to truly understand the texts he asked them to read, he would have to eliminate some of them. This was because the method we were in the process of developing (IAs and TAs followed by a plenary session via an asynchronous discussion forum and, eventually, via synchronous desktop conferencing), while potentially beneficial to his students, was starting to appear to be prohibitively time-consuming.

We thus returned to his original course syllabus and thoroughly examined the series of readings intended for his students. He reworked his selection and changed the distribution sequence for the 13 weeks of classes. This brought us to the end of our working session. Before we went our separate ways, the professor told me that he would send me an IA and a TA for Week 2 of classes before our next session.

**Session 5:** Since our last session, the professor had sent me, as agreed, the IA and the TA for the second week of readings. Having had just enough time to look at them prior to our session, we began our work by studying them together. I had noticed that the professor tended to write very short, specific questions such as Who did that?, What is the term for this?, What year did this or that take place?, etc. In response, I suggested he develop his questions further to make them a bit harder, because his type of questions might lead students to simply exchange answers among themselves without making an effort to find answers on their own. Writing questions using qualifiers such as “in your own words,” “drawing on your own experience” or “providing an example” would reduce this risk and require that the student devote individual effort to

finding answers. Should the professor notice systematic similarities in his students' answers, he could let them know that he expected individual activities to be completed *individually*.

With regard to his TA, I noticed that his questions were, on the contrary, too wordy. His sentences were, at times, simply too long and certain portions of them, because of their complexity, lacked clarity. I pointed out a number of examples of questions that would require some revision. He appeared to agree with my observations.

*Up to this point, his reactions have been quite reserved, as though he was sizing me up. I was also getting the feeling that, although he was seemingly interested in "entertaining" my input, I got the distinct feeling that I might be invading his territory, so to speak, by means of my comments, as though I were nonchalantly stepping on "sacred ground," one which none (especially mere mortals) had ever dared tread. I felt compelled to emphasize, once again, the fact that my suggestions had to do with writing up didactic materials from a strictly instructional standpoint, i.e. in terms of the mental models (Gentner & Stevens, 1983) his teachings inspired in his students, and that they had nothing to do with his academic content per se. He told me that although he had never worked with an ID before and that this approach was quite new to him, he was OK with the way things were going. Indeed, he confided in me, saying that he had never spoken to anyone (meaning his colleagues) about his course content, aside from his students. Consequently, he admitted that our working together was both a source of inspiration and insecurity for him. Once again, it struck me just how precarious the ID's situation is (professionally speaking). The ID may inadvertently barge into an area with the best intentions in the world only to have the door unexpectedly but firmly shut. His or her role is still a novelty, one which is generally not acknowledged in importance. I feel as though the ID is walking on egg shells every time he seeks to lift the veil on the professor-centered, traditional university course planning process, a highly individual process which seems to be rarely discussed, relatively obscure and even expressly hidden from other faculty members.*

With regard to the professor's TA, his questions tended to closely reproduce those in his IA, but more vague. I suggested he write TA questions that would require his students to pool the answers they wrote

for their IA, thereby constructing meaning on a collective scale. In order to encourage his students to negotiate meaning, piece together elements and ultimately draw conclusions, his TA questions would need to be more open-ended. Consequently, we went back over his TA questions and, rewriting them as we went, we made sure we followed the same numbering scheme as that used in the IA. We then attacked the IA and TA for Week 3. This time however, for each question in the IA, we also immediately wrote a draft question for the TA. The latter questions required students to carry out certain tasks such as categorising answers obtained during the individual assignment, summarising them, analysing them in terms of specified criteria, etc. I explained the concept of metacognition (Flavell, 1979) and how it applied to what we were doing. The questions we were writing would require that students process, sort and/or piece together the knowledge they acquired.

I also suggested that he include diagrams with his texts. The goal of a diagram (or schematisation) is, I explained, simply to assist students in their understanding by providing them with a “starter” mental model. I outlined some of the research in the field of cognitive mapping, visualisation and mental constructs and, as a result, he expressed interest in developing diagrams to add to his readings and assignments. Two connected concepts in his field of study caught our attention: “continuity” and “rupture.” The text we were working on dealt primarily with these two concepts but it was quite difficult. Quite spontaneously, I sketched a diagram on the spot. We talked about the visual aspect of the concept and we together worked on developing what I had drafted (see how this visual representation evolved in Appendix 2). After having drawn up four versions, we agreed to think the concept over a bit more and then ended the session.

**Session 6:** We began our session with another look at the diagrams, the last version of which we decided to keep. I sent it off to the IDC so that he could send it to the graphic artist. She would develop a more professional-looking version (probably using Illustrator and then Flash) and would get back to us with a prototype for our sign-off.

As we had done the last time, we began by working on the IA and the TA that he had written between sessions using the models that I had given him. I noticed that the professor had simplified his TA writing

style, slightly, and that his sentences were easier to read. Nonetheless, IMHO, his style still tended to be quite wordy and his sentences were still too long. Consequently, the readability level was relatively low and even clearly unsatisfactory in places. We spent some time exploring other, simpler ways to write his questions. I suggested, for instance, that he ask one question at a time (some questions had several sub-questions), that he formulate questions that require a complete answer, rather than a simple yes or no, that he make questions more neutral (i.e. not containing any elements that appear in the answer or any elements which give the answer away), etc.

*Although the professor had a wealth of experience and was a self-professed Socratic scholar, I have a hunch he had not developed the ability to communicate with his students. He seemed able to speak to them, but not actually commune with them. His explanations were far too fine-grained for undergraduate students and his sentence structure was generally too complex. I noticed two things:*

- 1. He wrote as he would when communicating with his colleagues, which was obviously not what was required here (we are far from Holmberg's (1983) "guided didactic conversation");*
- 2. His speaking style was identical to his writing style, which was not appropriate for the current context.*

*These observations of mine, which I believe I had put forward in a respectful manner, have nonetheless apparently been interpreted by him as my calling into question his pedagogy and, as a result, they were not at all to his liking. As the words parted my lips, it became clear that I had made a major faux pas (closely related to il ne faut pas). A cold north wind had just blown into the room. There are times when I wish, as Annie Lennox phrased it in the lyrics to the song "Why," that I had "just kept my big mouth shut." This was one of them. Diplomacy, I silently told myself, is an essential skill for a designer, an art acquired through experience, not something learned in the classroom. It is acquired over time, if one survives the learning curve...*

Despite these headwinds, we continued on, reformulating his questions. As he listened, I gave him my explanations, reasons and arguments. (Talk about being in the hot seat.) We went through everything with a fine-toothed comb. He gave me the reasons for his phrasing and we proceeded in this way until the exercises were completed. We came out of the whole process with well-developed exercises which read quite nicely.

During this work session, we established our *modus operandi* for the coming weeks. He insisted that we continue working on the exercises, however in asynchronous mode. Since the professor was not always on campus and had limited availability, he proposed leaving a copy of his texts with me and emailing his exercises to me each week so that I could read them and give him my feedback. Afterwards, we would send the “finished products” to the IDC who, with the help of various members of the technical support team, would give them their final processing. One final round of feedback was planned should the professor or I find any processing errors. We also agreed to have interactive work sessions over the phone and using screen-sharing software to produce diagrams for various concepts in his course which were the most abstract and the most difficult for his students to grasp.

As we were ending the session, I asked him if he wouldn't mind identifying and working on parts of his course which were most problematic, that is, areas where students tended to struggle, obtaining the lowest marks, etc. I explained that the design process is all about identifying problems, finding solutions and developing the tools to facilitate the learning process. The professor didn't make any promises, but he told me that he would think about it.

*In my experience, every course has such “black holes.” In most cases, these are areas which generally do not receive the attention they deserve. Students stumble and fall, likely because they are areas for which there are few didactic resources, i.e. exercises and activities which provide students with a walk-through. I tend to consider these areas a top priority because dealing with these problem areas can make all the difference to students striving to understand and get good marks.*

**Subsequent sessions:** Over the weeks that followed, we continued to develop exercises directly linked to his readings. Particular care was

taken to write clear instructions for his students on how the individual assignments (IAs) and team assignments (TAs) were to be completed. (A series of tests among a small representative focus group had revealed comprehension difficulties which prevented them from completing certain parts of the assignments.) The most work to be done concerned the team exercises, understandably so since the professor had no prior experience in writing them. We also found several websites which could be used as additional didactic resources for students. Unfortunately for unilingual French-speaking students, all of these sites (except for one) were in English, there being few French-language resources available online in his field. We included the URLs of these sites in the instructions for virtually every individual exercise. Some team exercises were also linked to these sites although the focus in the TAs was more about students pooling their IA results and then developing a synthesis of the concepts studied.

Over the course of these sessions, we brainstormed on ideas with the technical support team on how the plenary sessions could be held. They informed us that, after subsequent testing, they had essentially hit a brick wall. The receiving site could not, at the present time, boost their bandwidth for this course. It would be possible for the professor to talk to his students using the synchronous platform software but it would not be possible for students to answer him in real-time (due to the low bandwidth and time delay). Students would be able to answer him via the chat but their real-time participation would be limited to this intervention mode only. Together, we decided that the professor would proceed each week in the following manner:

- The professor would post a written overview of the main concepts covered in the didactic resources for that week on the course website and he would provide students with readings and an individual assignment for each week of classes;
- Students would complete the IA and submit it online. They would also work in teams and complete a TA before classes, choosing one team member to submit it;
- The professor would provide feedback asynchronously (via the website) on what he felt were strengths and weaknesses in response

to the IAs. He would also send them feedback on their results for the week's TA;

- During the plenary session, technology permitting, he would provide a summary of the week's assignments and would introduce, as an overview, the main concepts as present in the readings for the upcoming week, making sure to highlight the importance of these concepts in the field of study and their relationship to previously-introduced concepts in the course. Hopefully, this session would motivate students sufficiently so as to complete the assignments and thereby develop their critical thinking capability.

*It was here that I comprehended the extent to which the professor's role could have changed course had there been sufficient connectivity. Instead of carrying out the traditional role of knowledge provider, he could have played the role of a knowledge leader who interacts with his students, who encourages them to persevere, who instils in them a desire to carry on, who stimulates their intellectual curiosity and who forces them to confront, head-on, artificial barriers between them and their own knowledge-building capability. He could have been a source of inspiration rather than just another source of information, a motivator rather than a provider. Alas, access to this promising, liberating technology is not yet universally available. In spite of it all, even though we were unable to take his teaching to this next ideal level, at least his distant students would be in contact with a foreign expert, an experience which would allow them to be exposed to international standards and also to dream of what will be possible, eventually. Indeed, I firmly believe that it is only a matter of time, perhaps mere months, before even the most far away students are finally within our synchronous reach.*

*This reflection led to yet another: distance education was no longer the best term to describe what we were doing. Almost overnight, we had moved into the online learning paradigm. Necessity and opportunity had moved us beyond the requirements and limits of distance education and, thanks to new online synchronous technology; we had entered a new universe of possibilities.*

Our working sessions ended after a period of about six months, a time during which time the professor had gone from the initial design stage

to the final production stage of his course. Given the time limits within which we had to work and the extent to which the professor was available to devote himself to this work and despite a number of moments fraught with a degree of mistrust and incertitude, our work had gone rather well. Throughout the course design process, the professor and I had sent off documents to be mediated to the IDC who then dispatched them to various members of the support team. As a final step, the professor and I, as the course “architects” reserved the right to a final stamp of approval before our “house” was opened up to the public.

### **Ex Post Facto Interview**

On the design process: “Under the circumstances and after talking with others who had spent three months “getting their course into the grid,” I found myself in a difficult situation, being faced with using the grid (the HCS). Basically, I had a course to prepare. I thought we had only three months to get everything done.”

On the method of instruction: “I had a certain perception of my teaching method. My students seem to like it. After 20 or 25 years, a lot of them say they have not forgotten my course. So, when you proposed a method that involved using a synthesis-grid, under conditions which bespoke of urgency, and with my assertive, independent-minded personality, I simply had to abandon it. Having abandoned it, I went off and used a totally different one. And I finished the course. And the students are working and they seem to be doing alright.” (In actual fact, the professor did develop most of his course to the “grid,” despite his being aware of this fact. The only part of the grid he did not complete was the Objectives column. Despite this, given the way the AI and TA are designed, the professor’s intentions are nevertheless quite clear.)”

On writing objectives: “I help students give birth to ideas. I don't need to write objectives anymore. I want to expand their minds. They come to my course so full of certainty, their minds bursting with assurance. Humans bear the stamp of certainty and it is so harmful to them. I have only one concern: to bring students to doubt what they know. I want them to doubt their knowledge and then relearn it in a different way. You asked me to write objectives. They are so deeply embedded in me.

The problems we face are infinitely varied. You start with the facts and then you have to use critical thinking to solve these problems. It's just like a car accident. There are witnesses, weather conditions, mitigating circumstances...there are thousands of factors! How does one learn to take in all the facts while retaining only what is relevant?"

On his students' method of learning: "What do I expect them to do? I expect them to find answers to problems in case studies that they have never seen before. Take three different cases for instance: people are mistreated, made to feel scared and thrown out of their homes on the street...what can be concluded from these cases? How are they linked? It is up to them to conclude that all these cases concern a lack of security, or more precisely, a reigning state of insecurity. One must draw conclusions, understand consequences, find links between them, etc. from seemingly disparate facts."

On his teaching method: "I provide them with 'facts' as they were understood at a given time, or should I say perceptions of reality. Facts, of course, don't even exist. The problem with objectivity is one that dwells permanently inside of us. I want them to be able to reach conclusions even in the murkiest of cases. What we do is not an exact science!"

On targeted learning skills: "My students will become professional wordsmiths. The entire endeavour is a process. That's what getting a university education is all about. It is the capacity of students to search for and to find what they are looking for by themselves, through the use of their intellectual faculties. It's essentially an inductive process. I guide them through a series of readings and, above all, through an interrogative process. I don't want them to rewrite the course (that I'm giving). (...) I give them a series of readings and try to get through all of them. I try to get them to make connections. Their answers are predictable; I know how their minds work. I try, little by little, to bring them to make connections on their own and to put things in context without their having to spend hours preparing everything."

On his teaching method: "I hear positive things about my course...I put them in a situation and get them to feel it. It's alright to do that but

there is a danger. Whenever I have them role-play, they accept the fact that I want them to get a feel for a situation. However, they don't really "get" it completely. Stepping into the shoes of a 13th-century king is not that easy. It isn't easy for Europeans and even less easy for Canadians. And what about foreign students studying in the South Pacific? When I expose them to these unknowns, there is the risk that they will think as one does in the 21st century; this confuses the whole matter. Historical recontextualisation and role-playing doesn't work that well. On the other hand, what I did find remarkable, in terms of multimedia, was, despite all the talk about design on a grand scale, there is actually no agreement on what it means to educators, even less so to students. I have an overseas student who very kindly sent me pictures of her wedding, of her children, etc. This kind of exchange was extremely enriching and one that never would have happened in class. Why? Is it because of the Web? Well, the Web does enable people to share things that we would not in class."

On his teaching method (continued): "My method is inductive but also partly deductive. There are a certain number of things (readings for instance) that precede inductive reasoning. You have to be careful not to fall into "facilitative" deductive reasoning. When a case is presented, all the incontrovertible facts are presented. The inductive approach involves questioning what we read. It calls on a student's critical thinking capacity while the deductive approach silences it. The road ends there. We resort to deductive reasoning because it is 'safe'. On the other hand, the inductive approach allows professors to "cover" a mere tenth of what can be covered using the deductive approach, but at least there is quality in it. An intelligent person can learn anything that's taught to him, whereas the average student merely repeats things back like a parrot. The student doesn't really form any ideas on his own. My method makes provision for the reverse, that is, for going from deductive to inductive reasoning and from inductive to deductive. There is no fixed sequence."

On the design method used: "In terms of the method we used, we did our work together and then I continued with things on my own. Thanks to the method, we landed the contract in Europe. It is systematic, etc. The method is inductive in its approach. Europe is still living in the age of dictation."

On how the project unfolded: “I believe that what I did is very different from what the others did. I provide them (my students) with questions and case studies and then they read them. They have to discover things through deduction; I force them to make connections. Once they have made an observation, or a deduction, I then ask them to look for substance to support their arguments. There are no texts to tell them how to go about that. Through questioning, they choose a path and follow it. Using a form of Socratic dialogue, I help them come to conclusions by accessing various sources. Hints are there but it is up to students to find them. I provide only a few readings ahead of time, only a few elements here and there. They tell me: “We didn't learn anything!” “We have so many questions!”...and I tell them “you have learned how to get by on your own.” I don't “cover material”; it is impossible. There are thousands of things that can be said. Everything is done through analysis and reasoning. If that were done in every single course, students would turn out to be very different people. That's what a university is all about. No parroting. My most interesting and esteemed colleagues have their materials all prepared before they go in front of their students....”

On his usual in-class instruction: “I usually project texts onto a screen and we analyse them together. I go back over the questions that were raised and together we find answers. There is no one, single answer.”

On how his class unfolded at a distance: “We had planned out 15 weeks of activities. I didn't manage to finish everything however. The students were not able to do everything. Either they would send me their answers to the questions too late, not at all, or at different times. Also, some students would disappear for a while and then suddenly reappear online. You have to be lenient and flexible at a distance because communications are more fragile. You also have to plan for power outages and local conditions, especially abroad.”

On communication via synchronous mode: “My experiences with the synchronous platform were catastrophic. I don't know why. The first time, out of the 3 hours available, we only were in contact for one hour. The second time, after the first hour, everything just stopped. The third time, there was nothing at all. This is a serious problem. Then there was

the time zone-related problem, a 14-hour difference. It was difficult to manage. There are also several levels of authorisation for students abroad which makes matters even more complicated. Synchronous mode thus requires a great deal of availability. In passive mode (i.e. asynchronous mode), everything runs fine. If people attend regularly, things go well. The reaction time is acceptable.”

On teaching and cultural differences: “In Europe, professors feed, while students “regurgitate.” The deductive approach renders them passive learners. No one dares say anything off the wall or risks proposing a slightly different hypothesis... I always believed that in North America people were more inductive in their learning; however, the case [study] method is not very widespread. Documentary resources are there to support reflection... my objective is not to “cover” the book. My objective is to add to the book. But I am not saying that the two approaches are not complementary.”

On lecturing: “I don't like lectures that are simply repeated over and over again. A young student told me: “a professor failed me because I couldn't repeat what he said word for word.” The ‘parrot system’ doesn't work for everyone. I have seen graduate students who, faced with problems, were not able to solve them. They didn't have the slightest idea of how to proceed. Lectures are a means of hiding from questions... it's because of basic insecurity, the fear of not knowing how to answer them. A professor's sense of security, especially a young professor's, takes precedence over a student's learning possibilities.”

More on teaching method: “Each course, I tell them (students): “Here are the questions for next week. Send me your answers.” The following week, I put up an overhead and explain to them where the group, not individuals, went wrong. This is basically how my classes unfold:

- I ask Questions
- Students answer them
- I give them feedback
- I get feedback from them
- Discussion

Using various documents, they are required to complete everything through inductive reasoning. They must reflect on the concepts and question their thinking. Didactic material and methods for organizing their thinking are available, but in insufficient quantity and quality.”

## **Notes**

1. Our technical support team started running a pilot using Centra Symposium (Now Saba Centra).