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Subject: Fall 03/791A: content analysis (prep for our Week 8 class)
X-MailScanner-Information: <http://security.sdsu.edu/>
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To all:

Please advise if you're not sure how to log-on to EdChat for our class this afternoon (<http://edchat.sdsu.edu>).

Following is information SPECIFIC to the content analysis; please read thru it before class-time.

In terms of the case study, we'll be moving fairly quickly from the literature review to the *content analysis*/documents review. This message is meant to provide a jump-start on the process. Your task will be to conduct a analysis of the Ed 451 syllabus. **My hope is that I'll have Dr. Branch's document in hand by class time; if not, I'll forward it tomorrow .. when I'll see him "in person."**

First -- all you're really doing is formalizing a process with which you're already familiar. **We review and analyze documents (communications) all the time.** For example:

- Informally, we compare newspapers (LA Times, Union-Tribune, New York Times, USA Today) or newsmagazines (Newsweek, Time) --- from the **superficial** (layout, typeface, organization) to the **substantive** (their political slant or editorial spin, their depth of coverage, their use of pictures and graphics, etc.)
- We comparison shop (for computers, clothes, cars, even houses) by looking at brochures, flyers, specification sheets, etc.
- We choose and prepare meals by reading the labels from canned or packaged food products (specifically: cooking directions, ingredients, "use by" dates, etc.).

SO -- don't let this assignment throw you off your game. What's potentially "uncomfortable" for you is that you're not too familiar with (know much about) Ed 451, why it's required, why so many different instructors teach it (often with their own unique spin), or the students currently enrolled.

However, completing this assignment will ensure that your other data collection methods are well grounded.

For example, an *instructor* is more likely to be engaged in the an interview (you may choose to conduct) if you couch your questions like this:

- According to your syllabus, students are expected to _____; why are those outcomes so important?
- I noted that between Weeks 7 and 9 you focus on _____; could you tell you why?
- Why did you decide to focus on *class size* before *tracking*?
- You're working with both multiple subjects and single subject teacher candidates. How have you modified the course to attend to each group's particular needs or concerns?

Imagine the response you'd get if you simply asked:

- SO, what's unique about your class compared to the others?
- Tell me about your course.
- What technologies or applications do you focus on?

That said ... here are some critical points to keep in mind (drawn from Fraenkel/Wallen - Chapter 20:

- **Content analysis as a methodology is often used in conjunction with other methods.** *Example:* Let's return

to Trendy and the chemical safety tutorial. If our study was *process* oriented, we might want to review the table of contents or the index, the tutorial's content outline, and the facilitator notes -- not merely survey participants. [Just an FYI that the content analysis is especially useful when your data collection plan includes interviews and observations.]

- **Content analyses can be quantitative or qualitative in nature.** *Example:* In the content outline for the chemical safety tutorial, you might want to count how many times the Keeping Safe section of the corporate website is referenced, or the term *dangerous* is used. That's quantitative. But qualitatively, you might want to characterize how the Keeping Safe web pages are referenced in the outline. What impressions about that website do the tutorials designers want to leave on participants -- e.g., that it's professionally designed, full-featured, well-organized, comprehensive?
- **There are steps associated with conducting a content analysis -- although the process (like ISD itself) may be recursive or iterative;** just like other data collection methods -- a good content analysis is systematic and structured.
- **Communications may be latent or manifest.** "The *manifest* content of a communication refers to the obvious surface content--the words, pictures, images ... that are directly accessible to the naked eye ..." Latent content "... refers to the meaning underlying what is said or shown." BE SURE TO review pp. 487-488 for more detailed information.
- **Data analysis should reflect the type of data (quantitative, qualitative) you've opted to collect.** A qualitative analysis tends to organized thematically or by issue; a quantitative analysis tends to focus on *frequencies, percentages, or proportions.*

Following is an example from the EdTec 470 case study students in Ed791BC conducted last summer. In particular, I've focused on a section of the course taught by Ken Marushige (see: <http://edweb.sdsu.edu/Courses/EDTEC470/sections/F02-E2/index.htm>). Using *instructional elements* as my driver, I scanned all the content ... and found a number of "dimensions" or areas around which I might organize a structured content analysis:

Topics: how they're worded / described

Example: nouns (spreadsheets, telecommunications) vs. verbs or action / doing (Using the Internet to learn from others)

Assignments:

Their type (e.g., reflection, production, analysis, presentation)
 Whether they're independent or team
 Their length / depth
 Technologies or applications emphasized
 How they're assessed
 Their point values
 Connection to course objectives or outcomes

Assessment:

Embedded vs. formally conducted
 Performance, knowledge, and/or skill

Technologies:

What's covered (type or kind)
 When introduced
 How often touched on
 Isolated vs. integrated

And that, of course, is just a start. Don't forget that the syllabus is complemented by other website elements ... including the course description and the course resources.

But *instructional elements* isn't the only organizer to consider. I COULD HAVE compared the website against the state-mandated competences that students are supposed to attain (see:

<http://www.ctc.ca.gov/codcor.doc/999916/999916.html#20.5> as well as Epler's Social Studies section: <http://edweb.sdsu.edu/Courses/EDTEC470/sections/S03-14/index.htm>.

What are some ways to structure a content analysis with this "intent" in mind?

You might want to have a *benchmark* orientation (an idea that Elsa Tapia came up with last semester). You COULD compare Dr. Branch's syllabus to those posted by Dr. Gibson (see: <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~rgibson/451Fall2003TUETHUR.htm> OR <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~rgibson/SYLSDSUMULTICULTFall2003.htm>). What are some ways to structure a content analysis with this "intent" in mind?

You might also think about "centeredness" as your driver. What distinguishes a *student-centered* syllabus or course website from one that's *teacher-centered*?

In truth -- there are all sorts of reasonable and appropriate possibilities. Be creative!

Over the next few days, then -- work with your teammate(s) to figure out:

- what will *drive* your content analysis
- how you'll structure your tool for collecting / managing data -- and how you'll test it out to see if it "works"
- how you'll organize yourselves ... so that everyone is tasked with meaningful work

THIS WEEKEND, I'll provide the "template" for the report you'll be submitting to me. Right now, however, you need to focus on data collection!

Email me with questions you might have -- and, in the meantime, continue with your lit reviews!

M.