

ADDING SOME TEC-VARIETY

**100+ Activities for Motivating
and Retaining Learners Online**



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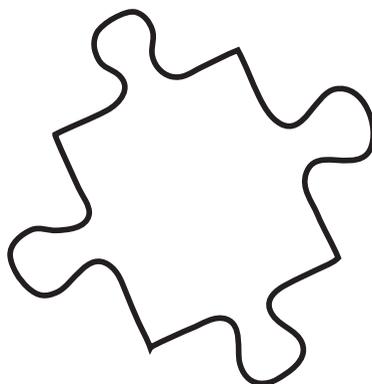
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CHAPTER EIGHT

PRINCIPLE #5 AUTONOMY



(Includes Choice, Control, Flexibility, and Opportunities)

To me, success is choice and opportunity.

—Harrison Ford

American psychiatrist William Glasser, author of *Choice Theory: A New Psychology of Personal Freedom*, argued that the daily personal choices we make are critical in determining our mental health. It is better to make internally motivated choices and enter into caring relationships than to be externally driven (Glasser, 1998). As Glasser puts it, “We almost always have choices, and the better the choice, the more we will be in control of our lives” (1998). Of course, our age of information abundance offers many learner choices. Not too surprisingly, Dr. Glasser’s ideas have been applied in a wide array of schools and business training settings.

Glasser’s theories about personal control are well suited for this age of learner-centered education. Principle #5 of TEC-VARIETY, in fact, has to do with learner choice and autonomy. Previous chapters addressed climate and feedback variables as well as how to generate curiosity, variety, fun, and fantasy. Those aspects of motivation, though seemingly learner-centered, are actually often under the control of the instructor. As a result, Glasser and his followers might applaud this chapter as it ventures into territory that tends to be outside the direct control of the instructor or curriculum developers. They

realize that making choices is part of what we do as autonomous beings, whether in school, home, or business.

Opportunities to choose and to act on their learning choices can have a powerful influence on learner satisfaction and performance (Pink, 2009). Any felt increase in autonomy enhances intrinsic motivation and offers learners a sense of control over their learning situation (Stipek, 1998), instead of feeling controlled or manipulated by someone else. In an educational setting, students could have a voice in the rules, procedures, tasks, activities, test questions, and many other classroom variables. It is vital to note that such autonomous motivation is linked to higher levels of comprehension, enhanced persistence, better grades, and less burnout.

There are decades of research to back this up. Edward Deci and Richard Ryan are well known for their work on self-determination theory (SDT). According to SDT, there are innate psychological needs that all humans seek. These needs include basic desires for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Deci and Ryan argue that the creation of environments or social contexts that support these needs foster intrinsic motivation and persistence toward goals. When such basic needs are frustrated, there is less intrinsic motivation. There are substantial benefits to be gained from autonomous regulation as compared to more controlled regulation. From this perspective, teachers should create an environment that respects student agendas, provides extensive choices and options, and designs activities that are highly relevant to student interests. Such actions are known in the motivational literature as autonomy support (Reeve, 1996), which refers to the amount of freedom that a teacher grants to students to pursue their passions and interests.

As was noted in earlier chapters, learners need opportunities and extensive freedom to learn and, ultimately, express themselves. They also need heavy doses of choice and volition. It is such volition or purposeful striving toward some action or goal that is at the heart of self-directed learning; that is, there is an inner will or determination to succeed. Daniel Pink (2009) argues that this internal drive system is focused on getting better at something that matters or is personally meaningful.

Ryan and Deci (2000) contend that extrinsic educational practices such as grades, detentions, and honor roles can undermine our intrinsic desire to learn. The extensive research that they document show that threats, surveillance, demands, deadlines, evaluations, and rewards undermine autonomy and can reduce creativity, complex problem-solving abilities, deep conceptual processing of information, and learner satisfaction. They find that the degree to which autonomy can be supported in the classroom, as opposed to the external controlling behaviors noted earlier, ultimately determines the level of student commitment and engagement in the learning process. Not too surprisingly, it also has a direct impact on the resulting learning outcomes.

Managers across business sectors have become increasingly aware of the importance of autonomy for new product development and overall success. Google, for instance, uses autonomy with its well-known policy of 20 percent time. At Google, engineers can spend one day a week doing what they want, including fine-tuning an existing product or dreaming up something totally new. This policy often results in more than half of Google's annual new product line (Pink, 2009). Products developed at Google during 20 percent time include Google News, Gmail, Google Talk, and Google Translate. Clearly,

providing employees with choice, control, and a sense of freedom to allocate time when, where, and how they see fit is a work world much different from that of the prior century.

Interestingly, the cofounders of Google, Sergey Brin and Larry Page, attended Montessori schools when they were young. So did Jeff Bezos who founded Amazon. As many are aware, Maria Montessori created a curriculum filled with choice, collaboration, play, exploration, self-directed learning, and learner autonomy (Montessori, 1912). Montessori believed in a multisensory approach, hands-on activities, and unrestrained liberty for the student. Small wonder, then, that Brin and Page attribute their success to such a system. Their prior experiences and dispositions allowed them to create a company environment where employees ignore existing rules and orders of how things are normally done. They also question what is going on in the world and have extensive opportunities for freedom, personal choice, and intrinsic motivation.

Are online educators willing to do what Glasser, Montessori, and other educators and psychologists have long argued for? Not only must educational settings prepare workers for environments like those found at Google and Amazon, such open and collaborative approaches simply result in better learning. Think about how ceding 20 percent of class time to students might result in a dramatically changed environment. No longer will students wait to be taught. Instead, they will think, collaborate, and develop products light years ahead of course objectives.

Each learner enters your class with a set of personal goals and beliefs. By embedding opportunities for choice and personal exploration in an online course, learners can feel in charge and in control of their learning environment (Bonk, Fischler, & Graham, 2000). With choice, flexibility, and autonomy, learners tend to make a personal investment in the course (Maehr, 1984). They want opportunities to learn, not restrictions from it. Nevertheless, online courses are notorious for being overly regimented or scripted. Too often, there are few, if any, options or choices. Instead, everyone must follow prepackaged content in lockstep order. No exceptions.

The good news is that during the past decade increasing experimentation has taken place in online environments. Students can be given choice in the discussion forums to participate in, the cases to respond to, and the assignments to select. They can even play a role in helping create weekly discussion topics, finding resources to share, or inviting guest experts. In some online and blended learning courses, students could take a lead in a discussion forum or concept demonstration. They might also sign up for a particular personality type or persona to role play. Across these techniques, instructors are giving learners choices in how they will meet course objectives. And, as is apparent by now, such choices and flexibility are highly motivating and personally valuable.

Technologies for Principle #5: Autonomy

There are innumerable ways that autonomy, choice, control, flexibility, and opportunities are possible online. The technologies might be as simple as a sign-up page on the Web, a set of open educational resource portals to explore, or a discussion forum

with multiple tracks or themes to select from. An opportunity to explore one or more learning portals or Web resources is common today. In addition to sign-up pages and portals, learner choice and autonomy are evident when students select an expert podcast to listen to, a blog to read, or a conference speech to watch and take notes on. Students may also select from a range of shared online videos to watch or engage in different virtual world meetings and interactions. With their avatars in place, learners can decide on which virtual meetings and learning experiences they want to investigate. Such opportunities to explore and self-determine their learning are increasingly common practices.

There are times when the learner should have the choice of which tool to use to best accomplish an assigned task (Jukes, McCain, & Crockett, 2010). There are often dozens of tools available for any particular digital activity or task. If the assignment involves educational blogging, list the ones you know about and allow students to suggest others. The same is true regarding the creation of shared online videos, podcasts, or animated characters. Skills for manipulating photos, sound, or video evolve from engagement in those activities. Find and use the technologies that are allowed. There will be plenty to choose from despite extensive lists of banned technologies.

The new digital landscape that we have entered over the past decade or two is rich with options and possibilities. Let students engage with new technologies. Let them have a sense of control and personally designed destiny.

Ten Online Activities in Principle #5: Autonomy

The activities listed here for Principle #5 are intended to enhance opportunities for learner autonomy and choice. Giving students a choice on their assignments and activities builds commitment and passion for learning. These activities involve increasing degrees of choice and freedom to learn from selecting a resource to showcase for a particular week, as apparent in Activity #41, to opening up the course not only for your own class but also for the entire world to take part in, as seen in Activity #50.

Activity 41. Cool Resource Provider

Description and Purpose of Activity. A prime example of a task offering student autonomy as well as choice, control, opportunities, and flexibility is the notion of the “cool resource provider.” Bonk coined this method a few years ago in one of his graduate courses, but the idea could be used in any education or training situation from the very young to senior learners. The cool resource provider explores and finds Web resources related to the course for a particular week or unit. To allow for student choice, the instructor posts a form online with blank lines for each week for students to submit their names. Alternatively, a wiki could be used.

Student cool resource exploration extends beyond instructor lectures, text resources, class archives, and assigned supplemental materials. If there are synchronous or F2F

meetings, the assigned cool resource provider could be required to make a short presentation to the class of one or more resources found. Such a presentation might take place for 5 to 10 minutes at the start of a class.

In Bonk's learning psychology course, such resources often include online psychological tests and instruments, simulations, animations, models, videos, or audio clips. Students have found videos of famous psychologists such as Albert Bandura, B. F. Skinner, John Watson, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and others (see the Web resources associated with this chapter).

In one instance, a student found an old video of Bandura explaining his famed Bobo doll experiments from the early 1960s. The video included original film footage in black and white. In that particular research, children who watched aggressive and violent actions from an adult model were more likely to engage in such acts. Reading about the study is vital to student learning; however, seeing the original research unfold is much more powerful. And it is a video snippet that Bonk continues to use in his courses. This is just one of dozens of instances where the use of the cool resource provider assignment helped to extend and even transform one of his classes.

As is evident, the cool resource provider role grants students a voice in the activities for the week. Instead of subjecting students only to the limited views of their instructors or course designers, this activity empowers them to go far beyond.

Skills and Objectives. Includes student autonomy, empowerment, and choice, the appreciation of multiple perspectives, content review, sharing, learner interaction, and critical analysis of concepts and applications. This technique extends the course in interesting directions and forces student reflection.

Advice and Ideas. The assignment should be clear. For instance, the instructor might ask students to find 5–10 or more Web resources for the particular week of the course that they signed up for and submit them to her for approval at least two days prior to class. A corresponding handout may be required. If it is an online class, students might post their resources to the course website. In a F2F class, students would present a few of these resources at the designated time (e.g., the start of class). Their presentation might take 5 to 10 minutes followed by questions and comments from the class.

Students could sign up for this role once or twice during the semester. To add a greater sense of instructional as well as intellectual power to this activity, the cool resource provider(s) may also be asked to help moderate discussion for the week by providing four to six starter discussion questions, or to generate a couple of debate topics, or to pose a few controversial issues. In terms of grading, we often make this a mastery assignment with full credit if done well.

Be sure to save all the Web resources contributed by the cool resource providers. They can be used in following semesters or versions of the course. In addition, ask students to rate or evaluate the resources found. Then archive the highest-rated resources for future students. You might also share them with colleagues who teach similar courses. Instructors can take advantage of this extended support for their classes, and, over time, their collection of class resources noticeably appreciates. The list of video resources for Bonk's learning and cognition class, for instance, has built up over the past few years and is now quite extensive with links to videos found in YouTube, TED, the George Lucas Education Foundation, and other places.

Variations and Extensions. We often have students work in pairs as cool resource providers. A paired approach offers additional support and analysis that often results in higher-quality work. An option to weekly cool resource provider activities would be to allocate one day of the semester for cool resource presentations or sharing. In fact, you might have cool resource provider competitions with awards at the end. To boost the quality level even further, there could also be competitions across classes or institutions. Another option would be to vary the type of cool resources shared each week. For instance, Week One for text resources, Week Two audio, Week Three video, and so on.

Key Instructional Considerations

Risk index: Medium

Time index: Medium

Cost index: Low

Learner-centered index: High

Duration of the learning activity: Throughout the course or as needed

Activity 42. Technology Tool Demonstrator

Description and Purpose of Activity. Akin to the cool resource provider idea is the technology tool demonstrator. In this activity, students contact the instructor and explain the technology tool that they want to demonstrate to the class. The instructor must review the tool as well as the justification from the student and approve it. If it is a blended or F2F class, the instructor might reserve a computer lab for the technology demonstration. The length of the presentation will vary depending on the course as well as the complexity and utility of the technology tool. Perhaps 15–30 minutes would be sufficient for such a presentation. If it is an online class, you might allow a similar amount of time in a synchronous class meeting using Web conferencing tools available within your organization or institution or some other freely available tool like AnyMeeting. Alternatively, students could screencast a simple video explaining or demonstrating the particular tool.

During the past decade, we have had students demonstrate collaborative technologies, blogging tools, and tools for creating 3D animated characters in movies. In terms of the latter, GoAnimate and Xtranormal are popular among students as they are easy to use. With such tools, students in blended courses could post video supplements to their live demonstrations.

There are various ways to reward students. We often allow students to drop an assignment if they present a new technology to the class. Keep in mind that most Web tools demonstrated will immediately be used by someone in the current course or training experience. The technology tool demonstration, therefore, is a way to extend the class in exciting new directions.

Skills and Objectives. Includes student autonomy and empowerment, resource exploration and selection, sharing, presentation and communication skills, and learner interaction. This technique temporarily places students in the role of instructor.

Advice and Ideas. There are innumerable benefits from this task including student respect, empowerment, and expertise. Be aware, however, that the activity can chew up a

significant amount of class time; you may choose to limit such technology demonstration sessions to just one or two during the course term. In any event, ask students to create a handout or guide sheet for the technology or resource. Also, be sure to maintain a list or database of all previous technology tool demonstrations.

Variations and Extensions. The instructor could designate a day for student demonstrations of new technology tools that relate to the course. Another idea would be to have multiple people spotlight various technology tools for the class on a few select dates during the semester. At the end of the session or semester, the class might vote on the most useful, unique, or relevant technology tool.

Key Instructional Considerations

Risk index: Medium

Time index: Medium (in terms of class time)

Cost index: Low (assuming the technology demonstrated is free)

Learner-centered index: High

Duration of the learning activity: Throughout the course or as needed

Activity 43. Starter-Wrapper Technique

Description and Purpose of Activity. Another online activity Bonk has experimented with is called the “Starter-Wrapper” task (Bonk, Ehman, Hixon, & Yamagata-Lynch, 2002). When using this technique, students sign up to lead or end the discussion on the assigned book chapters, articles, videos, and other resources for any week that interests them. The discussion takes place in designated threads in an asynchronous discussion forum. Most learners find a week that interests them. Students can also sign up in teams or in tracks. For instance, one person could lead a track for those interested in working in the corporate sector and another for those interested in working in higher education. A third track might be for K–12, informal environments, military training, or something else.

Akin to the highly popular and effective reciprocal teaching method (Webb & Palincsar, 1996), the starter assumes some of the teacher roles for the week by summarizing the assigned content for others. That person is also the discussion facilitator or moderator. To be effective, he would read ahead and summarize the week’s content before others are required to enter that discussion thread. The assignment might also call for him to post a few questions to get the discussion started. Once replies are posted, he would read the comments and pull out controversial, interesting, or important issues and themes. This switches him to a moderator role.

At the end of the week, the discussion “wrapper” would summarize the discussion that took place, including any themes, debates, and remaining open issues. The course instructor would act as a second moderator and wrapper. With such an approach, instead of “lectures” coming from instructors, students lecture to each other. In the starter-wrapper technique, the instructor would point out any student misconceptions, errors, and areas that they forgot to mention or where they did not go into enough detail.

This method works. Research indicates that it focuses student interactions and provides a structure for their discussion (Hara, Bonk, & Angeli, 2000). When used effectively,

there is often much depth and insights within the discussion. As the weeks unfold, student interactivity becomes more apparent and complex as students get to know each other better. However, if a student who has signed up as the starter for a week drops the course or fails to perform, the discussion will likely flounder. Be sure to quickly replace people who are no longer in the course or who fail to contribute in a timely manner. Bonus points might be offered to replacements.

Skills and Objectives. Includes choice and control, engagement, feedback, comprehension skills, and overall skill internalization. Students quickly learn the routine and have a place to review their learning.

Advice and Ideas. Provide examples of previous starter-wrapper activities. Perhaps ask students from previous semesters to provide testimonials on how it worked. You might also create a list of guidelines and caveats.

All discussions can be printed out for later review. The discussion forum is a living record of their teaching and learning in the course. In a F2F course, you could have your students print out one or more of their weekly discussion transcripts and bring them to class, with key concepts circled and open questions noted. Your students might also make presentations based on the weekly transcripts. Instructors could also create quizzes based on them.

Some semesters we establish a minimum number of student postings per week. We also ask students to respond to at least one peer comment each time they post. Finally, we often require posts to have a minimum of three sentences. We put this rule in place because the first sentence is often an agreement or social acknowledgment of the previous post, whereas the second sentence tends to be an opinion that starts with “I feel,” “In my opinion,” or “I think.” In the third sentence, they finally must say something substantive.

Variations and Extensions. One variation we have tried that works is to have the same person be the starter and the wrapper. In effect, that person is the moderator of the discussion. If you take this approach, you might rename the method “Starter-Moderator.” Another way to expand on this technique is to have students write super summaries of their learning in the course based on their discussion transcripts. Often students ignore the posts of the wrapper. To address this issue, we sometimes require students to quote directly from or at least refer to the posts of four or more starters and four or more wrappers in their super summaries.

Key Instructional Considerations

Risk index: Medium

Time index: High

Cost index: Low

Learner-centered index: High

Duration of the learning activity: Throughout the course or as needed

Activity 44. Shotgun Questioning

Description and Purpose of Activity. Options are important. In the preceding starter-wrapper technique, you allowed your students to pick issues or questions to respond to. Another option is for the instructor to post a series of questions or issues to discuss and

debate each week. Instructors can literally fire them out and see what happens. Students can then decide which to respond to.

For instance, there may be 10 issues or key questions each week. Students could be required to respond within three or four of those discussions. Alternatively, there could be one or just a couple of discussion threads; however, each may be loaded with questions on a common theme or target area (e.g., art periods in an art history class, work settings in a business management class, or ages of clients in an occupational therapy course).

Skills and Objectives. Includes choice and engagement, flexibility, feedback, comprehension skills, linking content to student interests, and overall skill internalization. Students quickly learn the routine and have a place to review their learning.

Advice and Ideas. Instructors or instructional designers of the course might create separate discussion threads for each question. As discussion proceeds, they could add new pieces of information or additional questions. For discussions that are fairly intense, there may be less need to intervene. For lightly populated discussions, interesting quotations, facts, and other data might entice student reflection and commenting.

During the semester, take note of the types of questions and content areas where students tend to post more heavily. Adjust questions and issues appropriately. We find that the discussion thread title and first few postings are strong influencers of the ensuing discussion patterns. Monitor them closely.

Variations and Extensions. Students could select 10 of the key discussion forums that they entered and contributed to during the semester and write a reflection paper on their learning within those discussions. The instructor may also ask them to reflect on fellow students' misconceptions and any interconnections between different discussion threads. To foster learner self-monitoring and other metacognitive skills, they each could reflect on how well the shotgun approach aligned with their particular learning style.

Key Instructional Considerations

Risk index: Medium

Time index: High

Cost index: Low

Learner-centered index: High

Duration of the learning activity: Weekly or as needed

Activity 45. Hot Seat Questioning

Description and Purpose of Activity. Similar to the time-constrained presentations mentioned in earlier chapters and the starter-wrapper technique outlined in this chapter, in this activity students sign up to be in the “hot seat.” The term *hot seat* is used in many environments, from witnesses testifying in a courtroom, to a corporate official reporting in a congressional hearing, to a suspect being interrogated in a police station (wiseGEEK, n.d.). Often, the person is in a hot and uncomfortable environment. At the extreme end of the spectrum, a hot seat includes painful shock treatment or even the electric chair. In any event, the hot seat is hardly where anybody wants to be, but an online hot seat activity encourages students to display their newly discovered skills or learned competencies. Clearly, with such an activity label, students know that they will be challenged.

The designated person in the hot seat must attempt to answer all questions posted during the week by fellow students in the course as well as by the instructor. Essentially, the person in the hot seat plays the role of resident expert. She would not only read the assigned content, but also potentially dozens of additional sources. This requires depth of thought on the part of the student and the ability to think rapidly. The hot seat activity could take place either in a live Webcam conference or in an asynchronous discussion forum.

In terms of student autonomy and choice, students select the week that most appeals to their interests and expertise. Many students enjoy the chance to field questions on a wide range of topics and issues. They might even develop a sense of expertise in certain areas that fellow students continue to ask them about later in the semester or even after the course ends. Importantly, later assignments might utilize that growing knowledge base. The hot seat activity could serve as a base for budding expertise and perhaps even useful products and papers.

Skills and Objectives. Includes choice and engagement, flexibility, feedback, comprehension skills, linking content to prior knowledge and interests, and overall skill internalization. Students quickly learn the routine and have a place to review their learning.

Advice and Ideas. Instructors can create an online form for learners to sign up to be in the hot seat or use a wiki for students to negotiate or even bid on weeks. Monitor the hot seat activity. Before commencing the activity, the instructor may have to train students in how to interact in socially appropriate ways with each other. If a student is experiencing difficulty with a particular question or fellow student in the course, the instructor could offer her additional information or resources directly in the discussion thread or privately via e-mail to help the student manage it. If the student is handling questions extremely well, however, the instructor might challenge that student with harder or more complex problems. What becomes clear is that the instructor's role is to provide instructional support and scaffolding, while also pushing students to reach the outer edges of their competencies and comfort zones.

Variations and Extensions. Students might work jointly in the hot seat with a peer, such as their designated Web buddy or critical friend. They could also be assigned to write a short reflection paper or blog post on how well their particular week went, reflecting on their content knowledge acquired, knowledge deficiencies, and areas that they still want to explore. All references and resources used during the week should be noted. If it is a paired activity, students should also reflect on their respective contributions and how well they worked together as team members.

Key Instructional Considerations

Risk index: Medium

Time index: High

Cost index: Low

Learner-centered index: High

Duration of the learning activity: Weekly or as needed

Activity 46. Open Exploration Weeks

Description and Purpose of Activity. Another way to build autonomy and choice in classes and training events is to leave designated openings and opportunities for that to occur. One activity discussed in the *Empowering Online Learning* book (Bonk & Zhang, 2008) is called “Library Day.” In Library Day, students must find and summarize a pre-determined number of articles in a week or a day, instead of reading a set of articles selected by the instructor. In contrast, Activity 46 allows students to do anything that they want. They can watch a set number of online videos, find and read articles, correspond with others in similar classes, explore simulations and games, listen to a number of podcasts, read through and summarize dozens of articles, or perform a combination of these activities.

First, however, students should be required to submit a short proposal on what they plan to explore that must be approved by the instructor. They could also share their plans with their assigned Web buddy or critical friend in the class or with the entire class in a discussion forum thread. During the week or at the end of it, students would reflect on their learning from their activity.

Skills and Objectives. Includes student autonomy and choice, exploration, addressing student interests and individual differences, and extending the course to additional topics and emerging areas of interest. Using such a method can help guarantee that the instructor will address student needs at some point during the semester. It can also reveal to students topics or areas that currently have limited information or resources to learn from.

Advice and Ideas. Provide scaffolds and job aids for the open weeks. Be clear about your expectations in terms of the number of articles read, websites visited, videos watched, podcasts listened to, discussion posts made, and so on. It is extremely important to have students reflect on how well the assignment went and what they learned from it. Examples from previous semesters as well as ideas on what students might explore could be used to entice student learning pursuits.

Variations and Extensions. Open weeks for exploration are quite popular with our students. They often ask for more such weeks. In response, you could offer two open weeks, one in the middle the semester and one just before students’ final assignments are due. Alternatively, you could place two open exploration weeks back-to-back. You may also consider letting students decide when the open weeks will occur during the semester.

Key Instructional Considerations

Risk index: Medium

Time index: Medium

Cost index: Low

Learner-centered index: High

Duration of the learning activity: 1–2 weeks as needed

Activity 47. Open Educational Resources Explorations

Description and Purpose of Activity. Sometimes we offer our students a chance to explore a list of resources related to the week. Each student in the class might have a different assignment. For example, in a course on instructional or educational technology, students could investigate and report on open educational resources as a topic. Sample open educational resources are listed in the resources section associated with this chapter. You could assign students to review and report back on a set number of them. In addition, give students a handout with questions or criteria listed that they must address. For instance, one question could ask about the ease of navigation as well as the depth, currency, utility, and relevance of the resources found at each site to which they are assigned. In a fully online course, their completed reports may be presented in a synchronous Web meeting or in an online discussion forum. In a blended course, they could demonstrate each site in a F2F class meeting and offer their suggestions for improvement.

The preceding example is just one quite obvious application of this type of task. Not everyone teaches an educational technology course focusing on open education, however. In other types of classes, such as English literature, the open educational resources for Jane Austin, Ernest Hemingway, William Shakespeare, and Edgar Allen Poe listed in the Web resources section of this chapter provide a starting point for further exploration. The instructor or course designer would find additional sites and design exploration and evaluation criteria and forms. Similarly, physics instructors would find more sites like the Einstein website. And courses in biology or anthropology could start with the Darwin website as well as articles from the Public Library of Sciences (PLOS), and Scitable from *Nature*. They might also browse through the Trailblazing website, which holds 350 years of Royal Society Publishing. Courses in photomedia could have students exploring sites like Panoramio and EveryStockPhoto.com. Much is possible with careful plans and thoughtful reflection and exploration.

Clearly, this activity should find utility in any type of online or blended course. It shifts the learning burden from the instructor toward the students. That is not to say that the instructor is unimportant in the process; in fact, instructor creation of the task and selection of resources is what makes it possible. As we mentioned in previous chapters, the instructor assumes the role of online concierge and curator of course content. Such a role is not as difficult as it may sound. We find that it typically does not take more than an hour or two to locate enough open educational resources for an entire class to explore in a week. We urge you to allocate this time. Without a doubt, the role of the instructor is more varied and complex when teaching online. It can also be much more fun!

Skills and Objectives. Includes student autonomy and choice, student exploration, addressing student interests and individual differences, depth of learning, developing expertise in a particular issue or topic, and extending course resources. The exploration of Web resources takes advantage of the power of the Web.

Advice and Ideas. There are many ways to scaffold this assignment. In addition to a guide sheet or online form for website evaluation, there would likely be tasks for students to locate certain data, summarize what they have found, and link the website content to one or more concepts discussed in the course.

There is also a need to consider and perhaps find ways to constrain the amount of work associated with this task. If there are 30 students in the class, each could be assigned one of 30 online resources that the instructor has found (see example in the Web resources section of this chapter). If there were 15 students, each would be assigned two of them. If there were 10 students, each would get three. If there were more than 30 students, the instructor could expand the list or perhaps assign students to work in teams.

Variations and Extensions. Instead of instructor-selected resources and learning paths, true learner autonomy would happen when students themselves find open educational resources to explore for the week. To enhance this search, students could work in teams or groups to locate and select what they feel are the best open educational resources, and then share the resources found and their ratings in a class wiki or in an online discussion forum thread. Final reflection papers or presentations on the process might be required.

Key Instructional Considerations

Risk index: Medium

Time index: Medium

Cost index: Low

Learner-centered index: High

Duration of the learning activity: 1–2 weeks or as needed

Activity 48. Pick and Choose Options

Description and Purpose of Activity. For centuries, educators were limited in their course resources options. Higher education was a land where the scarcity of knowledge was the norm. The same was true at the K–12 level as well as most corporate and military training settings. Publishers often dictated what went into a course. Given such limitations, there was not much the instructor could do to support learner autonomy. Today, however, those norms are being reversed. Learners and instructors have a plethora of options for learning. There are podcasts, shared online video clips, expert blogs, and so on.

With this learning resource explosion comes a tearing down of predefined course structures and an expansion of learner options and opportunities. For instance, for every case or scenario you find on the Web related to your course, there are dozens more to choose from. Content and tasks that at one time were extremely rare and far too expensive, such as simulations, animations, and video, are now increasingly common and often free.

When Bonk taught a technology integration course to practicing teachers in the late 1990s that was primarily online but with a couple of F2F meetings, he failed to adjust his teaching to the new delivery format. He decided to assign all students the same four tasks and set of readings. He also created a series of debates with preassigned debate teams. There was minimal choice. Bonk soon found that his choices of tasks did not fit his students' needs. His rigid course structure was not amenable to full-time working adults with families.

The next time he taught the course, he offered ten task options for the course and allowed the students to pick any four. Notice that the amount of work remained the same. In addition, there were no assigned course readings. Instead, students could select their readings from a collection of articles found in a popular book that each student received

for free from the project. The learners picked the tasks and articles that appealed to them. In addition, with instructor approval, they could substitute other articles that they found. Moral of the story? Options! Students love options.

A couple of years before that, Bonk taught an educational psychology course to pre-service teachers. Instead of assigning them to read and solve a set of 5–10 cases that he had designed and used in previous semesters, Bonk had his students write cases based on their field experiences in Indiana schools while responding to the cases of their peers. In addition, students from other universities in the United States as well as the United Kingdom, Finland, Korea, and Peru added to those field experience cases. They had thousands to pick and choose from. It was a highly interactive and engaging global educational experience.

Those are but two examples related to giving students options in online and blended courses. As is apparent, choice and options are increasingly the norm and the role of the instructor is one of learning guide or concierge for her students. But first she must be an effective and efficient curator of online course content. Following are 10 ideas for such an open-ended activity.

1. Detail 10 task options for the semester or course and allow students to select any four or five.
2. List multiple cases (e.g., Case A and Case B) and allow the students to select which ones to answer.
3. Have multiple final project options (e.g., research reports, grant proposals, special topic reviews, wikibook chapters, super summary papers, short videos detailing their learning, summary podcasts, and so forth).
4. Require three or four short reflection papers during the semester. Provide examples of different types of reflection papers to select from (e.g., current trend papers, course journey reflections, article summaries, expert or scholar reviews, thought papers, website exploration reflections, book or special journal issue reviews, and so on).
5. Create a database of online papers tied to weekly topics and allow students to select three or four of them each week to read.
6. Create a database of videos related to the course and require students to watch a few of these each week and then reflect on them in an online discussion forum.
7. Ask students to review one expert blog or podcast show each week from a list of 10 or 20.
8. List online conferences, summits, institutes, and similar events and ask students to watch and reflect on one or two of the keynote speeches or invited talks.
9. List e-books and special journal issues related to the course that are freely available online and have students write a critique or review of one of them.
10. List technology tools or resources related to the course and ask each student to write a review of one of them or a compare and contrast paper of two or more such tools or resources.

Skills and Objectives. Includes student excitement and enthusiasm for learning, fun, student autonomy and choice, student exploration, decision making, communication skills, and addressing student interests and individual differences. Such a method helps to personalize the learning process, allowing students to have a voice and a sense of control over their learning journeys and destinies.

Advice and Ideas. Clearly, in such an activity, the skill of the instructor or course designer will be in scaffolding or guiding the learning process. Given all the options, the refinement of your feedback and grading system may take time. Not every task or option will work. Ask students to evaluate these options and suggest new ones. Remain open to new ideas. And be sure to catalogue what worked and share it with others.

Variations and Extensions. There might be designated points of reflection within the course for students to debrief on the activity and share what they learned. The assignments might also recursively build on each other, perhaps ending with a task in which students compile their learning journeys into a portfolio or online gallery. Or students could be asked to compare their learning journeys to that of their Web buddy, critical friend, or others in the course.

Key Instructional Considerations

Risk index: Medium

Time index: High

Cost index: Low

Learner-centered index: High

Duration of the learning activity: As needed

Activity 49. Open Syllabus Course Portal with Options

Description and Purpose of Activity. Many of the previous activities described in this chapter included options and choices for a particular week or activity. The final two relate to the entire course. Many instructors already use a CMS or LMS and upload links to articles, e-books, shared online videos, and other Web resources. However, this is just part of the course resources.

Imagine what happens when the entire course is available online and filled with options—and there are no required books or F2F meetings. Back in 2005, some instructors started to use tools like Pageflakes and other Web resources as a portal to their course. Each “flake” in Pageflakes could offer different course content including calendars, notes, Web searches, bookmarks, photos, social networking tools, examples of prior student work, RSS feeds from blogs or podcasts, and so on. For some instructors and students, such a technique was overwhelming and quickly caused cognitive overload. For others, it was ideal.

One approach that some instructors and trainers increasingly use today is to post the course syllabus on the Web with every assigned article, video, or Web resource available as a clickable Web link. Bonk has employed such an approach the past few years in his course on the emerging learning technologies and open education. In 2007, his course

syllabus was 27 pages long. It mushroomed to 75 pages by the spring of 2013. At that time, he nicknamed it “the monster syllabus.”

In this course, there was nothing for students to purchase; instead, every journal article, report, and resource was available online. Each week, students were asked to choose three or four main articles to read from about six or seven that were available. He also posted a dozen or more “tidbits” or recent articles in the news for each week of the semester, of which students were expected to read two or three each week as well.

Placing the entire syllabus online with every article or resource available for free allows students to explore the course contents at will. They can enter a website or peruse an article and decide if it meshes with their needs. Students can embark on a learning journey and the instructor’s role becomes that of expedition leader. Given that the syllabus is open to the public means that countless others can learn from that course portal. At the same time, anyone can also make recommendations for improvement or extension of the course materials.

Skills and Objectives. Includes student excitement and enthusiasm for learning, adventure, fun, student autonomy and choice, student exploration, extended course connections, student multitasking, addressing student interests and individual differences, and sharing course content with the world community. Such a method helps to personalize the learning process and grants control to learners based on their interests, prior knowledge, and future directions.

Advice and Ideas. The open course syllabus and associated content are not only available to students at any time but also to the instructor, departmental colleagues, and anyone with a casual interest in the topic. There are many people relying on the accuracy and currency of the information. As you might expect, such a course requires serious attention to detail. Instructors and course designers must stay abreast of current trends in the field and update the online syllabus on a regular basis. They might bookmark relevant Web links according to current topics and interesting articles related to the course. Such files can be reviewed and updated at any time.

Consider recruiting a former student or some other Web-savvy individual to help maintain the site. That person could check the links from time to time, post updated syllabi, let you know when a course resource is no longer available, and discuss changes in the format of the content. Alternatively, one or two students might help with any course maintenance and updating at the end of the course. Such course review and maintenance activity might be an optional end-of-course assignment.

Variations and Extensions. Instead of posting the entire course at the start of the semester, pieces of the course can be revealed over time. In addition, an interactive course timeline or concept map for the course could be created that provides a visual overview of the online syllabus or course portal. An optional assignment in the course might be for students to evaluate the linked course contents and overviews, using an item evaluation or ranking form that you have prepared. You could ask them to select their favorite and least favorite items in the course. Given sufficient data, the instructor can then make changes to the course portal.

Key Instructional Considerations

Risk index: High

Time index: High

Cost index: Low (assumes access to all articles and resources linked to the course are freely available)

Learner-centered index: High

Duration of the learning activity: Every week

Activity 50. Open Teaching and MOOCs

Description and Purpose of Activity. At the high end of the risk continuum today are those instructors who decide not only to make their course materials available online for people to browse and use, as in the previous example, but to allow anyone around the world to participate in and contribute to the course itself. Increasingly, instructors like David Wiley of Brigham Young University allow a modest number of people from around the world to sit in and participate in such an open course. At the end, they might receive a badge or certificate of completion (Young, 2008). We call this “open teaching.” Open teaching typically allows for much student choice and autonomy.

Other instructors are even more ambitious and simultaneously deliver a free and open course to thousands or tens of thousands of people around the world. The phrase “massive open online course” (MOOC) is used to refer to this situation. According to Wikipedia, “A massive open online course (MOOC) is a course where the participants are distributed and course materials also are dispersed across the web” (Massive Open Online Course, 2011). Of course, it is typically the intrinsically motivated learners who do not require a grade, course credit, or gold star who complete a MOOC (Fini, 2009).

During the summer of 2011, Dr. Ray Schroeder, professor emeritus at the University of Illinois Springfield, offered a massive open online course in education (eduMOOC) titled “Online Learning Today . . . and Tomorrow” (Parry, 2011). Within a couple of weeks of its announcement, Schroeder had more than 2,600 people registered, representing some 80 countries including Morocco, Vietnam, Guyana, Fiji, Sudan, India, Cyprus, and Belgium. When Bonk interviewed Schroeder about his observations halfway through the course, Schroeder replied that a MOOC is ideal for ideas related to learner autonomy and choice. As he stated, “This addresses individual choice, access, and flexibility. In the end, there is an awesome resource site with a rambling network of interested individuals, blogs, wikis, G+ circles, etc.” Schroeder then added, “The motivation mostly comes from the broad range of professional colleagues that are engaged. The enthusiasm, knowledge, interests of the individuals raises [the level of learning of] all who read/view/hear what they share on the topics” (Bonk, 2011).

With a MOOC, you can reach a vast number of people in a short amount of time with just-in-time content. According to Schroeder, “This is a natural for professional development/training. . . . This would seem to be a great fit for courses and topics where there are new developments, new issues, new topics” (Bonk, 2011). Intrigued with the idea of a professional development MOOC, in the spring of 2012, Bonk offered a MOOC on how to teach online titled, “Instructional Activities and Technology Tools for Online Success” (Bonk, 2013; Chronicle of Higher Education, 2012). CourseSites, a free course management division within Blackboard, was the sponsor of the MOOC. Over 3,500

people initially enrolled in this five-week course and many more have enrolled since then. There were weekly synchronous sessions using Blackboard Collaborate (previously called Elluminate) as well as online discussions, extensive resource sharing, student use of blogs and wikis, and so on. The course is still available for anyone to enroll in and receive a badge for completion.

Although an open syllabus offers extensive autonomy and choice, there tends to be even more with a MOOC. There is also a unique sense of excitement and energy because enrolled students can interact with global peers who are keenly interested in the topic. Enrolled students are often inspired by the people who want to sit in and learn something that can help them in their careers. In terms of autonomy, with freely accessible course materials as in the case of open teaching, participants can choose the materials that they want to access and read or use. In a MOOC, such materials are often quite extensive and of high quality. Participants can decide on the modules or units in which they want to participate. And they can typically select their learning partners or study group team members. To personalize the experience, MOOC participants tend to form local chapters that meet up in cafés and bookstores to discuss their learning. In effect, a MOOC or open class is all about such choice, control, and learning opportunities. Though perhaps deemed risky today, open teaching in the form of MOOCs will become a common practice in the coming decades (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2010). You too can be a part of this exciting trend.

Skills and Objectives. Includes flexibility, choice, openness, a culture of sharing, appreciation of multiple points of view and diversity, learner interaction and debate, participatory learning, exploration, extended course connections, addressing student interests, and welcoming the world community. Open teaching exposes students to a wealth of opinions and levels of expertise.

Advice and Ideas. Start small. Invite a few visitors or lurkers into your online or blended course. Once you have pilot-tested the course, consider opening it up to the world. You might ask enrolled students for their opinions about opening up the course before you do so, however. If they approve, scan previous MOOCs for ideas on how to run one. In addition, you might watch the four-minute YouTube video from Dave Cormier from Prince Edward Island, Canada, in which Cormier uses his experience with MOOCs to explain what a MOOC is.

It takes time to get adjusted to this type of course. There are many challenges and items to consider. In Bonk's interview with Schroeder, he said, "The volume of users is daunting in the first week or so. Getting everyone registered and receiving the listserv is a challenge when there are more than 2,600 in the group. But, once it is running, the participants take over. We continue to populate each week's webpage with dozens of resource links and conduct the panel discussion with knowledgeable people."

Variations and Extensions. Consider working with one or more instructors who have also placed their syllabi and extensive materials online. Resources from each open access course could be used and evaluated by students across institutions or cultures. Or perhaps two instructors offering MOOCs on distinct but related topics could have one or more cross-course collaborations. For example, in a series of professional development courses related to training instructors to teach online, there may be separate MOOCs on understanding students and their needs, emerging technologies for learning, copyright

and plagiarism, quality and assessment, and online delivery and facilitation. Such courses might have common assignments or occasional student interactions.

Another idea would be to have students in a traditional class explore online MOOC materials that are openly accessible. You could ask these students to find resources and evaluate those related to your course. Be careful, however, as not all MOOC vendors allow their contents to be used in other courses. Check that you have the appropriate copyright clearances.

Key Instructional Considerations

Risk index: High

Time index: High

Cost index: Low to high (depending on the technologies selected)

Learner-centered index: High

Duration of the learning activity: Every week

Final Reflections on Autonomy

Counting all the above activities and their respective extensions and variations, there are dozens of ideas to select from to create autonomy support in your online courses. Online learners will respond in highly positive ways to the choices and options that you provide as long as they are supported with clear and direct explanations. Try the cool resource provider, starter-wrapper, Case A and Case B, or some other idea. Openness, options, flexibility, and choice are really what differentiate Web-based forms of instruction from other formats. When you place your focus there, you are giving your students opportunities to learn and to make personal decisions about their learning present and futures. As you begin to experiment with some of these ideas, in addition to your own ideas, you will have the kernel or shell for developing your own self-determination theory. You can be the Deci and Ryan of your online class.

You will have to decide the type and degree of learner autonomy in your online and blended classes. There will be many extreme highs and lows when you initially cede control to your students. Some of your students may prefer the old ways in which they were taught; they might find security in set lectures followed by assessments of that knowledge. Of course, all learners want some sense of learning guarantee that they have obtained the main objectives and can now apply the key concepts. In our fast-changing society, however, such methods no longer suffice. The twenty-first century needs human beings who are independent and self-directed learners. These are the kinds of learners who will find success in companies like Google, Apple, and Amazon.

This chapter addressed the fifth principle of the TEC-VARIETY framework. We now turn to the second half of the framework. In building on ideas related to learner autonomy, choice, control, and flexibility expressed in the current chapter, the sixth principle addresses the relevance and meaningfulness of the learning situation—a key component of any motivational approach or theory related to self-directed or self-determined learning. When learners find meaning in tasks, they will strive to complete them. We hope that by reading the next chapter, you will feel comfortable in designing highly authentic and interesting tasks that are relevant to your learners.

Praise for *Adding Some TEC-VARIETY*

“There are books on theory and books on practice, however this is the best volume ever written for using learning theory to inform effective practice. This book is a tour de force for creating an environment where students not only succeed in online learning, but they achieve excellence as well.”

—**Charles (Chuck) Dziuban**, Director, Research Initiative for Teaching Effectiveness (RITE), Professor Emeritus and Inaugural Pegasus Professor, University of Central Florida, and Sloan-C Fellow

“An excellent book from world leaders in the field that will be of great value for educators and designers. Presents concrete examples grounded in solid ‘practical’ theory.”

—**Charalambos Vrasidas**, Executive Director of the Center for the Advancement of Research & Development in Educational Technology (CARDET), Associate Dean for eLearning, University of Nicosia, Cyprus, and author of several information technology and distance learning books

Based on 10 theoretically driven and proven motivational principles, *Adding Some TEC-VARIETY* offers 100 practical yet innovative ideas to motivate online learners and increase learner retention.

What motivates?

1. **Tone/Climate:** Psychological Safety, Comfort, Sense of Belonging
2. **Encouragement:** Feedback, Responsiveness, Praise, Supports
3. **Curiosity:** Surprise, Intrigue, Unknowns
4. **Variety:** Novelty, Fun, Fantasy
5. **Autonomy:** Choice, Control, Flexibility, Opportunities
6. **Relevance:** Meaningful, Authentic, Interesting
7. **Interactivity:** Collaborative, Team-Based, Community
8. **Engagement:** Effort, Involvement, Investment
9. **Tension:** Challenge, Dissonance, Controversy
10. **Yielding Products:** Goal Driven, Purposeful Vision, Ownership

This is the book you need to grow your online teaching repertoire in innovative ways that will grab your students' attention and imagination. **Additional book resources as well as a free e-book are available for download at <http://tec-variety.com>.**

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