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Navigating Through a VUCA World by Using an Educational Compass

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Abstract: The security challenges of the twenty-first century can hardly be underestimated. These challenges are volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, with a tendency to become even more complicated and diverse. Nowadays, military leaders are challenged to solve problems within these four main security challenges. While facing such problems, military leaders are often stretched beyond their capabilities because current military education does not adequately provide them the knowledge and skills they need to deal with these problems. In order to prepare officers to best deal with the security challenges of today and the (near) future, a growing number of military academies recognize the need to address more than just military skills in their educational programs. The purpose of this article is to propose an easily applicable educational model which will enable military academies to effectively and efficiently design their education in order to prepare their future military leaders to best deal with security challenges of the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Curricular Components; Educational Compass; Educational Design; Educational Design Model; Lifelong Learning Competencies; Military Education; Twenty-first Century Security Challenges.

Introduction

Volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity characterize the world we live in and thus the contemporary environment in which military leaders operate. These four environmental characteristics are also referred to as VUCA. That is why twenty-first century security challenges—such as hybrid warfare, non-state actors, and exponentially increasing information and technologies—are becoming inevitable as they put an increasing demand on our military leaders to keep up while solving their assigned missions under critical, unforeseen and most immediate disadvantageous conditions.¹ As a result, preconditions, needs, processes, policy and operations are continuously adjusted, causing the operational context to become more unpredictable every day. The operational context is inextricably linked to military education, because this kind of education prepares military leaders to complete their missions. Sequentially, continuous changes in the operational context create different demands on educational design, content, and form. Unfortunately, today's defense organizations are too rigid, and designing and adjusting educational programs is so time-consuming that an educational program has to be revised as soon as it is ready to be implemented. Moreover, an increasing number of military academies now recognize the need to address more than just military skills in their educational programs.² Unfortunately, the knowledge and skills required to determine what content should be added and how this content should be taught is often lacking. This lack is exacerbated by the fact that educational design models are versatile and ambiguous, and succeed each other rapidly, which makes it difficult to choose an appropriate educational design model—even for educational specialists.

Abovementioned tendencies endorse the rationale of this article: to propose an easily applicable and simple educational design model which will enable military academies to effectively and efficiently design a wide range of specific educational and training practices. Through this model, military educational programs will address the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to execute military tasks within an operational context. As a result, their military education should prepare future military leaders to best deal with security challenges of the twenty-first century in a VUCA world. This way, no matter what assignment must be completed, military leaders can always deal with the unforeseen and the unknown. Therefore, our model enables military academies to give new meaning to the acronym VUCA through their education: vision, understanding, clarity and agility. Eventually, this new meaning should enable our future military leaders to face their operational environment that is characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.

This article will first describe why there is a need for an easily applicable and simple educational design model. Secondly, the theoretical fundamentals of our model are explored. Thereafter, these fundamentals will be explained altogether. Finally, all fundamentals will be merged into our model: an educational compass that can be used by educational designers of military academies to enable future military leaders to navigate through a VUCA world.

Why a New Educational Design Model?

There are several reasons for proposing a new approach to designing military education. First, our continuously changing world—best described with the acronym VUCA—requires a different approach to military education. After all, what military leaders have to comply with is also continuously changing. Consequently, military academies, and in fact the entire organization, have to adapt their learning approaches to these changing circumstances.³ Second, changes in the world also have repercussions on current, existing educational design models, causing these models to be complex and ambiguous, and to rapidly succeed each other. However, this variety of educational design models does not seem to have led to a unified approach that matches the context in which they are to be used. Third, the personnel responsible for designing education in the defense organization are often insufficiently equipped to perform this task. In addition, they cannot gain the necessary experience in designing education due to a lack of simple guidelines and due to the job rotation system. Therefore, there is a need for a new, easily applicable, simple educational design model that describes the steps needed to design education and offers flexibility within and between those steps.

How Is Our Educational Design Model Initiated?

Due to the fact that there are many complex and versatile educational design models available, it is difficult to design education efficiently and effectively, especially when there is

a lack of educational expertise. Although this article will not describe a complete overview of educational design models, this paragraph will first explain two models that supported our colleagues in designing education: constructive alignment and curricular spider web. Based on these educational design models, ten curricular components are distilled. Second, three additional curricular components are added based on our experience as educational specialists. Finally, three educational levels are explained at which these curricular components can be applied.

While working as educational specialists, we have been able to support many teachers in designing education. One way to do so is by using constructive alignment. This educational design model consists of three components: learning objectives, assessment, and learning activities. When these three components are aligned, a high-quality learning process is effectuated.⁴ However, from our perspective, constructive alignment does not offer teachers sufficient guidance to properly design education. In other words, our teachers need more support than constructive alignment provides, because these three components are too abstract for teachers to design education. In our view, Van den Akker complements constructive alignment with his curricular spider web.⁵ Van den Akker distinguishes seven additional curricular components: vision, teacher role(s), learning environment, learning tools, learning content, time, and grouping. Each component is elaborated with design questions that support teachers in making educational decisions.

Additionally, the extent to which collective goals of our defense organization are achieved is inextricably linked to the individual development of our human capital. In fact, human capital is an indispensable link for any other asset to reach their full potential.⁶ Therefore, high-quality education is the foundation for the military to flourish. That is why the group for whom education is designed should not be forgotten.⁷ Since the abovementioned two educational design models do not take this target group into account, this component is added as an eleventh curricular component. Furthermore, education should be in line with the context in which military leaders will perform their tasks. If not, military leaders may experience difficulties in transferring knowledge and skills into the operational context. Whereas context is of such great importance to the meaning of our education, context has been added as the twelfth curricular component. Moreover, apart from knowledge and skills, education should focus on attitudes. One way of doing so is by teaching military leaders lifelong learning competencies. When students master these lifelong learning competencies, they are more likely to become great leaders and to be able to function within changing environments.⁸ That is why lifelong learning competencies are considered as a thirteenth curricular component.

The abovementioned thirteen curricular components can be applied on three educational levels: macro, meso, and micro. Designing education at the macro level usually refers to a curriculum, at the meso level to a course, and at the micro level to a lesson. First, a curriculum includes all courses an educational program offers in order to achieve the objectives. Second, a course consists of several lessons that help students achieve the course

objectives. Finally, a lesson consists of learning activities that ensure a student achieves the learning objectives.

In conclusion, applying these thirteen curricular components helps ensure that coherent education is designed: learning objectives, assessment, learning activities, vision, teacher role(s), learning environment, learning tools, learning content, time, grouping, target group, context, and lifelong learning competencies. Designing education through these curricular components on macro, meso, and micro levels will effectuate coherence between and within educational programs, courses and lessons. These curricular components and educational levels underlie the foundation of our educational design model.

What Curricular Components Does Our Educational Design Model Consist Of?

Derived from the abovementioned theoretical framework and our experiences, thirteen curricular components are conditional for high-quality education. If high-quality educational design implies that all thirteen curricular components have been thought through, it can be stated with certainty that designing high-quality education is a complex assignment which cannot be performed by everyone. Therefore, an educational designer must always be aware that his considerations within one curricular component affect the elaboration of the other curricular components. Moreover, this task becomes even more complex when our continuously changing context is considered. Assuming not every educational designer possesses the required knowledge, skills, and experience, an easily applicable educational design model must be created. In order to do so, it is of great importance to determine what content these thirteen curricular components should contain. Although our expertise is focused on the elaboration of curricular components, the organizational aspect of education should not be forgotten. Van den Akker already briefly addresses organizational aspects of education by his component of time, but in our view but the operationalization of the component time is not exhaustive. Therefore, we complemented the component of time with seven additional organizational components that together comprise the thirteenth curricular component.

Target group

One of the key components in educational design is the need to contemplate the students for whom education is being developed, the target group. Obviously, the impact of an educational program is predominantly dependent on the students' level of mastery after completing their education. Since each target group is characterized by diversity an educational designer needs to understand which characteristics apply to the particular target group and how these characteristics provide either opportunities or constraints on an educational design. In order to characterize a target group, an educational designer should examine several topics: general characteristics, specific entry characteristics, learning styles, personal and social characteristics, cultural background, physical abilities, and maturity level.⁹ By means of these topics, an instructional designer gains insight into a

range of characteristics of the target group, varying from gender to age, work experience, prior education, motivation, (meta)cognitive skills, expectations, digital dexterity, and ethnicity.¹⁰

Context

A student must be able to learn any time, any place, anywhere. Learning is a continuous process that does not take place only inside the classroom. In fact: teaching theory in the classroom only supports what has to be done in the operational context. That is why education should focus on enabling students to apply knowledge and skills integrally in the context of any professional situation. One way of doing so is to consider in which contexts a student finds himself. An educational designer should distinguish a multitude of contexts, such as the digital classroom and the operational practice (e.g., spending the night in wooded terrain). Stressors can be used to increase awareness of the number of different situations that the profession has in store for the student. This awareness provides the student a broader frame of reference whenever he finds himself not only in a similar situation, but also in new, unfamiliar situations.¹¹

Vision on education and learning

A vision on education and learning describes which goals an academy wants to achieve, what high-quality education should look like, and how education and learning can be optimally designed. Therefore, a vision indicates in what way students can be educated most effectively and gives direction to teachers' learning interventions and didactics. That is why a vision has a major influence on the design of education.¹² In order to formulate a vision, a number of steps should be taken. First, it is important to examine current developments for the defense organization, such as "hybrid warfare." Second, it is then important to identify developments in the field of learning and education. For example, students should be able to learn any time, any place, anywhere. Once these developments have been analyzed, design principles can be formulated that give direction to the structure of education and learning. Finally, a vision is established which describes the purpose, the content and form, and the organization of education and learning.

Lifelong Learning Competencies

In order to prepare our military leaders to best deal with twenty-first century security challenges within a continuously changing context, academies should help them master lifelong learning competencies.¹³ The P21 Framework describes lifelong learning competencies in a way they can be incorporated relatively easily into any curriculum.¹⁴ This framework describes learning and innovation competencies, information, media and technology competencies, and life and career competencies. Based on our experiences, most of the military educational programs do not address these lifelong learning competencies explicitly.

Learning objectives

Learning objectives indicate what content must be mastered at which level and thus give direction to the content of education. Ideally, learning objectives are brief, clear, and specific statements of what students will be able to do at the end of an educational program. Learning objectives can be used by an educational designer as a way to clarify, structure, sequence, and plan the educational design.¹⁵ Generally, learning objectives consist of four components: content, behavior, conditions, and performance. First, an educational designer should focus on what content a student should master. Second, the behavioral component can be determined based on the content component. This component indicates what a student should be able to do with the content.¹⁶ Third, a condition indicates criteria under which the student must show the desired behavior. Finally, a learning objective may include the minimum performance that the teacher would like to see. For example, the teacher can set a time limit or indicate how accurately students must work. Since it is not always possible to have learning objectives consisting of these four components, it is recommended to describe at least the behavioral and content component.

Assessment

Once learning objectives are established, consideration should be given to the way in which it can be assessed whether a student meets these objectives.¹⁷ Assessment refers to a variety of methods that an educational designer uses to evaluate, measure, and document each student's readiness, learning progress, skill acquisition, or educational needs.¹⁸ Broadly, two types of assessment are distinguished: formative and summative. On the one hand, a formative assessment is an in-process evaluation of student learning. Typically, this type of assessment is performed multiple times during an educational program and provides both teachers and students feedback on their learning process. On the other hand, summative assessments evaluate student learning at the end of an educational program. These kinds of assessments are typically graded to determine whether a student has achieved the learning objectives.¹⁹

Whether a formative and/or summative assessment is chosen, an instructional designer can choose between a wide range of assessment forms. But how to select the appropriate type of assessment? Learning objectives are key in determining what type of assessment is most suitable. The verb in the learning objective indicates what kind of assessment should be chosen. Therefore, the more complete a learning objective is formulated, the easier it is for an educational designer to select the most appropriate type of assessment.

Learning activities

After determining what and how learning content will be taught and measured, appropriate learning activities should be selected. Learning activities describe what activities are used to stimulate each student's learning process in mastering the learning content. Various learning activities can be distinguished, such as teacher-centered activities and student-centered activities. Teacher-centered activities include activities

where teachers direct students, while student-centered activities consist of activities where students direct themselves and are being guided by their teachers. Learning activities can also be distinguished by the skill a student masters while participating in activities: (meta) cognitive activities, affective activities and psychomotor activities.

Several factors influence the choice of the best learning activity: target group, vision on education and learning, learning objectives, and assessment. First, the target group is the first factor an educational designer should consider, because if this group is not used in active learning, students require more guidance for the activity to be successful. Second, learning objectives clarify which content must be mastered at what level. This information is indispensable because, for example, a student cannot learn to shoot by only attending a lecture about this topic. Third, the type of assessment(s) must be considered before learning activities are selected. For example, when a student must be able to shoot, he should be given the opportunity to practice before taking the assessment. Last, the vision on education and learning influences which activities are possible and feasible.²⁰

Teacher role(s)

Since teacher roles go far beyond teaching, teachers must possess knowledge and skills that encourage student success such as building a safe learning environment, mentoring students, being role models, being subject matter experts, counseling students, and teaching students how to use and apply knowledge and skills in their lives (inside and out of the classroom). That is why teachers fulfill six teacher roles: diagnostician, challenger, model learner, activator, monitor, and evaluator.²¹ First, a teacher needs to be able to adequately diagnose (previously) acquired knowledge, skills, and attitudes students did or did not master, or mastered unsatisfactorily. This diagnosis helps the teacher determine how to introduce new content and skills in a way that integrates with students' learning needs. Second, a teacher needs to be able to challenge students to learn and apply new knowledge, to learn and try out new skills in several different situations.²² In order to do so, a safe and positive learning environment is conditional.²³ Third, a teacher needs to be a role model.²⁴ Fourth, a teacher needs to be able to activate the use of knowledge, skills, and attitudes by means of different learning activities.²⁵ Fifth, a teacher needs to be able to take a step back and monitor the learning progress of students. At the same time, a teacher helps students who are in need, so that they are also able to accomplish the learning objectives. This way, a teacher is a monitor who provides students with feedback and feedforward.²⁶ Last, a teacher needs to be able to evaluate and assess the quality of the learning process of students to determine to what extent students have accomplished the learning objective.²⁷ The teacher should continuously switch between these six roles. In doing so, a teacher aligns with the needs of the target group and the context in which students are learning.

Learning content

In order to apply learning content integrally in the context of a professional situation it should be based on three aspects: knowledge, skills and attitudes. The aforementioned lifelong learning competencies are inextricably linked to all learning content that is to be designed.

Whether an educational designer is concerned with designing new education or renewing existing education, the learning content must always meet the vision on education and learning, the learning objectives and the tasks that the target group will have to perform.

But how does an educational designer determine which learning content is important? This process starts with determining the main theme, such as military intelligence. Subsequently, this main theme is then divided into sub-themes. One way of doing so is by asking open questions about the main theme. The answers to these questions should clarify which topics should be included in the learning content. Another way to obtain this clarification is by brainstorming about the main theme with subject matter experts. As a result, a mind map is created in which the connections between different sub-themes are identified. As soon as an overview of all sub-themes has been obtained, an educational designer must evaluate whether this overview is complete when compared with the target group analysis and the learning objectives. Thereafter, the order of learning content is conceived. It is of great importance that the learning content forms a logical whole. Organizing principles can help to achieve this logical structure of content. Moreover, organizing principles provide students a frame of reference that enables them to process (new) knowledge, skills, and attitudes²⁸. Without being exhaustive, an educational designer might structure learning content based on complexity (easy to difficult), chronology (step A to Z), or importance (generic to specific). Which principle is most suitable depends on the results of the target group analysis, the vision on education and learning, the learning objectives, and teacher roles.

Learning tools

Learning tools comprise all resources and materials that support the learning process. For example, resources include handbooks, doctrines, literature, subject matter experts, and Information Communication Technology (ICT). These resources support the learning process of students and that is why they should not be forgotten. An example of materials used in education could be a resuscitation dummy, weapon, compass, or map. In order to determine which learning tools an educational designer needs, the designer consults the target group analysis, learning objectives, learning content, and learning activities.

Learning environment

Learning takes place in a learning environment. This environment is often expressed in physical and non-physical factors. An example of a physical factor is the availability of sufficient learning tools within a classroom, whereas a non-physical factor is related to the atmosphere in which learning takes place. The self-determination theory describes three elements that may benefit a learning environment: autonomy, competence, and connection.²⁹ There are several ways to meet these elements, such as letting students choose their learning activities (autonomy), providing feedback on both shortcomings and progress (competence), and creating a safe space in which experimentation is encouraged and mistakes are allowed (connection). Nonetheless, the framework for a learning environment is to be devised by an educational designer, but it is the experience of the student that determines how the learning environment is perceived.³⁰

Grouping

An educational designer must make decisions regarding whether to divide students into groups. Working in groups can be beneficial for the following reasons: what is learned is better processed and applied; social skills are practiced (such as dividing tasks, listening to each other and comparing arguments); and student independence is promoted. An educational designer should determine whether learning activities should be performed individually, in pairs, in groups, or plenary. Whatever choice is made, it must contribute to achieving the learning objectives. In addition, consideration can also be given to the homogeneity or heterogeneity of a group. For example, groups can be classified by previous education, age, learning pace and learning styles.³¹

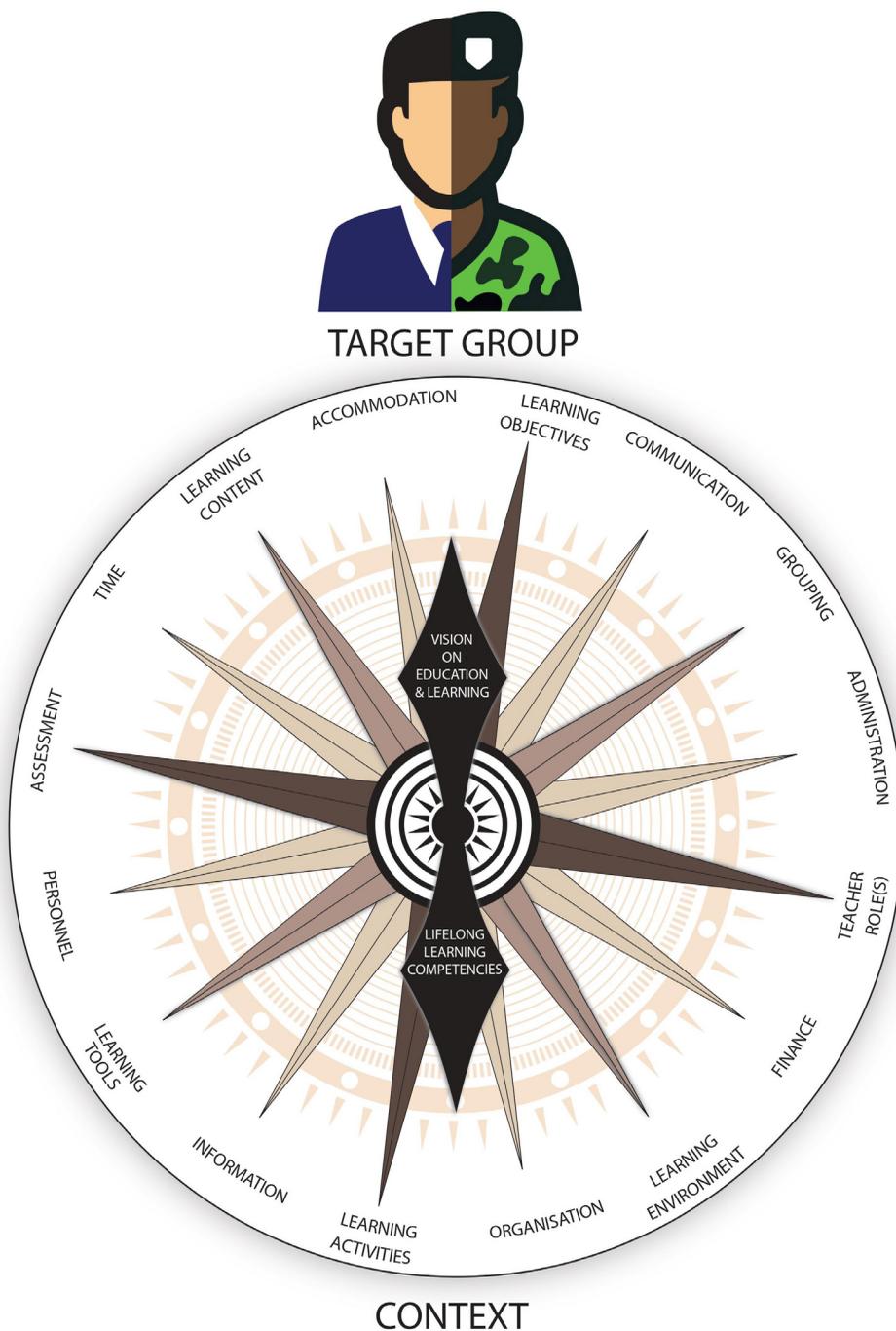
Organizational components of education

In addition to the curricular components, it is also necessary to elaborate and secure the organizational components of education. After all, the following eight organizational components ensure that the educational program can actually be accomplished in the way it was designed: personnel, information, organization, time, finance, communication, administration, and accommodation. The personnel component guarantees sufficient qualified teachers and other personnel, such as guest lecturers, subject matter experts and staff personnel. This way, the educational designer makes sure that the required personnel is available. When considering the information component, an educational designer must elaborate what information should be provided to students and teachers. The organizational component focuses on coherence and coordination within and between all components of education. The time component consists of two sub-components: the total duration of the lesson, course, or curriculum and how often these are taught in an academic year; and the availability of teachers and the time a teacher needs in order to prepare, execute and evaluate their education. The financial component determines whether the educational design can be realized within budget. Several aspects should be considered, for example, budgets regarding guest lecturers or the purchase of necessary materials. The communication component describes when and what will be communicated internally and externally, and to whom. The administration component provides insight into what systems will be used when it comes to tracking learning outcomes, student counselling and scheduling education. Last, the accommodation component monitors whether sufficient accommodation is available in terms of classrooms, tents (in case they go on a bivouac), beds (in case of a boarding school system), et cetera. Based on these eight components, the educational designer will be able to examine whether the ideal design is feasible.

Our educational design model

Thirteen indispensable curricular components and their interdependencies have been elaborated. These interdependencies are visually represented in Figure 1 by our educational compass. Military academies can use our educational compass to design education that enables future military leaders to best deal with twenty-first century security challenges in a VUCA world.

Figure 1: Our Educational Compass



The thirteen curricular components have been merged into a compass for various reasons. First, a compass gives direction. More specifically, our educational compass directs military academies in designing their education effectively and efficiently. Second, a compass suggests that all components should be in balance with each other: No matter what way a compass is used, the distance between north-south and east-west always remains the same. Third, the way in which a compass continuously adjusts itself has been an important characteristic that had to be reflected in our model. For example, by evaluating experiences of both students and teachers, an educational designer can determine if and how the educational program should be adjusted for the next cycle. This way, a continuously improving cycle is pursued. Last, a compass was chosen because our model is descriptive instead of prescriptive. In doing so, the educational compass does justice to the complexity of any educational design assignment.

The educational compass is held by the target group. The visual representation of the target group is two-dimensional. On the one hand, the target group consists of both civilians and military personnel; on the other, it emphasizes the importance of paying attention to the human being behind the employee. Both dimensions are indispensable when designing education. Our educational compass consists of a rotating needle and three compass roses. The rotating needle consists of a vision on education and learning and lifelong learning competencies. These two components give direction to the curricular components that are described in three cascading compass roses (indicated with three different shades): learning objectives - assessment - learning activities - teacher role(s), learning content - grouping - learning environment - learning tools, and organizational components of education. All parts within the educational compass are encompassed by the protective layer around it—the context. Without taking the context into account, the rotating needle and compass roses would no longer be in line with each other, and the compass would not work. Therefore, it is important to relate each curricular component to a meaningful, realistic, and authentic context.

Our educational compass is roughly divided into three elements: target group, compass, and context. Depending on the educational design assignment and available amount of time, an educational designer should be able to deliberately select the necessary curricular components that match the assignment and available amount of time. This way, the educational designer should be able to tailor our educational design model every time. However, an educational designer must always consider—regardless of limiting factors—the target group, the rotating needle and first compass rose of the compass, and the context in order to design high-quality education.

Concluding Remarks

Recapitulating, this article set out to propose an easily applicable and simple educational design model. Through our educational compass military academies should be able to develop an educational program which enables future military leaders to best deal with

security challenges of the twenty-first century in a VUCA world. Applying our educational compass will ensure that military educational programs address required knowledge, skills, attitudes, and lifelong learning competencies to execute military assignments within an operational context. In order to do so, thirteen indispensable curricular components have been elaborated: target group, vision on education and learning, lifelong learning competencies, learning objectives, assessment, learning activities, teacher role(s), context, learning content, learning tools, learning environment, grouping, and organizational components of education. To ensure that educational designers, regardless of their knowledge, skills, and experience, are able to direct themselves through these thirteen curricular components, a layering between these components has been provided. First, the target group should be analyzed. In addition, the educational designer should determine in which context(s) students should be able to apply their knowledge and skills. Second, a vision on education and learning and lifelong learning competencies should be formulated. Third, an educational designer should focus on the first compass rose, describing learning objectives, assessment, learning activities and teacher role(s). Fourth, the designer should pay attention to the second compass rose: learning content, learning tools, learning environment and grouping. Fifth, the third rose indicates the organizational components of education. Moreover, after the educational design has been completed, attention must be paid to its quality and feasibility through continuous evaluation.

Our educational compass allows military academies to (re)design their education as the continuous changes in the operational context have an impact on educational design, content, and form. It is certain that these changes will continue in the future, increasing the need for a sustainable educational design model. We have tried to meet this need by proposing a unified designing approach with our educational compass. By dividing our educational compass into several layers, it should be easily applicable in any situation—regardless of available time and design experience—for educational designers at any military academy.

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REFERENCES: JPWS uses *The Chicago Manual of Style's* notes and bibliography system with endnotes. For further information on references, please consult *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th edition.

Books: Feldman, Lily Gardner, *Germany's Foreign Policy of Reconciliation: From Enmity to Amity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 20-33

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Feldman, *Germany's Foreign Policy of Reconciliation*, 73-78.
Roehrig, "Stability or Instability?," 131.

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