

Introduction

This book deals with the design of distance education at an emerging dual-mode university, that is, a university offering courses both on-campus and via distance education or online in a variety of manners. It was written from the point of view of an instructional designer (ID) working alongside university professors in designing their courses for distance delivery.¹ It originated as my logbook, which I kept over a period of three years and in which I relate the ups and downs as well as the dos and don'ts of designing learning materials for students studying at a distance. It introduces you to ten faculty members with whom I shared this experience and lifts the veil on a seldom-reported, essentially undocumented, working environment.

Before presenting the cases, I will outline the underlying research study as well as introduce the design model that served as my original design prototype.

The Instructional Design Model Prototype

When I began a new mandate as instructional designer-researcher at an emerging dual-mode university, my main task was to accompany faculty members in readying their courses for distance delivery. Coming from a professional background of distance education in the single-mode tradition (such as The Open University in the United Kingdom), I was

used to employing a highly structured design model with faculty members whose principal job was to create new courses or to revise existing ones. The model was industrial in nature and based on the division of labour, i.e. faculty and specialized professionals working as course teams. I had no inkling of how different my work would be in what was essentially a traditional university environment, albeit one with numerous distance education course offerings.

Indeed, I discovered the prevailing role of faculty in a traditional university to be quite different from the dominant role of faculty in single-mode distance education universities. First of all, traditional “on-campus” faculty, for the most part, have little understanding of what is involved in developing courses for distance education, let alone online learning (Twigg, 2002). Secondly, the traditional university structure is such that faculty do not benefit from the level of pedagogical and technical support inherent in the distance education approach to course design and development (Mortera-Gutierrez, 2002; Rumble & Harry, 1982). Moreover, although faculty in distance education universities conduct research which is essentially well received by their academic communities, in traditional universities the primacy of research over teaching is even more apparent (Maeroff, 2003). These are but some of the differences between the two milieus that have an immediate and profound impact on the amount of time faculty in traditional universities are willing and able to devote to planning their teaching.

Upon my entry into this dual-mode university environment, I began to realize that I could not simply go about my business as usual. Given these new circumstances, I had to find ways of fulfilling my mandate successfully. As I started working closely with faculty, it dawned on me that there was not a lot of literature available to instructional designers working in traditional universities. Indeed, according to Reiser (2001) “instructional design had little impact in higher education” (p. 62). I realized how true these words rang. For decades, the instructional design model, often simply referred to by the acronym ADDIE (each letter representing a step in the process: Analysis-Design-Development-Implementation-Evaluation), had been the paradigm guiding instructional design. Originally conceived during the Second World War as a means to train approximately eighteen million soldiers for theatres in Europe and the South Pacific, it was subsequently adopted by big

business to staff American post-war industry. But it was not designed for the needs of higher education, which aims to develop the individual, one mind at a time, not vast numbers of warriors or employees. Therein lays the difference, and the rub. As important as it is to raise the skills level of the GI to an acceptable threshold to better his chances of surviving on the battlefield, it is equally important for society that universities hone the unique and diverse skills of gifted individuals capable of enlightening humanity with innovation, discovery and erudition. It is therefore no surprise that the university milieu has, by and large, been extraordinarily resistant to any attempt at industrializing its methods, approaches or practices (Moore & Kearsley, 2004). That instructional design has become equated, at least in the minds of some (Carr-Chellman, 2005; Magnussen, 2005), with a form of insidious influence geared to mass produce educational outcomes must be recognized as a failure of the ID field and its proponents to establish its relevance and clearly reveal its usefulness to a critical and discerning population.

Instructional design in an on-campus setting

In light of these preliminary remarks, it should be clear that my first major task was to figure out just how to go about accompanying faculty involved in distance education at a transitioning dual-mode university. This task prompted my first efforts to establish a working instructional design model that would produce acceptable results in this particular setting, given the available resources and despite its numerous limits.

Despite the fact that Reiser (2001) states, correctly I believe, that instructional design has had little impact on higher education, it would be untrue to say that there is no course planning occurring in higher education. Indeed, every faculty member spends an untold number of hours every term planning his or her courses, generally according to a firmly-anchored, discipline-based course planning tradition, in some cases stretching back centuries to the oldest universities of Europe. However, as much as tradition once played the main role in deciding and defining what would be taught and how it would be taught, currently research is increasingly filling that role. Nonetheless, although tradition is losing ground with regard to *what* is taught, it still seems to have a stranglehold on *how* it is taught.

It should therefore come as no surprise to the instructional designer that he or she will encounter resistance when attempting to carry out his/her role. But it does. University administrators began hiring substantial numbers of instructional designers in the 1980s and even more so in the 1990s and early 2000s to leverage new technology in the hopes of making distance education profitable for even the smallest universities. As the Internet and the Web proved to be even more enticing as a means to growth and as online learning became a reality, more IDs were added to staff in recognition of their knowledge and skills in creating learning environments for off-campus learners. Instructional designers, trained according to rigorous design models, started to see that they had been plunged into a hostile environment. Their solution: work with the early adopters, develop courses in niche fields, manage the process to respond to obvious needs while attempting to avoid conflict. This was my initial understanding of my new setting when I first embarked upon my new mandate. I knew it would require time and patience to make a dent in the status quo. I also knew I needed the proper tools with which to start my work.

The Prototype Development Process

Here, I will provide a synthesis of the process by which the initial instructional design model prototype emerged, the full version being available online (Power, 2005; Power 2008c). This study took place in a Francophone university in Canada where two main influences have been felt in the field of instructional design. Brien's *Design pédagogique*, (1992) an adaptation of Gagné & Briggs (1973) model, has become a classic work of reference for all levels of education in the Quebec educational system. *Design pédagogique* united the strength and relevance of the Gagne & Briggs model and adapted it to the needs of one of the fastest-developing educational systems of the twentieth century. Another book of reference was Prégent's (1990) *La préparation d'un cours [Charting Your Course]*, which was widely disseminated in universities throughout Québec and la Francophonie.² Prégent also bases his approach on Gagné (1985) as well as on Brien (1992) in identifying the course design-related tasks carried out by all professors.

This prototype was based on several sources other than those mentioned above, among which figure the ADDIE model as developed

by Gagné (1985), Gagné & Briggs (1973), Gagné, Briggs & Wagner, (1992), Dick & Carey (2000), Dick, Carey & Carey (2007), Merrill (2002) and Reigeluth (1999), all highly representative of fundamental instructional design literature. Other sources include Otto Peter's (1983) industrial approach to distance education, Nipper's (1989) generations of distance education and Moore's (1993) well-known transactional distance theory. Previous work that I conducted on the congruency principle (Power, 1987, 1996; 2008b; 2008c) has also been influential in the development of the design prototype, as well as observations from the field I have gleaned from over thirty years in higher education, as a student, as a teaching assistant, as a research assistant, as an analyst, as a consultant, as an instructional designer/researcher and finally as a professor and an administrator. My varied experience allowed me to analyse faculty course planning techniques and practices, the results of which were reinvested in the initial instructional design model prototype.

My challenge was thus to bring together these diverse sources and hammer out a prototype that would allow me to assist faculty in successfully developing their courses for distance education. I therefore began by identifying "design phases" that professors would readily recognize as being similar to course planning phases prevalent in their fields. I intentionally made choices about which phases best represented the design pattern I felt they would find most useful in completing their task, in light of conditions (namely available resources and set limits) and predispositions I encountered. Based on the above theory-based instructional design conceptual framework, actual faculty course planning practices and following a comparative phases analysis, the following design phases were retained for the initial course design prototype as being theoretically sound and representative of actual faculty design practice at the dual-mode university in question:

1. *Analysis* (student needs assessment, course & program requirements as well as faculty interests, etc.)
2. *Module-Building* (Web-based course-related resource material, e.g. readings, etc.)
3. *Teaching Activities Development* (in-class exercises)
4. *Learner Support Activities Development* (additional, individualized resources for purposes of formative evaluation)

5. *Evaluation Instruments Development* (various testing instruments for purposes of summative evaluation)
6. *Items for Ongoing Improvement* (the “wish list,” e.g. course resources, etc. to be developed later)

It was thus with this overall design model that my study began.

Notes

1. At the time of this study, there was a fair degree of ambiguity with regard to distance education and how it intersected with online learning and e-learning. It is my position that these terms identify differences mainly in technological issues and delivery systems which, as a trend, are becoming increasingly sophisticated, ubiquitous and learner-centered. For that reason, the reader will notice, towards the latter part of this book, my marked preference for the term “online learning” as I believe it accurately reflects technological changes occurring in the field.
2. For instance, Prigent’s book was distributed to all new professors upon their arrival at the university where this study was conducted.