Book Reviews

Diane P. Janes, Editor

Preparing Materials for Open, Distance, and Flexible Learning: An Action *Guide for Teachers and Trainers* by Derek Rowntree. London: Kogan Page, 1994. ISBN: O-7494-1 159-7

Reviewed by Dennis M. Mulcahy

Three factors have particular relevance for the designers of instruction for adult distance learners:

1. means and resources by which independence (i.e., learner control) is supported and nurtured;
2. access to different interaction levels and
3. availability and ease of use of different technology platforms.

To promote a high level of learner involvement in distance instruction/learning, instructional developers and designers should strongly consider what weight will be given these factors. Systematic program and course design which attends to independence, interaction and technology should result in more effective distance education.

I encountered Derek Rowntree's new book, Preparing Materials for Open, Distance, and Flexible Learning, at a very opportune time. I was about to begin work on my first attempt at creating a distance education course. The Associate Dean, Graduate Studies of our Faculty of Education had asked me to develop a distance version of a new campus-based graduate course I had developed in the area of rural education.

I agreed to the project but I had no idea how to go about it. I had no experience whatsoever, either as a student or teacher, in distance education. My twenty-five years as a high school teacher and university professor were all spent working with students in the classroom.

I have found this book has provided me with excellent guidance as I work to develop my first distance course. One point that was made right

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from the beginning and emphasized again and again throughout the book was the importance of quality learning materials. Students learning at a distance, Rowntree states, "to a greater extent than others depend on the quality of their learning materials." Developing quality learning materials that are user friendly, he adds, may be the most important task in a distance development project. The point is that the materials must to a large extent stand alone. Unlike the campus-based teaching situation where I am always present in the classroom or my office, my distance students will be working independently most of the time.

Having made the point about the importance of learning materials production, Rowntree then provides a detailed action plan that guides someone developing a distance course or courses through the various steps in the process. The contents of the book are divided into three main sections or stages: Stage One · Planning Your Materials; Stage Two · Preparing for Writing; and Stage Three · Writing and Re-writing. Within each section there is a set of steps and procedures outlined and illustrated with many examples and diagrams.

There are many aspects of this book that I have found particularly helpful. One of these is the list, on Page 13. of what Rowntree calls the "tricks of the trade." These are key features and characteristics of distance learning materials that make your materials especially useful to students. Several that I found particularly useful for my planning included:

- user friendly, the "you and I" style of writing
- short, manageable chunks of learning
- fewer words on a page than usual
- plenty of helpful examples
- obvious awareness of different learners' needs
- exercises that get the learner to use the materials

Very valuable to me, as a beginner in distance learning, was the inclusion of twenty-one sample pages from a variety of distance learning materials (Pages 1 S-38). This illustrated for me the different styles that could be used and the different approaches that could be taken for different kinds of courses and subject matter.

The section entitled "Three Types of Open Learning Materials" enabled me to identify the particular type of learning materials I was most interested in producing. Rowntree identifies three types: Tell-and-Test; Tutorial in Print; and Reflective Action Guide. I was quite certain after reading the three descriptions that the Reflective Action Guide was most suited for my objectives and my graduate students.

Throughout, the writing is clear, crisp and very reader friendly. The book itself is a demonstration model of its intended outcome. It teachers how to produce distance materials by being itself an exemplary model.

REVIEWER

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Educational Programmes on Television: Deficiencies, Support, Chances (Contributions to an International Symposium) by Manfred Meyer (Ed.), K.G. Saur Verlag GmbH & Co., 1993. ISBN 3-598-2021 O-5

Reviewed by Judy Somers

Symposiums for me inspire images of high level policy theorizing and elegant debate amongst well-published experts. The direct applicability of their procedings to a worker bee level often eludes me. In short, I am intimidated by this thoroughbred of conferences.

What a pleasure it was, then, to read this collection of contributions to the International Symposium held in Munich, Germany, and originally entitled "Cultural and Educational Programmes on Television: Deficiencies and Chances in a Competitive Media Environment". Fortunately, Manfred Meyer listened to his librarian's advice, shortened the mammoth title and re-inserted the word "support" as it is the core issue of most of the contributions. The writings discuss support media, supportive actions or measurement, and back-up activities for productions that were conceived as educational television programmes.

There are contributions from Belgium, France, Germany, The Netherlands, and Sweden, as well as several from British broadcasters. Canada's TV0 and Japan's NHK are also represented. The shared strategies for designing and distributing support media for educational broadcasts travel surprisingly well across international boundaries.

The suggestions for financing and managing support media production are clear and potentially useful for budget-juggling administrators, but my enthusiasm is based on the number of concrete examples provided of successful media integrations. The idea that the particular presentation strengths of any medium should be considered during its design, and that a blend of such thoughtfully crafted media can provide an engaging educational experience for many types of learners is not new. It is a concept that has been