

Book Reviews

Diane P. Janes, Editor

Instructional Design Strategies and Tactics by Cynthia B. Leshin, Joellyn Pollock, and Charles M. Reigeluth. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications, 1992, 331 pp. ISBN 0-87778-240-7 (CDN\$44.40)

Reviewed by Earl R. Misanchuk

The need addressed by this book, according to the authors' introduction, is for guidance in selecting and using instructional strategies, areas often given short shrift in other articulations of the instructional systems design (ISD) process. A large format (8 1/2 X 11) soft-cover book, it is comprised of five units, some of which are further subdivided into two "steps."

Unit 1 - Analyzing Needs, is composed of two steps - Analyze the Problem and Analyze the Domains (Jobs or Subject Areas). The introduction to the book points out that Unit 1 will be of greatest interest to trainers, while educators may well decide to skip it with impunity. The distinction between training and education is maintained throughout the book: where prescriptions differ for the two concerns the authors make a point of distinguishing between them. Unit Two - Selecting and Sequencing Content also consists of two steps - Analyze Each Task and Sequence Its Major Components, and Analyze and Sequence Supporting Content. Developing Lessons - Unit Three, is composed of a single step, Design and Write Each Lesson. This step has several sections based on the kind of learning involved in a particular situation: memorization of information, application of skills, understanding relationships, and higher level skills. Unit Four - Media Utilization, has one step - Perform Interactive Message Design, again with several sections based this time on the delivery method: human-based systems, print-based systems, visual-based systems, audiovisual-based systems, and computer-based systems. The final unit (and step) is Evaluation. Needless to say, such comprehensive and complex subject-matter makes the arrangement of the contents of the book itself an interesting object lesson in instructional design,

The first thing that struck this reviewer was the rather odd grouping of subjects described above, with single sub-sections of sections having related but different names. It makes one wonder why the use of units was necessary. Perhaps the organization of the material into seven steps would have been more functional.

Be that as it may, the authors have gone out of their way to elucidate the structure of the subject-matter of the book, and to ensure that the reader is constantly aware of where a particular section of the book fits into "the big picture." A graphic organizer, or content map, is the device they rely upon heavily throughout the book, generally to good effect. Actually there are two graphic organizers, one corresponding to the major headings (the units and sections referred to earlier), and the other corresponding to more subordinate headings. For lack of better terms, I shall refer to the two types of maps as major maps and minor maps, respectively.

The major map that concludes the Introduction and provides an overview of the ISD process doesn't quite match the arrangement of the topics in the table of contents, which unfortunately does not help in getting the reader oriented. The same graphic organizer, with different parts highlighted, is also used at the beginning of each step, but once again the terminology used in the figure does not always match the headings. This makes it a little confusing to keep track of where one is—exactly the opposite of the intended purpose of the graphic organizer. For example, one page displays the heading "STEP 5: DESIGN AND WRITE EACH LESSON," while the facing page (the one showing the major map) says "STEP 5: SPECIFY LEARNING EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES."

A copy of the minor map, with the appropriate section name highlighted, appears at the beginning of each sub-section in the text. The fact that the heading itself (which is, of course, the same as the highlighted portion of the map) appears directly below the map makes for considerable redundancy.

Supplementing the graphic organizer/content map in attempting to keep the reader apprised of the context is a rational, although complex, numeration scheme for the various steps in the ISD process. At times however (and perhaps this is purely an idiosyncratic reaction) I found myself actually distracted by the orientation devices. Reading section labels such as 5B.2.3(U) is not terribly informative per se. Aside from telling me the obvious—that it is a step between 5B.2.2(U) and 5B.2.4(U)—the only function it seemed to serve (for me) was to cause me to flip back several pages to find out what steps 5B.1 and 5B.2 were. Unfortunately even that knowledge didn't seem to help me in contextualizing the information in 5B.2.3(U).

The layout and typography used in the book unfortunately also do little to aid the reader in keeping oriented. While there is consistency in the use of headings of various orders and a perceptible if not obvious differentiation in size among orders, there is frequent opportunity for confusion between various elements comprising the text. The book is primarily composed of four types of information (the labels are rather arbitrary, and mine): steps in the process,

elaboration of theory underlying the steps, guidelines, and examples. Unfortunately the same typography is used for all four elements, making it difficult to distinguish one from the next (although guidelines are always boxed). The consequence is somewhat reminiscent of being lost in a hypertext segment, and despite the best efforts of the authors to provide orientation devices, the devices do not always work as well as they might.

Perhaps the problem really lies in the choice of the medium. As I read this book I kept wishing it was in electronic form, so that I could switch into outline mode and collapse and expand topics and headings, like my word processor allows me to do. Or to be able to click a mouse to obtain a display of guidelines. Or examples. And, with another click, to make them go away, leaving me with the outline structure of the theory and prescriptions. Although the prospect of reading 300 pages' worth of text from a screen is daunting, I kept feeling that if I had the capacity to expand and collapse I would be much more at ease in terms of contextuality. Perhaps this book could have been published as a HyperCard stack? But I probably ask too much.

It is quite unfair of me to have dwelled so long on the shortcomings, because despite them I liked the book and found it useful; moreover, I believe I will continue to find it useful. As I noted earlier, the sheer complexity of the subject-matter posed a significant sequencing and display challenge, and I found it very instructive to contemplate how I might have done it differently (alas, with little success!). Furthermore, the straightforward arrangement of the lucid text that actually comprises the substance of the book more than makes up for the problems described, and once the reader gets into the steps themselves, the chunking of subject-matter is rational and easy to follow.

The advice and the theory offered is pithy and succinct, and provides something for both the neophyte and the experienced designer. The beginner will be able to extract advice that is up-to-date (in terms of both theory and research) and that can be applied immediately to instructional design, while the more experienced designer can use the text almost like a check-list to ensure that nothing has been overlooked. Teachers of instructional design will likely not find much in the book that they do not already know, but they will find many things that they might occasionally forget to pass on to their students. Thus the book's potential check-list quality is a strength, and I would encourage the authors, in a subsequent edition, to take greater pains to point out to readers how it could thus be profitably employed.

The strongest parts of the book, in my opinion, are Step 5 (Design and Write Each Lesson) and Step 6 (Perform Interactive Message Design), which are, after all, what the book promised to be about. Once again the complexity of the subject-matter structure (with four kinds of learning in Step 5 and five classes of media in Step 6 being addressed) makes for a certain amount of redundancy in presentation. Still the suggestions provided are generally valuable. I plan to incorporate at least those portions of the book into an instructional design course that I teach, and I expect that I will find myself often reaching for them while designing instructional materials myself. I recommend you take more

than a cursory look at this book.

REVIEWER

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Distance Education: A Practical Guide, by B. Willis. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications, 1993. ISBN 0-87778-255-5, 138pp. (CDN \$38.95)

Reviewed by Richard A. Schwier

In deference to the writing style Barry Willis uses in this book, I would like to make three recommendations before the substance of the review:

- If your professional life touches distance education in any way, buy this book;
- If your professional life does not touch distance education in any way, buy this book for someone else whose life does;
- If you are looking for an expansive treatment of the philosophy and issues surrounding distance education, buy a different book and put it on your shelf. Then buy this economical treatment, and read it.

The remainder of this review will describe *Distance Education: A Practical Guide* and discuss why I make these recommendations.

Willis wrote this book for two primary audiences. The first is faculty engaged in distance education, presumably in post-secondary institutions. Most of us have encountered faculty who are superb scholars, yet know little about teaching and next to nothing about distance education. The bulk of this book addresses their needs. The second target group is administrators involved in policy and program development. Although administrators will be interested in most of the same information as faculty, the book also treats several important organizational and policy issues for this group, such as academic legitimacy and tenure. After reading this book a couple of times, I would add at least two secondary audiences for the book not mentioned by Willis. One is instructional designers who often work very closely with subject matter experts in the design and delivery of distance education courses. They will find