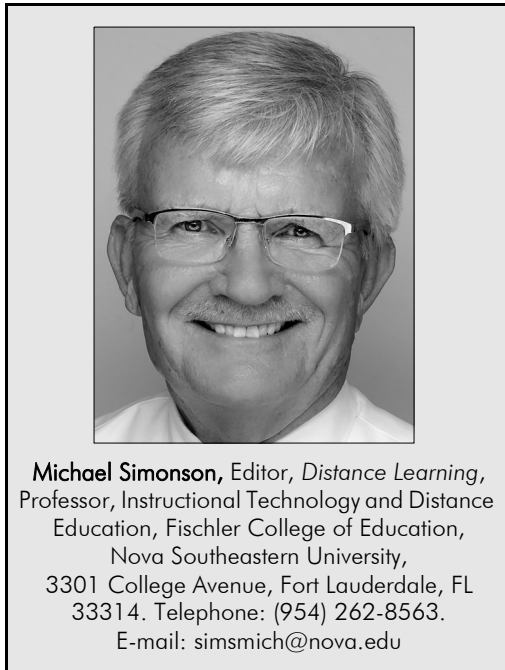


Ten Thousand Apps

Michael Simonson

Cone of experience—sounds like science fiction. Actually, 75 years ago, Edgar Dale (1946) proposed the “cone of experience” as an exciting even revolutionary idea. Dale divided experiences into levels of abstraction ranging from direct experiences to verbal symbols—motion pictures and television were in the middle levels of the cone. Dale then wrote a best-selling textbook built around the concept of the cone.

Dale’s book was titled *Audio-Visual Methods in Teaching*. If this classic book was rewritten today the title would probably be *Instructional Technology Methods for Teaching and Training*.



What was profound in the 1940s actually remains relevant today. The levels of experiences listed in the cone classify how reality is depicted by media. For example, reading in a book about fishing is not the same watching a TV show about fishing, and even a film about fishing is not the same as going fishing.

Dale’s cone seems to imply that, as far as learning is concerned, going fishing is better than observing a TV show about fishing, and reading a book on how to fish is not as good as watching the TV show.

This idea was called realism theory—more realistic teaching was better.

Actually, realism theory is a *misinterpretation of Dale’s cone*.

What is ignored is *resources*—realistic instruction is more complex, takes longer, and costs more.

For example, how about the cable TV show “The Deadliest Catch”?

Watching this show is interesting and even exciting—it is well done. Viewers can see and hear what is happening aboard a boat in the Bering Straits. Certainly, the crew of the *Time Bandit* have a more realistic experience than those watching on TV, and reading the script of an episode does not have the same power as the final video production.

Instructional designers know this type of situation well—designers must identify the most realistic way to present ideas and that also require the fewest resources—realistic, relevant course content is a goal,

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