

BOOK REVIEW

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN: A PRIMER***Bruce R. Ledford & Phillip L. Sleeman******(Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing, 2000,
176 pp., \$26.75)*****Ann Yakimovicz***Aprendio, Inc.*

A “primer,” according to common dictionary definitions, is a small introductory book on a subject. At 6 inches by 9 inches in size and containing 176 pages, *Instructional Design: A Primer* is just that.

Some of you may be familiar with other writings of Bruce Ledford, such as the Introductions in Wilson Brian Key’s books, *The Age of Manipulation* and *Media Rape*. His strong interest in communication and media led him to partner with Phillip Sleeman, a professor of educational psychology, in writing a book to provide basic information about instructional design in a different manner than most introductory textbooks.

Ledford and Sleeman state that their purpose is to provide a book that demonstrates the practice of instructional design using one approach, which they call a paradigm, rather than presenting the full range of theories,

methods, models, and other paradigms that have developed for instructional design practice. Using their particular knowledge in communication and instructional technology, the authors present instructional design as a rigorous paradigm of seven steps—front-end analysis, goal, task analysis, operational objectives, media, learner activities, and validation. The book is intended for “undergraduate pre-service education majors in teacher education, and for instructional designer/trainers in non-public education settings such as corporate training, health and allied agencies, military, government, and business and industry” (publisher’s Website, <http://www.infoage-pub.com/id.htm>).

Chapter 1 introduces this seven-part General Paradigm of Communication as part of an overview of instructional design. Starting with the approach that all teachers are instructional

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technologists “if they establish instructional goals and objectives” (p. 2), Ledford and Sleeman reveal that this paradigm from the instructional technology viewpoint is relevant for everyone. The authors take the reader through basic concepts such as the role of media, the role of evaluation, and an explanation of constructivism. The chapter concludes with a set of 11 foundational statements drawn from behavioral and social learning theories that guide the ideas and concepts presented in the remainder of the book.

Chapter 2, at 14 pages, is the heart of the book. This chapter starts by presenting a group of instructional paradigms—Thiagarajan’s ID Paradigm of Interactive Teaching, Gerlach and Ely’s Systematic Approach to Instruction, Banathy’s Design of Instructional Systems, and Searle’s System of Instruction. Each paradigm builds on the last, culminating in more detailed discussion of the authors’ paradigm first presented in Chapter 1. The Ledford/Sleeman paradigm will look familiar to instructional designers. It starts with analysis of the reasons for instruction and what is known about the learners, followed by development of the instructional plan, strategies, and media, then closing with assessment of what has been learned to validate the design.

Beginning with the third chapter, Writing Goals, the book shifts from the theoretical to the practical. Chapter 3 takes on the task of demonstrating how to develop goals that successfully focus instructional design. Ledford and Sleeman recommend shifting to open-systems thinking, then using Ralph Tyler’s model to consider the learner, the subject specialist, and society as sources that shape the goal. A handy checklist of areas for learner analysis: sensory-motor, symbol manipulation, spatial relationships, oral communication skills, personal identity, cultural determinants, interactional transactional patterns, and affective components. The chapter concludes with a step-by-step for learners to practice developing sound instructional goals.

Chapter 5 contains the specifics of writing objectives that can be operationalized, pref-

aced by a four-page brief on task analysis as Chapter 4. Ledford and Sleeman cover a good deal of ground in Chapter 5. They present Bloom’s taxonomy in detail, including definitions for the individual categories in each of the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, and finish with clear examples of objectives that describe behavior, conditions, and standards for performance.

Chapter 6 briefly reviews goals, task analysis, and objectives as an introduction to learner activities. A form for documenting each step of the process, first introduced in Chapter 3, reappears here with examples of learner activities, media and criterion checks.

Media selection, design, production, and integration are covered in Chapter 7. The chapter contains a number of useful flow charts that diagram the selection process for media, including types of media, size of audience, and types of activities. A simple approach to developing storyboards using 5 inch by 7 inch cards, plus guidelines for video scripting, are the focus of the chapter.

Chapter 8, “Media Design in Instructional Design,” focuses on the visual considerations in creating learning materials such as visual aids. The authors provide rich documentation and how-to’s here. The chapter is illustrated with ten figures—starting with four sets of hints on lettering visibility and presentation of balance and types of lines. The summary of this chapter clearly pulls together the particulars into a continuum of simple/complex as the purpose of a visual, moving from attraction through interest and entertainment to information, motivation and, finally, instruction.

In Chapter 9, the authors present the concept of Message/Medium design, reviewing goals and expanding analysis into consideration of audience analysis. They follow this discussion with a step-by-step demonstration, using storyboard cards to plan the segments of what must take place in a learning event, such as directives, responses, and criterion checks.

The concluding chapter, 10, introduces assessment and evaluation, looping back to the Chapter 1 discussion of norm-referenced and

criterion- referenced evaluation and supplementing the earlier explanation with examples of simple probability curves, plus an overview of bias, grade inflation, and selectivity in testing.

In general, I found this book to be rather uneven in its coverage of the material. The chapters ranged from broad and brief overviews of a topic, such as the very short Chapter 4, to the minute details of creating visuals in Chapter 8. I longed for a clearer structure and organization, such as an introduction and summary for every chapter, rather than a few.

Instances and case studies of how each step of the paradigm is applied would aid enormously in helping the reader to understand the concepts. In fact, rigorous application of a linear instructional design paradigm is very difficult to do in the ill-defined environments where most of us work. Given the expansive range of the target audience, examples of how to perform front-end analysis and set goals where a state-wide curriculum and testing standards are in place, or where a corporate training department has no staff, would be useful.

A gap in the book is the lack of discussion about how new technologies are shaping instructional design decisions and methods. Rapid prototyping, development in multi-disciplinary teams, and the concept of learning “objects” are influencing instructional design practice. Case studies would have been especially strong demonstrations of theory-into-practice here.

The authors’ goal, that of demonstrating that their framework, or paradigm, is the best approach for performing rigorous, effective instructional design, was well-demonstrated in some chapters, less so in others. For a course on instructional design, this book could serve as a supplementary text, particularly to help students in exploring the plethora of variables that affect media decisions and instructional technology strategies. It might also serve well as one of a group of texts used for advanced courses on commonalities and changing practices in design. The flowcharts for media selection would be valuable working references for any designer.