Chapter 4
Starting with the Learner: Designing Learner Engagement into the Curriculum

Jonathan E. Taylor  
Troy University, USA

ABSTRACT

The central thesis of this chapter is that in order for effective learning to occur, teachers must facilitate learner engagement, and in order to do so, learning resistance has to be conceptually understood, acknowledged, identified, and addressed as a part of the curriculum for any given class, course, or program. This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the literature on learning resistance, identifies three significant disjunctures between the theory and practice of curriculum development and instructional systems design, and analyzes the relationship between learning resistance and that theory-practice gap. The failure to see motivation and learning as an integrated whole, the mass production of curriculum, and the hesitance to teach something that cannot be measured are all discussed in detail, and suggestions are made for mitigating the negative effects of each.

STARTING WITH THE LEARNER: DESIGNING LEARNER ENGAGEMENT INTO THE CURRICULUM

“Wherefore, admitting that I will make use of certain principles which are to be found in the books of the philosophers, I would none the less maintain that they truly and rightfully belong to our sphere and have a direct bearing on the art…” (Quintilianus, c. 45-c. 95 A.D., from the Institutio Oratoria). Some liberty has been taken here with Quintilian’s quote (he was speaking of the art of oratory), but the spirit of it has been retained. A significant portion of this chapter is dedicated to providing information pertaining to learning resistance, while the overarching purpose of the chapter is to address curriculum development. For those looking forward to immediately being immersed with terminology and thought that falls most regularly within the traditional “sphere” of curriculum design, some patience may be in order. Nonetheless, the presentation of the former will be brought to bear upon the latter. The central thesis of this chapter is that in order for effective learning to occur, teachers must facilitate

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-5872-1.ch004
learner engagement, and in order to do so, learning resistance has to be conceptually understood, acknowledged, identified, and addressed as a part of the curriculum for any given class, course, or program.

While there are many different ways to approach the concept of curriculum, the approach here will be mainly directed toward Instructional Systems Design (ISD). This is the case because an instructional system is a “vehicle which generates an essentially reproducible sequence of instructional events and accepts responsibility for efficiently accomplishing a specified change from a given range of initial competencies…” (Corno, 1977, p. 235). As such, ISD is a fundamental curricular tool in nearly all large organizations, particularly those in workplace educational contexts. Certainly it is not the only way (or even the best way) curriculum may be approached, but due to its influence and the volume of learners subjected to it, it requires a vital share of the curriculum discussion as a whole.

Many of the most prominent and frequently used instructional design models do, in fact, acknowledge the importance of learner characteristics as well as other contextual factors. This can be seen at least as early as 1949 in Tyler’s statement that, “to have a thorough understanding of possibilities and difficulties involved in drawing interpretations about educational objectives, [one should] jot down data about groups of students with whom you are familiar, formulating a comprehensive set of data about their needs and interests (p. 15).

The Instructional Development Institute Model (Wittich & Schuller, 1973) has, as a second step, analyzing setting, which includes learner characteristics as well as other contextual factors. This can be seen at least as early as 1975 in Wittich’s statement that, “to have a thorough understanding of possibilities and difficulties involved in drawing interpretations about educational objectives, [one should] jot down data about groups of students with whom you are familiar, formulating a comprehensive set of data about their needs and interests (p. 15).

The Instructional Development Institute Model (Wittich & Schuller, 1973) has, as a second step, analyzing setting, which includes learner characteristics as well as other contextual factors. This can be seen at least as early as 1975 in Wittich’s statement that, “to have a thorough understanding of possibilities and difficulties involved in drawing interpretations about educational objectives, [one should] jot down data about groups of students with whom you are familiar, formulating a comprehensive set of data about their needs and interests (p. 15).

The Instructional Development Institute Model (Wittich & Schuller, 1973) has, as a second step, analyzing setting, which includes learner characteristics as well as other contextual factors. This can be seen at least as early as 1975 in Wittich’s statement that, “to have a thorough understanding of possibilities and difficulties involved in drawing interpretations about educational objectives, [one should] jot down data about groups of students with whom you are familiar, formulating a comprehensive set of data about their needs and interests (p. 15).

The Instructional Development Institute Model (Wittich & Schuller, 1973) has, as a second step, analyzing setting, which includes learner characteristics as well as other contextual factors. This can be seen at least as early as 1975 in Wittich’s statement that, “to have a thorough understanding of possibilities and difficulties involved in drawing interpretations about educational objectives, [one should] jot down data about groups of students with whom you are familiar, formulating a comprehensive set of data about their needs and interests (p. 15).

The Instructional Development Institute Model (Wittich & Schuller, 1973) has, as a second step, analyzing setting, which includes learner characteristics as well as other contextual factors. This can be seen at least as early as 1975 in Wittich’s statement that, “to have a thorough understanding of possibilities and difficulties involved in drawing interpretations about educational objectives, [one should] jot down data about groups of students with whom you are familiar, formulating a comprehensive set of data about their needs and interests (p. 15).