Chapter 68
Starting with the Learner: Designing Learner Engagement into the Curriculum

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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.

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"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

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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. The Air Force Instructional Design Model (1975) uses the term *system requirements* to refer to learners, instructors, and other environmental and contextual factors (Dick, Carey, & Carey, 2009). Smith and Ragan (1993), in their model, include an analysis step, which involves an examination of the learning environment, the learners, and the learning task. Kemp, Morrison, and Ross (1994) recommend that learner characteristics be taken into account, and the Dick and Carey Model (Dick, Carey, & Carey, 2009) provides that designers should analyze learners and contexts. Willis's R2D2 Model (Willis, 1995), has gone a little further. Its constructivist basis resulted in a model that not only acknowledged learner and contextual factors, but suggested that these factors must be continually assessed throughout the entire design process. Verduin (1980) and Cennamo and Kalk (2005) more directly and thoroughly than most others, also expressed the need to take the *affective domain* into account.

Since at least lip-service has been paid to the idea of learner characteristics and/or contexts in many of the prominent curriculum and instructional design models, this chapter is, in some ways, not so much an indictment of a prevalent gap in the literature as it is an indictment of a pervasive, albeit unintentional, inadequacy in the practice of curriculum design.

It is the author's position that a number of different factors have given rise to this inadequacy and the unintended consequences of its outworking, and this chapter will provide an examination of three of these factors. However, before getting into the specific nature of the disconnect between curriculum design models and the practice of curriculum design and its use, a brief overview of learner engagement and a rather more comprehensive overview of learning resistance need to be provided.

Of some magnitude is the lack of sufficient instruction for teachers, trainers, and instructors in the phenomenon of learning resistance and how it relates to all aspects of education. The need to fill this gap is a foundational premise for this chapter, and taking this into account, the first half is used to provide an overview of the theoretical framework for learning resistance. Following this, the common failure to take learning resistance seriously, at least from the point of curriculum design, and three of the more easily detectable potential