

Book Review:

For the Love of Instructional Design: An Essay

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“Science is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration.”

—Albert Einstein

Typically, most essays are written with a point of view, a statement or a stance. This might be rather different or unique in that it is a question that has bothered us, and many others, for a few years and maybe, through the accompanied blog, we all can work towards an answer.

Those of us who have stumbled into the field of instructional design hopefully have fallen in love with it. In that case, you probably liked the systematic nature, the sense of making order out of chaos and yet it was a place where creativity *and* logic reigned supreme. You may also like it because it is both scientific and artistic – based in research but practiced in creative ways. Mostly you like it because it works; when done right, the process helps solve problems and produce some of the most superior learning possible. Instructional design is only limited by the knowledge and skill of the designer.

Both of us have spent the majority of our shared four decades in academe teaching graduate level courses. Our students made a true choice to attend graduate school – it was a much less obvious decision than their pursuit of an undergraduate degree. To the majority of graduate students it costs not only money but also no small amount of commitment and sacrifice. Yet over and over again, in the classes we teach and in conversations with multiple colleagues at a variety of institutions, we find that too many student do only the required reading, and are not bringing into assignments or discussion the rich amount of material on the field that one would hope they would want to devour for the *love of instructional design*. Why is that and more importantly, how do we stoke the desire of students to not merely meet requirements but to fall in love with the field as we have? It is ironic, that many students profess a strong support for constructivism or connectivism yet rarely practice those ideas.

When we first started working in the field, we cared mostly about doing a good job. Soon we realized that effort meant little compared to the outcomes. For

example, Les did a great job developing a program for social workers about removing abused children from bad homes. He got some nice pats on the back, which was nice, but in the end, who really cared about how good a job he did in the design? What he cared most about was helping a child who needed to be moved somewhere safe. Even though that one project stands out as special, a wise colleague once told us, the projects we create should almost be invisible and what we should strive for was not recognition but effect.

We have also come to realize, despite all the accolades and recognition we accrue, the reality is that, at best, our knowledge of instructional design and what works is like a grain of sand on a huge beach. This frankly humbles us, and also motivates us to keep learning more about our field all the time. In other words, we fuel our love of the field by seeking out opportunities to be immersed in it.

Returning to our students, we realize they all have outside lives and responsibilities, and there is nothing wrong with an external reward as a motivation for pursuing a graduate degree. What troubles us is the nagging feeling that rewards are not enough to make a great instructional designer or educator. Love is intrinsic – it is that internally fueled passion to do more than is required because we simply want to, not because we must. Let us go way out on a limb here, and suggest that a degree without love creates a meaningless designer, one who simply gets the degree but never puts it into full practice. This is a disservice not only to the field, but to all those learners who encounter that designer’s work as well.

to our learners to provide them with the best education possible; so they, in turn, can provide the best learning opportunities to their learners. We say this not because it’s our job, but because we can make a positive and lasting difference in the lives of others. If we truly love our work, how could we do less than our best?

Yet we encounter graduate students who seem focused on course requirements, and claim to love the

field yet will do only what is minimally necessary to pass the course before them. Worse still, there are those who seem to believe that their effort to meet those minimal requirements is what makes them “excellent” designers or educators. This is not indicative of love – the student is not compelled by deep-seated desire to do more than is needed. If you truly love something, would you not want to be with it all the time for the sake of itself?

The real concern we are attempting to express is a lack of commitment to the profession. How will the field mature and grow with the advent of new knowledge and more powerful tools if so few practitioners exist that are willing to devote themselves to that which they claim to love? The purpose of this essay is not to evoke excuses but to ask the question: how do we instill passion and commitment, dare we say *love*, for the field? We are opening the dialogue, and hope those of you reading this will engage with others, and us for the love of instructional design. In sum, how has the culture of learning turned into a checklist?

May you all have a happy and joyous New Year full of love, good health and lots of fun.