

Trendsetters

Conversations with innovators in learning and technology

By Fredrick W. Baker III

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General Questions

Fred: Hi Jacquleen! Thanks for participating in the TrendSetter's Column. Could you describe how you got into the field of Instructional Design?

Jacquleen: Hi Fred! My experience in the field of Instructional Design began in 2001, when I participated in the development and launch of GeriU, the Online Geriatrics University, a training resource for healthcare professionals in the state of Florida. During this time, I joined a team of doctors, nurses, instructional designers and software developers to create a statewide, educational CD-ROM to train nurses on handling patients with dementia. In addition to the instructional design work I did for this project, I got to be an actor in the training videos; you never know where a project may take you! The training we designed is now delivered online and still being used by healthcare professionals—over thirteen years later.

Fred: That is great! In 2001 I don't think online training was really commonplace yet, so the GeriU crew must have had to be pretty innovative. What did you do next?

Jacquleen: After my work in the healthcare field, I taught high school Language Arts for nine years in Miami-Dade County Public Schools



Jacquleen A. Reyes

(MDCPS). In my final year, right before I made the switch to the corporate world, I taught at a magnet school for technology that employed flipped and blended learning instructional models. The school was founded by the Superintendent of MDCPS, who made the commitment to act as our principal. It was an honor to work for him and I learned more about educational technology under his direction than ever before in my teaching career.

Fred: It's so important to recognize the people who help us along the way. This is a complex field, and it takes a lot of sorting and mentorship just to get a decent understanding of it. I am also a fan of some of the flipped and blended models and they are still on the rise. So, what do you do today?

Jacquleen: Today, I am in the doctoral program for Instructional Technol-

ogy and Distance Education at Nova Southeastern University (NSU) and am finishing my dissertation. I also work as the Learning Solutions Program Developer for Checkers Drive-In Restaurants, Inc., where I systematize the instructional design and project management of e-learning for training and talent development within the corporation's newly implemented learning management system (LMS), set to deliver training to approximately 7,000 employees via tablets.

Fred: That is great! It is always interesting to me to see the phases that the TrendSetter's participants have gone through in their careers. Can you give us the brief on your dissertation in 40 words or less?

Jacquleen: I'm critically analyzing research on transactional distance theory to identify how: the theory has been applied to instructional models, scholars have adopted the theory, and perceptions of the theory have changed over time.

Fred: Great job! For me, learning to be concise and to explain things as simply as possible were some of the hardest and most valuable lessons of writing dissertation. Jacquleen, what appeals to you about the field of Instructional Design?

Jacquleen: What's most appealing about the field of Instructional Design is that advances in technology generate new opportunities and challenges that push us forward and cause us to evolve as educators. Presently, I am designing and developing mobile learning content to train employees at Checkers and Rally's restaurants. Our trainees will have the ability to access their learning within the LMS through a tablet, all while they are in the restaurant. However, executing an effective mobile strategy for training in a fast-paced environment is easier said than done. To my knowledge, there is no framework or widely accepted model for this type of mobile learning where content that is housed and tracked within an LMS is deliv-

ered via a tablet. There is no one company or researcher that has said, “This is how it’s done.” Therefore, we have to go through a tedious trial and error process to get it right. Despite the challenges, we are at the forefront of developing a model that other companies can follow—and that’s exciting.

Fred: That is so true. There is no cookie-cutter approach. I think that is something that throws people off when they enter the field and see how much we talk about models and theoretical frameworks. They are guides, rather than step-by-step instructions, and must be used critically and reflectively. So, how would you describe your research agenda and how did you decide to become involved in that area?

Jacqueleen: As you know, I’m writing my dissertation on transactional distance theory, which is a distance learning theory that describes the distance between teachers and learners as a psychological separation influenced by levels of structure, dialogue, and autonomy. I decided to pursue the topic after learning from a professor that it’s an area of distance education where research is lacking: the theory hasn’t been adequately documented since 2005. In the literature, transactional distance theory has been accepted and disputed by researchers, but has never been fully adopted. It makes me wonder why, especially because many researchers propose that the theory could be adapted to the future challenges of distance education. It’s one that has the potential to impact the field—even as technology evolves—and support instructional designers, distance educators, and researchers in their efforts. I’ve been researching the theory for over two years now and in 2013, I published some of my research in the article, “Transactional Distance Theory: Is it Here to Stay?” in the journal, *Distance Learning*.

Fred: That sounds like an interesting area to dig in! It is great when you find a practical and useful area of research that is also in need of serious work! It provides a unique opportunity to pursue a passion that is also valuable to others and it not being a hotbed of ac-

tivity leaves enough room to work at a comfortable pace. Can you tell us two works by other people that you found very provocative or informative?

Jacqueleen: There are three resources I recommend to others. First, *The Systematic Design of Instruction*, by Dick, Carey, and Carey, is a book every instructional designer should read. It’s a great starting point for those who are new to the field. It describes the basics of instructional design and provides details on the Dick and Carey model and process of application. It is also a great reference for professionals already working in academic and training environments.

Resonate, by Nancy Duarte, one of the world’s top presentation designers, is a book that offers ideas on how to take presentations beyond simple slides and create captivating content. It illustrates how to engage learners with storytelling and develop memorable visuals that make ideas stand out. This book is for everyone who wants to build a strong connection with their audience.

Lynda.com is my favorite resource for tutorials on just about anything that relates to software, creative processes and business. The instructors of the tutorials are experts on the subject matter who also work in the field. This resource is a must for anyone in instructional technology.

Fred: The Dick, Carey, and Carey book is classic and Lynda.com has some great tutorials. Atomic Learning is a similar product that I have also used. I had not heard of *Resonate* before, but it looks like a great book. Thanks for the recommendation! Jacqueleen, would you name a few people who have had the most important impact on your career?

Jacqueleen: Academically, the person who has made the biggest impact on my career is Dr. Charles Schlosser, my program professor and dissertation committee member at NSU. If it weren’t for him, I wouldn’t have a solid topic for my dissertation. As my professor, he encouraged me to research transactional distance theory because it was not well documented in our

field. He now advises me as I continue to research and write on that topic for my dissertation. CS, as he likes to be called, is an expert in the field of Instructional Technology and Distance Education and is hands down the best professor in my program at NSU. I continue to look to him as a mentor and leader.

My aunt, Dr. Kathleen Yates, has been an inspiration to me and is the one who encouraged me to go back to school to earn my doctorate. In recent years, I watched her obtain her Master’s and Doctoral degrees; she’s a shining example that it can be done at any age. Earning a doctorate is no easy task, so it’s been awesome to have a family member who not only supports me in my journey, but can empathize with this type of effort. She’s a great source of moral support.

Fred: The doctoral process is a difficult and rewarding journey. It is definitely not something anyone does without support of all types. It is a unique and amazing relationship that develops between a committee chair and the student, and to have family who have recently gone through the whole ordeal must have been relieving and inspirational. Jacqueleen, what are the major trends you see influencing the field right now and in the near future?

Jacqueleen: Learning analytics in education is a major trend right now. While there is a lot of talk about how big data can transform teaching and learning, a solid framework has yet to be developed that addresses pending questions like: How do we effectively work with datasets across environments and what technology will allow us to do so? How do we resolve ethical concerns? And, how do we determine who owns the data? I actually wrote an article on learning analytics that was accepted for publication in an upcoming issue of *TechTrends*. The title is “The Skinny on Big Data in Education: Learning Analytics Simplified.”

I see Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in corporate environments being a trend as well. There are so many opportunities for companies to leverage MOOCs to offer cost-effective, timely training, while reaching

a wider audience. Courses can also be made available to consumers, which is a clever way to build a company's brand. What's more is this is also an area where learning analytics can be valuable to a company's success.

Fred: Congrats on the publication! I think that learning analytics and MOOCs are both important areas with a lot of lessons to offer our field, but that also, unfortunately, suffer a lot of hype. I would love to see more serious (less political) focus on the practicalities of both areas (although it seems to be coming around a bit). Jacqueline, what major research gaps or areas of need do you see in the field?

Jacquleen: Research on effective strategies for mobile learning that integrate an LMS with a tablet is scarce. While I hope to eventually contribute to research in this area, I'd like to know more about what frameworks people are using, whether they've had success, how they've adapted existing content to function on a tablet, and the details on best practices.

Fred: Sure. I don't know much about that area of research, but it is still somewhat nascent. I saw a presentation in the #Change11 MOOC by Zoraina Wati Abas, of the Open University of Malaysia, who was doing a lot with m-learning there. You may look her up to see what she has been working on. What advice do you have for IT researchers/practitioners who are just beginning in the field?

Jacquleen: Thanks for the suggestion. As for IT researchers/practitioners who are new to the field, I advise them to join professional associations and communities. My favorites are the Association for Educational Communications and Technology and The E-Learning Guild. For those in a corporate environment, the Association for Talent Development is excellent as well. Becoming members of groups on networking sites, like LinkedIn, will also allow practitioners to communicate with peers and stay current with what experts in the field are doing. It's important that we all learn from each other, so joining organizations is essential in our line of work.

My other piece of advice is to stay current with new technology. Instructional designers today have to have an exceptional skill set. Not only do we need to be able to write, communicate, and understand the learner, but we also need to know how to use the latest technology and software. This includes: film production equipment like cameras, microphones, and lighting; authoring tools like Adobe Captivate and Articulate Storyline; audio and video editing software. The more I know about my craft and what it takes to develop engaging and professional quality learning, the better my product becomes and the more my learning outcomes improve. It's my duty to the learner to be at the top of my game.

Fred: Good advice. It is important to be involved in a lot of networks and on top of a variety of tools, but given the breadth and availability of both these days, it is also easy to get a fragmented focus. We have to strike a balance between being involved and on top of it all, and being able to focus on details and get good at certain areas. It is definitely a challenge! Do you have any other advice?

Jacquleen: For those instructional designers restricted by low budgets and few resources, here's a tip. While I have funding for major projects, I am a one-woman show when it comes to small undertakings. For simple projects, I really have to think outside the box and get creative with the resources. I have to design instruction that's memorable for my learners. For instance, I had to develop training around properly maintaining cash registers. The only content I was given was a document with a list of rules that employees needed to follow. I had a video camera, editing software, and my own creativity, so I turned those rules into training that included a rap video. In addition to writing the typical learning objectives and assessment questions that bookended the content, I recruited actors within my office, wrote and recorded the rap song, choreographed dance moves, and acted in, filmed and edited the video. At first, I was afraid this wouldn't go over well with the company because it was

a little different and less professional than what you'd see in a corporate environment, but I knew my audience and thought this type of learning would be a great fit. It turned out I was right and the video was received favorably.

Fred: Wow! Are you able to share a link for us? It is critical for us to understand the learners and let their needs drive our design decisions. It is a good sign that your company was willing to let go of tradition in order to meet those needs. So, the advice may be to be creative and entrepreneurial in doing what needs to be done for the learners.

Jacquleen: That's right, Fred. To gain a better understanding of what I'm talking about, you can view the video here: <http://tinyurl.com/CheckersHandleWithCare>, or by scanning the QR code in Figure 1. We used a cloud-based platform called Brainshark to deliver the training to all of our restaurants. I highly recommend it for educators and trainers in distance learning environments.



Figure 1: QR code linking to an example of Checker's training.

Fred: Jacqueline, that video shows a true dedication to the learners and a willingness to step out on a limb to make meaningful instruction that sticks! We should all be so willing to step out of our comfort zones for our learners! Thanks so much for participating in TrendSetters!

Jacquleen: My pleasure!

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