The ID CaseBook

Case Studies in Instructional Design

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In 1989, the government of a Southeast Asian country (referred to here as (SEA), in cooperation with a major U.S. electronics corporation, began to plan the development of a training design center in SEA in which participants would be trained to design instruction using the systems approach. The hope was that SEA would obtain the long-term capability to determine the need for, and then to develop, appropriate training programs for its workforce. At the time this decision was made, there were no instructional design (ID) training programs being offered in SEA, although there were various training institutes in operation (e.g., the Teacher Training Institute, the National Training Center, and the Vocational Education Center) and numerous government employees who provided training for local businesses. So although these employees served as trainers, they themselves had received little, if any, formal instruction in design theory or practice, and furthermore, they had never participated in a curriculum that employed a systems approach to the design and development of training. Although SEA trainers often delivered instruction on specified content, they had no formal experience with, or knowledge of, adult learning principles or the use of interactive teaching strategies. The instruction they created typically depended on their own content expertise or revolved around instruction that had been imported from the United States and then adapted.

A pair of U.S. designers was hired to plan and develop a curriculum for preparing SEA instructional designers. One of these designers, Frank Tawl, was a university professor and a noted expert on the use of the systems approach for designing instruction. Frank had developed a number of courses at his U.S. university that related to ID topics and issues and felt fairly confident that these could be modified to fit the SEA learners’ needs. Tawl’s teammate, Semra Zusnis, was a private consultant who had worked with Tawl on a number of previous projects and was noted for her ability to

*Based in part on a 1991 article by Walter D ilk that appeared in Performance Improvement Quarterly, 4(1). "The Singapore project: A case study in instructional design." pp. 14-22. Used with permission of the author and publisher. Note that information from the original case was altered in order to increase its educational value for our readers. Readers should not consider this case to be a true representation of the Singapore government.
recognize and address culturally relevant issues in situations involving learners from diverse backgrounds. As part of their front-end analysis, Tawl and Zusnis conducted interviews to determine the current perceptions of professors at the national university, as well as training staffs at the Teacher Training Institute, National Training Center, and the Vocational Education Center, regarding the proposed ID training curriculum. Among other things, they were interested in determining: What kind of training experiences were currently in place at the existing training centers? What procedures did SEA trainers follow when designing and presenting new instruction to fellow Asians?

In these initial interviews it became clear that the professors at the national university were supportive of whatever the Americans thought best—teaching whatever content Tawl and Zusnis thought was appropriate, as well as using whatever strategies the Americans typically used. During follow-up interviews they posed virtually no opposition to Tawl’s and Zusnis’s ideas; after a suggestion was made, the professors would simply nod in agreement. Although Tawl and Zusnis made a concerted effort to uncover any culturally sensitive issues that should be taken into consideration in the design of the curriculum, they identified almost none. If the SEA professors had any culturally related concerns, they didn’t acknowledge them.

Additional interviews were held with potential students for the ID curriculum, namely, the current trainers. Tawl and Zusnis asked questions to determine the following: What did the SEA trainers already know about the design process? What beliefs did they hold that reflected possible acceptance of the systems approach and/or findings from current research regarding the teaching/learning process? What beliefs seemed contradictory to these current theories about teaching and learning? How motivated were they to participate in this new training program? Although, on the surface, these potential students seemed to accept Tawl’s and Zusnis’ ideas about interactive delivery strategies and alternative assessment measures, they were obviously unclear as to what was expected of them. They wondered how similar this training would be to the imported training they had become accustomed to modifying. Was this instruction going to be more or less effective with their students?

The SEA trainers indicated that they preferred lecture-based instruction and memory-based assessment measures. Interestingly, it was discovered during the interview process that SEA trainers had been modifying “imported” instruction by eliminating the built-in interactive activities and changing the assessment techniques to be more memory, as opposed to performance, based. The SEA trainers indicated that although they “mostly” liked these training programs, they were concerned that their students would be uncomfortable performing in front of their peers and mentioned that losing face was something to be avoided at all costs.
There was an additional concern that students over 40 years of age may not be sufficiently motivated to perform under the nontraditional conditions advocated by the imported programs. These students would be retiring when they turned 55 and mentioned that the time spent learning new skills, at their "mature" age, was "a real waste."

The majority of the trainers interviewed expressed little motivation to attend this new training when it became available. Those who were interviewed mentioned the following concerns:

- Additional time commitments involved in completing a degree program (all worked full time)
- Having to learn a new way of designing and delivering training
- Lack of job advancement, salary compensation, or other rewards or recognition being tied to completion of the program
- Lack of confidence in convincing clients to let them use these new skills

If these concerns were adequately addressed, the trainers indicated that, perhaps, they would participate.

Tawl and Zusnis decided to observe a few training programs currently being offered by the National Training Center. Additional time was spent with the instructors of these courses to determine how their training courses had been developed. In essence, the observations supported what had been suggested in the interviews. SEA trainers were accustomed to presenting and attending instructor-led training. They did not like being put on the spot (performing or responding in front of their peers); they liked assessment measures that provided a quick indication of how much they had learned. Also noted was the fact that they used very little media during instruction and did not engage in either needs analysis or formative evaluation procedures when developing instruction. It was difficult, if not impossible, to determine if any of the training being offered was making a difference on the job.

In contrast to the opinions and preferences mentioned by the SEA trainers, the SEA government strongly supported a move to more "modern" training—it was more than eager to imitate the Americans' approach to the systematic design of instruction. Although Tawl and Zusnis agreed that appropriate teaching methods such as simulations, role plays, and case studies should be used when they supported the instructional objectives of the ID curriculum, they were concerned about motivating the learners to engage in these activities.

Tawl and Zusnis realized that the typical ID competencies needed to be included in a way that fit the needs of the SEA students. Some modifications to a typical ID curriculum would be required. Finally, the question of who should teach the new courses, U.S. or SEA trainers, needed to be addressed. There did not seem to be any easy answers to the many questions facing this experienced design team!
Invoking ID practice via the Frank and Semra case

As Tawil and Zusnis labored to design a blueprint for the ID curriculum, including the identification of the strategies and approaches that should be used, they were faced with a number of difficult decisions. Propose possible solutions for each of the following issues:

- How to help the students in this case master factual information and develop intellectual skills and positive attitudes regarding the systems approach to ID
- How to motivate learners to use effective learning strategies, including interactive techniques
- How to design and evaluate alternative assessment measures (project-based assessments, simulations, role plays, etc.)
- How to teach students to use mediated instruction effectively
- How to get buy-in for the use of needs assessment and formative evaluation methods
- How to build learners’ confidence to respond/perform in front of peers
- How to motivate the older employees
- How to build confidence for working effectively with clients