Trendsetters

Conversations with innovators in learning and technology

By Fredrick W. Baker III

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General Questions

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

Jacqueleen: 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?

Jacqueleen: After my work in the healthcare field, I taught high school Language Arts for nine years in Miami-Dade County Public Schools (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: 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. Jacqueleen, what appeals to you about the field of Instructional Design?

Jacqueleen: 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. (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?

Jacqueleen: Today, I am in the doctoral program for Instructional Technology 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?

Jacqueleen: 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. Jacqueleen, what appeals to you about the field of Instructional Design?

Jacqueleen: 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 activity 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 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...