Promoting Adherence to a New Paradigm of Instructional Management

Robert A. Reiser
Center for Educational Development and Evaluation
Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306

As an instructional designer in a university, I occasionally feel I am at the mercy of my fellow faculty members. I feel this way because it is difficult to ensure that my colleagues will properly implement the materials I develop.

I usually develop materials for a course in conjunction with the faculty member who is responsible for the operation of that course. When I am satisfied that the materials I have developed are effective, I give the materials to the faculty member so that he or she can implement the materials in the course. However, implementation does not always proceed as planned. Sometimes the way the materials are used bears little resemblance to the way they were designed to be used. And sometimes the materials are not used at all.

These implementation problems are examples of what may occur when the traditional paradigm of instructional management is adhered to. According to Heinich (1970, p. 146), this paradigm places the faculty member (that is, classroom teacher) in complete control over the instructional tactics used in the classroom. Thus, the classroom teacher decides what instructional materials will be used in the classroom and decides how those materials will be used.

The absurdity of the traditional paradigm has been noted by Heinich (1970, p. 144). He states that under the traditional paradigm, we get extremely capable people to design instructional materials and then we allow less capable people to decide what to do with those materials.

A new paradigm of instructional management has been described by Heinich (1970, pp. 146-149). According to this paradigm, all decisions regarding instructional tactics are made at the curriculum planning level of the instructional process. These decisions are made by teams whose members include instructional designers and classroom teachers. The decisions involve assigning some instructional responsibilities to instructional materials and other instructional responsibilities to classroom teachers. Once an instructional responsibility has been assigned to some instructional materials, the classroom teacher does not have the authority to override that decision. If the classroom teacher is unhappy with the decision, the teacher must express his or her displeasure to the team, who then decides what, if any, action to take. Thus, the classroom teacher is not the sole arbiter of what occurs in the classroom (or in any other environment in which instruction takes place).

Adherence to the new paradigm of instructional management might result in improved instructional effectiveness and efficiency. Many educators, however, cling to the traditional paradigm. As Heinich (1970, pp. 138-139, 170-171) indicates, many classroom teachers assume authority over what occurs in a course, and instructional designers are often reluctant to question that authority. Thus, the new paradigm is rarely adhered to. The remainder of this paper will describe techniques that instructional designers, particularly those in higher education, can employ to promote adherence to the new paradigm.

To promote adherence to the new paradigm, instructional designers must precisely define how the instructional materials they develop should be implemented. The activities that should, and should not, accompany the use of the materials must be clearly defined. On occasion, I have developed instructional materials without devoting sufficient attention to specifying how those materials should be implemented. When I have done so, I have found that the materials I developed have not been implemented properly. Furthermore, in these instances, I have inadvertently supported adherence to the traditional paradigm of instructional management by allowing classroom teachers to decide how instructional materials will be used.

Adherence to the traditional paradigm of instructional management is also supported when an instructional designer decides upon a solution before identifying a problem. Many instructional development projects begin with a classroom teacher asking an instructional designer to develop a specific product for the teacher's course. Frequently, the instructional designer will develop the product (solution) the classroom teacher requested without examining whether that product is appropriate. In doing so, the instructional designer is allowing the classroom teacher to decide what materials will be used in a course and how those materials will be used. Thus, the instructional designer is supporting adherence to the traditional paradigm of instructional management.

To avoid this situation, instructional designers must begin examining real needs. When a classroom teacher asks an instructional designer to produce a solution (product), the instructional designer should respond by trying to help the classroom teacher to identify the problem. Once the problem is identified, the instructional designer and classroom teacher can work together in determining what instructional materials and activities, if any, can be used to solve the problem. Thus, the instructional designer becomes involved in curriculum planning.

Instructional designers must attempt to ensure that decisions made at the curriculum planning level are not ignored by classroom teachers at the classroom implementation level. In higher education, one way to ensure that decisions made at the curriculum planning level are not ignored is to obtain a written agreement from a faculty member or his or her department. Such agreements may specify that in consideration of the development efforts involved, a faculty member or department will agree to use a specific set of instructional materials in a prescribed fashion for some specified period of time. The agreement may also state that during the specified time period, the manner in which the materials are used may be changed, but only upon the consent of all the parties involved.

Some instructional designers may prefer to obtain an oral agreement rather than a written one. Whether an agreement is oral or written, it is a good idea

to obtain the agreement from an academic department rather than from an individual faculty member. An agreement with an individual faculty member terminates when that faculty member leaves the university or stops teaching the course which was the subject of the agreement. An agreement with a department, however, is not subject to changes in personnel or changes in teaching assignments.

Heinich (1970, p. 171) has stated that instructional designers should attempt to enter the instructional process before faculty members have been assigned to teach a particular course. If an instructional designer can do so, then he or she becomes involved in designing a department's course, rather than a faculty member's course. If a course has not been claimed by a faculty member, it is much more likely that an instructional designer's suggestions regarding course materials and procedures will be accepted. Thus, by working with departments and attempting to become involved with a course before a faculty member has been assigned to it, an instructional designer can avoid many design and implementation problems.

No matter when an instructional designer becomes involved with a course, it is likely that he or she will eventually work with a faculty member who is, or will be, responsible for the operation of the course. I believe it is very important for the instructional designer to get that faculty member fully involved in the instructional development process. I have found that the degree to which a faculty member is committed to some materials is directly related to the degree to which the faculty member was involved in the development of those materials. It is particularly important that during the development process, the faculty member becomes involved in determining how the materials will be used. If the faculty member helps make implementation decisions at the curriculum planning level, it is unlikely that he or she will attempt to ignore those decisions at the classroom implementation level.

While the instructional designer's main efforts should take place at the curriculum planning level, I have found that the instructional designer must also be involved at the classroom implementation level, even after formative evaluation (including field testing) has been completed. During formative evaluation, the instructional designer is closely monitoring course procedures and outcomes. When this monitoring ceases, the manner in which materials are used may change, and student performance and/or attitude may be negatively affected. By regularly monitoring outcomes in a course, even if it is done only once a semester, the instructional designer will be able to note any changes in student performance and attitude. If a major change has occurred, the instructional designer can examine whether improper implementation of instructional materials has caused the change. If improper implementation is the problem, the designer can then take the necessary steps to ensure that the materials are used in a manner that will maximize their effectiveness.

I have saved what I consider to be the most important point for last. Heinich (1970, p. 147) has indicated that providing individualized instruction in learning centers is one of the best ways of ensuring that instructional materials are presented as they were designed to be presented. A learning center that is developed and operated by an instructional development organization can solve many of the problems faced by instructional designers. Currently, such a center, tentatively called the Learning Success Center, is being designed at Florida State University.

The Learning Success Center at Florida State is being designed to improve student learning in those courses that use the Center's facilities. The Center will accomplish this goal by providing a setting in which students will study instructional materials designed or selected by teams of faculty members and instructional designers. Unlike the materials in many learning centers, the materials in the Learning Success Center will be employed as integral parts of a course, they will not be used as aids to classroom instruction.

It is planned that the Learning Success Center will be used in conjunction with another center that has already been developed at Florida State: the Assessment Resource Center (ARC). The facilities of the ARC are used to administer and score objectives-based tests to over three thousand Florida State students each quarter. The tests in the courses that use the ARC have been designed by teams of instructional designers and faculty members at Florida State. All items on the tests are keyed to instructional objectives. Immediately after taking a test in the ARC, the student receives feedback from a computer indicating how well he or she performed on each of the objectives covered on the test. The student can review materials related to those objectives with which he or she had difficulty and is then given the opportunity to take another version of the test covering those objectives.

Before a portion of a course is placed in the ARC, all decisions regarding assessment are agreed upon by a team of instructional designers and faculty members. Similarly, before a portion of a course will be placed in the Learning Success Center, faculty members and instructional designers will decide all issues regarding instructional materials and activities in the course. These decisions will be binding unless the faculty members *and* instructional designers decide otherwise. Thus, by developing desired facilities, and offering the use of the facilities to those who agree to certain conditions, instructional designers at Florida State are able to accomplish two goals. First, they are able to become involved in decision-making at the curriculum planning level. And second, they are able to ensure that those decisions reached at the curriculum planning level are carried out at the classroom implementation level.

Earlier, I stated that as an instructional designer, I occasionally feel I am at the mercy of my fellow faculty members. I have felt this way less frequently since I have started to use the techniques described in this paper. If you are an instructional designer, I suggest you try some of these techniques. By doing so, you may solve some of your immediate problems and you may also promote adherence to a paradigm that will help prevent future difficulties.

Reference

Heinich, R. *Technology and the management of instruction.* Washington, D.C.: Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1970.