

We Live in Two Different Worlds: A Reaction to Patton's Article

Clinton J. Wallington
Chairperson, Instructional Technology
Department
Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, NY 14623

When I reviewed Patton's article, I agreed strongly with several of his suggestions yet I found myself asking why they could not be applied directly to my own situation. The instructional development program at Rochester Institute of Technology is deeply involved with training in business and industry. Most of our students either come from that sector or will be placed there when they graduate. In other words, my work is to prepare educational technologists to do the kind of work Patton describes.

My positive response to the article and my industry contact led me to speculate about the differences between the "third world of instruction" and formal education—especially postsecondary education. This train of thought brought about a realization that there are several assumptions so basic to the two sectors that they cannot be changed (for the time being)—only taken into account. Knowing these assumptions should help advance the dialog between the third world of instruction and formal education. If we are aware of each other's constraints, we can avoid meaningless arguments about

¹The term "business/industry" does not adequately convey the real scope of training and education which exist outside of formal education (K-12 and postsecondary). AECT's "other" group (other than K-12 and postsecondary) includes business, industry, health agencies, government agencies, and all sorts of not-for-profit organizations. I will use the term "third world of instruction" in the commentary to bring home the fact that it is large and diverse. But "third world of instruction" is clumsy at best—suggestions for a new term will be appreciated.

some differences and address ourselves to the joint resolution of mutual problems. This was the rationale behind my unusual step of writing a commentary based on an article assigned to me for review.

Now About Those Hidden Assumptions. . .

First of all, the primary functions of the instructional third world and formal education are different. The primary functions of educational institutions are training and education. The primary function of organizations in the instructional third world is manufacturing, services, or distribution of goods. Training and education in the third world of instruction owe their existence to one of these primary functions and are not primary functions themselves. This is in no way a reflection on the quality of instruction in either sector. The major result of this difference in primary functions is rather that the regulatory system is radically different for training/education in each sector. In the education sector, the instruction is directly regulated by the government. In many instances, it is owned and operated by some level of government—in postsecondary education, usually the state. The consequence is that changing the instruction—adding a new course, starting a new program, changing the basic mode of instruction—is usually subject to governmental review and approval, something with which the third world of instruction (if it's lucky) may not have to contend. Additionally, the external governance is usually reflected in the internal governance of educational institutions. Thus, the rapid changes and flexibility that Patton suggests for the third world of instruction are often impossible in light of the internal and external regulatory system of postsecondary education.

Second, in the third world of instruction, learners are often paid while learn-

EDITOR'S NOTE

Clint Wallington is a consulting editor for *JID* and reviewed the Patton article prior to its selection for publication. He also serves as the secretary of the Industrial Training and Education Division of AECT, is on the national Professional Development Committee of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), and is a member of the Board of Directors of the Genesee Valley Chapter of ASTD.

ing. Learners in the education sector are not only *not* paid, but in most cases they pay for the training provided.

This major difference has several implications for instruction. There is, for example, little incentive for postsecondary education to shorten a course. In fact, shortening a course (in terms of time) may have negative consequences. Students, charged by the credit hour, may resent the reduced hours. (From the credit/contact hour, almost everything is calculated—from amount of classroom space needed to financial aid for students. You don't mess much with credit hours.) Licensing and accrediting agencies may question the validity of the abbreviated instruction. (When was the last time you heard the third world of instruction worry about making up "snow days" to satisfy state requirements?) The institution's support service may actually resist modifications which make them change their programs. (While I can design and manage courses with individual pacing and continuous enrollment, my scheduling and records offices currently cannot cope.) In the instructional third world, time literally is money. Training most often represents a cash investment in the employee. Shorten the course and you save not only direct salary but the training logistics and possible per diem and other trainee support. If the trainee's performance is approximately the same after a short training period as after a long one,

the short period raises the organization's return on investment (ROI) dramatically. The same ROI is difficult to establish in formal education because many costs remain fixed (because they are time-based) whether or not the actual course time is shorter.

Third, the different sectors' views of learner permanence are polar opposites. Education is committed to a transient learner—albeit to a longer training period. The learner completes a course of study; the learner departs. There is no thought of the learner as a permanent fixture. The third world of instruction views the learner as a potentially permanent employee who can be retrained repeatedly. The training department will (or may) have a number of opportunities for instruction later in the employee's career on an as-needed basis. Further, if the training is of a general nature or beyond the capability of in-house training, the company may choose to send the employee outside for training—something rarely, if ever, done in formal education. This affects the job-relatedness of training and maintenance of learned behaviors.

Fourth, most instruction in the third world is directly and specifically job-related. Patton's view of performance maintenance notwithstanding, the skills learned are usually used on the job soon after the training, thus helping to maintain the learned behavior. In contrast,

educational institutions usually offer instruction related to a family of jobs and the skills learned may—or may not—be used depending on students' jobs after instruction. Because of the different aspirations of the graduates and the differences in jobs available, it is almost impossible to make a course specifically job related. Another implication of this job-relatedness is that formal education is regarded as a long-term preparation—even in the professional and technical skills area. Thus, the educational institution bears the responsibility for training that prepares the student for skills needed immediately as well as skills needed years after leaving the institution. This makes, in general, the approach to instruction in education a long-term proposition and instruction in the third world, short-term. This difference may relate to Patton's observations about upper-level management training being different from some technical skills training. Perhaps management views the skills in upper-management training as so long term or different as to defy conventional needs analysis (although I doubt it).

Fifth, because of the constraints of fixed course times and teaching a general family of skills, the education sector often assumes the responsibility for pushing (or leading) a student as far as possible within the time available and the learner's ability. While assuming

this responsibility may be regarded by some as totally unwarranted, it is nevertheless the mindset of most educators and can be a barrier to the introduction of competency-based or criterion-referenced instruction. The education sector regards course content as a series of levels of competency which may be mastered in a fixed time period. Those mastering more competencies get A's, and those below the minimum mastery get F's—with a range of grades in between. The mindset of instructional third world is the opposite: Content is regarded as a fixed set of competencies with time as the flexible variable. This is especially true in skills training. The difference in approaches becomes evident when the developer seeks end-of-course objectives from the different subject matter experts.

The foregoing is by no means an exhaustive list of differences. There are more. Those pointed out are major differences—differences that often go unacknowledged and lead to misunderstandings (and sometimes acrimonious debate) between the two sectors.

There are also a number of similarities (which should be evident to most) that allow instructional developers working in either sector to assist one another and to move the art and science of instructional development forward. Patton's article is one such needed step in moving things forward.