

Letter from the Editor

Bridget N. O'Connor

This issue of the *Information Technology, Learning, and Performance Journal* is dedicated to end-user training and learning. The emphasis is on *learning*, our middle name.

Most scholarly fields associated with information technology are concerned about the development of new tools. In this sense, they are specializing in the design of hardware and software that support any variety of work processes and communications needs. What differentiates organizational systems is our emphasis on what you actually do with the product, and how new tools contribute to our individual, group, and/or organizational performance.

Hardware and software vendors often say their products are “user friendly”; however, “user seductive,” may be more expressive, as seduction implies that the more one uses the software, the more one wants to use it! Increasingly, software is user seductive as advances in interface design have resulted in systems that have become easier to use and at the same time more functional.

A plenary speaker at the Spring 2000 OSRA Conference in Toronto said that the au courant term for learning is “downloading.” This is consistent with the metaphor of a mind as a hard disk—where we store content specialties and experiences and which we program to filter and recall what we have come to value as “truth.”

Moreover, given that we live in a cross-temporal, global economy with diverse cultures and incredibly fast technological changes, we are never done learning, and what we come to know as “truth” will change. Thus, we will all need to have an erasable, expandable, re-programmable mental hard disk. Erasable because “what we know as truth” changes. Expandable because knowledge is forever being created. Re-programmable because our experiences continually help us make new meanings from what we know. We can not afford to have our mental hard disks write-protected!

Learning—and the ability to unlearn and relearn—is required if we are to be seduced by new work tools, and this is the challenge facing vendors, instructors, and end-users themselves.

About This Issue

Counting from when the call for papers was released, this special issue of the *ITL&PJ* has been in process for over two years. We believe it meets a need in the OSRA community for a focus on problems and issues related to how we learn to use new technologies facing those of us who are trainers, educators, IS professionals, or managers.

The journal’s format has been expanded here to include two invited editorials related to whether or not colleges and universities should certify their graduates in specific skills, such as Microsoft Office User Specialist (MOUS) or Network+™. I invited members from both academe and business to tell us what they thought about this issue. While I initially thought the responses would be pro-con, they are pro-pro. From academe, Ray and McCoy provide a comprehensive summary of the issue and come out in favor of certification. From business, training specialist Delaney also provides a rationale for certification, and at the same time challenges us all to consider what an undergraduate education really means.

In the first of three research-based articles, Lambrecht reports a qualitative study where she identified effective software teaching practices in postsecondary academic settings. While she found that postsecondary instructors emphasized software operations over business content, she suggests an emphasis on business content should and will drive teaching practices. In the second article, Shaw and Giacquinta use data from a survey of over 300 graduate students that

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described their computer attitudes, uses, needs, and preferences. They found these highly motivated learners wanted to learn to use a wide range of potential tools—including qualitative and quantitative data analysis and bibliographic software—and wanted more workshops and more integration of technology within their coursework. Thus, the first two articles result in a common theme—that rather than emphasizing software operations, applications instruction should be tied to problem solving and to meeting the needs of the workplace or the learner.

In the third research article, Simon found that learning style was the driver for effective instruction. He used structural equation modeling to examine three training methods—instruction, exploration, and behavior modeling. In this comprehensive study of 450 U.S. Navy personnel, he found that trainees whose learning style matched the training method were more successful in training outcomes and computing satisfaction, and consequently had higher levels of computer use.

Our *Making a Difference* section begins with Belanger and Van Slyke suggesting that individuals' play with computer applications while on the job, such as surfing the Web, be considered a form of self-directed, experiential learning. They make a strong theoretical

argument for encouraging such behavior and suggest ways practitioners might foster learning that is of value to the organization and ways researchers might examine such practices. Then, Zhao offers a step-by-step way for educators to teach learners to create a Web-based client/server network on personal computers. His unique, practical teaching strategy should be of interest to technical trainers and educators. In the third article of this section, Creighton and Kilcoyne describe a case where grades and dropout rates from a university's traditional classroom-based computer applications course were compared with a self-paced applications course over a period of seven semesters. With the introduction of mandatory help sessions and practice tests, the grades and dropout rates were similar.

A common theme through all these articles is that while there is more than one way to do almost anything, these adult learners of computer applications were goal-driven rather than technology-driven. The reports here indicate that end-user learning requires instructors to experiment with a variety of teaching/learning approaches—including play and self-directed learning—to meet the needs of their institutions and target learners. Moreover, it is clear we have just begun to investigate the wide range of variables that lead to effective, efficient learning.

Guidelines for Authors

The *Information Technology, Learning, and Performance Journal*, formerly known as the *Office System Research Journal*, publishes articles related to the field of organizational and end-user information systems (OEIS). Submissions may present the results of research in the discipline, deal with research methodologies and data treatment techniques, or describe research or experiences related to instruction in the discipline. For the "Making a Difference" section, manuscripts that discuss our theoretical bases or describe an innovative policy, procedure, method, technique, or practice that has potential benefit for systems professionals and/or educators and technology trainers are encouraged. We also accept reviews of current books—both academic and popular presses—related to OEIS. All submissions are submitted to a blind review process.

Authors should follow the style described for manuscripts and bibliographies in the Fourth Edition (1994) of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*; however, tables should be single-spaced. Authors should not be identified anywhere in the manuscript. Submit four copies of the manuscript. On the original copy, include a cover page with author name, title, organizational affiliation, telephone number, and email address. A 100-150 word abstract of the manuscript should be included with the manuscript.

Manuscripts should be submitted exclusively to the *Information Technology, Learning, and Performance Journal*. Previously published manuscripts are not acceptable. Manuscripts are selected through a blind review process involving the editors and referees selected from the Editorial Board. The Journal is indexed in the *Business Education Index*, the *Current Index to Journals in Education*, and the *Computer Literature Index*.

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