

TechTrends

Book Review : Learner and User Experience Research: An Introduction for the Field of Learning Design & Technology

Hyperlink - <https://edtechbooks.org/ux>

By Matthew Schmidt, Andrew A. Tawfik, Isa Jahnke, Yvonne Earnshaw, & Rui Huang

This book allows readers to engage with key tenets in each of the spaces of learner/user experience, designing for learning/instruction, and research methods thus creating a pallet of awareness. The book presents different conceptual discussions, research approaches, frameworks with accommodating to the foundational tenets as a way to draw linkages to overarching and sometimes seemingly unrelatable fields. The authors, Schmidt, Tawfik, Jahnke, Earnshaw and Huang contributions to field is noted as serving as a conduit for many who may not have any understanding of this research space. The combined effort demonstrated in this introductory volume, takes an approach of convenience to present topics to those who seek new knowledge.

According to the authors, the book is geared mainly to those who act as learning or instructional designers by focusing on two separate tenets in the field of learning design - learner experience and user experience. These tenets are seen by the authors as “new phenomena” within the field of learning design and technology – a premise which can be challenged. Researching experiences in the learning design space from two disparate lens (user vs learner) is not as new as the authors believe but it would be agreeable to say is not a well-known or practiced view. It is important to note that with the increase in pervasive use of digital technologies in the design of learning opportunities, there is need to include these contributions, not as new ones but more so as an expansion to the field. Furthermore, expounding on learning experiences as two separate tenets (one as part of the user space and the other as part of the learner space) as an introductory guide is a good for those new to the field. Thus a characterisation that topic is new as opposed to those who are new to field are now being introduced to the topic should be readdressed as it can be seen as being misleading.

How is the book organised

The book provides content on topics around three areas, Methods, Paradigms and Theories; Models and Design Frameworks for LX and the last area which is geared toward the application of learning experience designs, titled LX Design-in-Use. Preceding these three areas, the authors introduce their approach to the book which should prepare readers for terms which were used interchangeably (e.g., learning design vs instructional design; learner experience vs learning experience, etc.), and missing consistently presented definitions pertaining to the book title (e.g., UCD, LX, usability, etc.) throughout the book. Some of the chapters present a clear guide to readers as to the importance of the themed content and then others seemingly in presentation and narrative only scrape the surface. The chapters were not uniformly formatted

so as to present a guide to the reader as to the value of each. Instead, each chapter used its own guidelines to demonstrate its value which left the reader to make the decision as to what is key to know. Even with a perfunctory approach to reading, one can quickly miss gems of knowledge about Color Theory, Flow theory, Think-Aloud Protocols and participatory design methods. Thus, missing an opportunity for readers (designers) to enhance what is already known by situating their own knowledge in the space of UX/LX design.

Models, Paradigms and Theories introduced fields such as Interaction design and Human Factors (i.e., Human computer interaction (HCI) and User Centred Design (UCD)) and Management and Marketing fields (i.e., Theories of Change and Color Theory) as perspectives to be included when researching learner or learning experience. Some of these are contributions which are not pervasively used in the educational technology field and presented here as somewhat of a wake-up call. The chapters are seemingly positioned to address the foundational knowledge that learning designers should have in their toolbox. The tools include instructional design and learning theories as they are situated with user centred design and evaluation practices; understanding that principles of design is to guide behavioural change; the tools should include what some would call the cosmetics/aesthetics of the field and that designing for learning must acknowledge learning as a process and not as a state. Each chapter on its own has merit towards the overarching thoughts described in the sections title, but when coupled under such can be confusing through its presentation, formatting and reported positionality.

The second section, Models and Design Frameworks for LX as titled is a bit misleading but through the authors descriptions attempts to give voice to those who through a variety of confounding factors are linking known educational technology design processes to LX practices. The creation of a frameworks (i.e., sociotechnical and design implementation framework), understanding the actors in the design process and how they may or may not perform (i.e., novice designers), and determining where engagement collides with user experience and engagement are the key learnings in this section. Without sounding like a broken record, each chapter has its merits whereby there is value in the content independently but under the title and its associated description it can be misleading.

The final section “LX Design-in-Use” present cases where LX measures are delineated into researched tenets. Whilst a good start to the discussion of how LX can be used in learning/instructional design, the descriptor as “exemplars” can be deemed far reaching given that there are no qualifiers provided to assist in the differentiation of what makes the cases worthy of being replicated in method and form. The challenge is not that these can’t be exemplars, but rather what makes them worthy of being followed from a design perspective. The preamble to this section should have been detailed to explain the value readers should gain from this section, almost providing a map to how UX will enhance the design of learner experiences.

This book provides an introduction to the intersection of UX and LX for designers, but although well-intentioned [it] was challenged in succinctly guiding readers as to clear and concise way to

start from zero to being more informed. As an introduction, the use of terms interchangeably and synonymously along with a variety of beliefs like designers alone can benefit from understanding this space does not help. This space concerns all actors who use/interact/perform in and about it. Addressing UX not as disparate field but one that is embedded within the design process is loosely intimated but not succinctly addressed in the book. It seems, as presented to a novice designer, the more you read the more you will have questions with very few places to gain answers.