

book reviews

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Modular Instruction

Modular Instruction. James D. Russell. Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Company, 1974. 142 pp. \$8.95.

This is a "how-to" book—how to design, select, use, and evaluate instructional modules. Modules and modular instruction are known by a wide variety of names, from "learning paks" to "mini-courses," and the author begins with a synthesis of these tangential approaches. A clarification of this concept gives the reader and the author a mutual basis of understanding.

Russell's definition of a module is "an instructional package dealing with a single conceptual unit of subject matter." A module, as a self-contained unit, offers variety and adaptability to the instructional process. It can be used by an individual or small groups of learners in a variety of situations. It incorporates multimedia learning experiences so the learners can see or hear about the concept they're studying. A module may be several minutes or several hours long.

The rationale for the module concept of teaching has a sound basis in learning theory. Modules take into account individual learning styles, are flexible to meet variable learner needs, and place maximum responsibility on the learner. Modules also provide for active participation by the learner, reinforcing the theorem that we learn by doing. The author develops the rationale for modules and compares modular instruction with conventional instruction.

Russell emphasizes, from a sound administrative viewpoint, the importance of a feasibility study as the beginning step in the modular instruction process. He recommends that professionals first investigate whether this mode of instruction is feasible under local conditions. The next step is the design of new modules, if no modules are available.

Although this book is primarily for teachers in a formal classroom, the author points out the applicability of modular instruction to enrichment, remedial work, absentee instruction and correspondence courses. However, the astute Extension professional can readily identify implications of modular instruction for Extension work, since the concept applies to both youth and adults. Staff at all levels could use the guidelines to improve the quality of materials already in a modular format, or in the preparation of new materials.

Educational material could be organized in a modular format to increase its use as well as reach audiences not receptive to group techniques, or audiences whose work schedules conflict with traditional meetings. Inherent is a new role for the teacher as a resource and facilitator of learning. The Extension professional could use modules for recurring, seasonal questions to maximize his time, or for small groups working without a teacher/agent.

Russell has succinctly formulated a "how-to" process on a contemporary educational methodology with substantive support in theory and current research. His style of writing and organization reflects what a module should be. Read with a specific clientele in mind, either in or out of a formal classroom, this book has much to offer the professional who wants to explore beyond the conventional modes of instruction.

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