

Practitioner Profile

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Practitioner: Michael Cottle

Michael Cottle currently works for the Church Educational System of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, of which he is a member. He serves as the Coordinator of the DC Metro Area Seminary and Institute Program. He also oversees the Barlow Center, the home base for thirty-two interns from Brigham Young University working for various DC businesses. He also supervises the Institute programs at George Washington University, Georgetown University, Gallaudet University, American University, and Capitol Hill. Additionally, he supervises Seminary for the Washington DC Stake.

Mr. Cottle earned his Bachelor's degree from Brigham Young University with a major in history and a minor in family science. He also earned his Master's degree from BYU in Educational Leadership. He is currently working on his PhD in curriculum and instruction through Utah State University. He had the opportunity to do an internship with CES (Church Educational System) where he attended a workshop for teachers of Seminary and Institute. While there, he was asked to work in an instructional design capacity on the new Seminary curriculum for the *Book of Mormon* and the *Doctrine and Covenants*, two standard works of scripture for the LDS Church.

Background Information on the LDS Church

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints places a high value on education, both secular and religious. In addition to sponsoring three campuses of Brigham Young University in Utah, Idaho, and Hawaii as well as LDS Business College in Utah, they also offer religious education to high-school aged students through the Seminary program and to college-aged students and adults through the Institute program. Students in Seminary have three venues from which to choose, depending on their location and circumstances. One option is the Home Study Program where students complete daily lessons independently and then meet face to face with their instructor once a week. The second option is the Early Morning program where students meet every morning before school with their instructor and spend 50 minutes each day reading and studying the scriptures. The third option is Released Time Seminary, generally available only in certain western states, where religious education is incorporated into their school day. Recently, an online option has also been introduced. The goal of all the programs is to increase student understanding of the scriptures, to deepen their love for God and their fellowman, and to prepare them to teach others about the gospel both as future missionaries and as future parents and teachers in the Church.

The Church believes the Bible to be the word of God. Additionally, they believe the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants to be scripture. The Seminary and Institute programs rotate through each of these standard works, focusing on one each year. The courses of study for the Bible is divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament, with a year spent on each. Curriculum for each course of study has been in existence for many decades and

is periodically updated or revised. Such was the case recently and Mr. Cottle had the opportunity to participate in the revamping of the courses of study for the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants.

Curriculum Design Process

The development of this new curriculum took place over several years and began with the course of study for the Book of Mormon. The first two years were spent researching what Seminary teachers needed. This body of teachers is comprised of between 3,000 and 4,000 full-time teachers actually employed by the Church. It also has over 40,000 volunteer teachers worldwide. Their training and experience as teachers varies greatly and many were spending several hours each day preparing the lessons they would teach the next day. The need for a curriculum that addresses the needs of both beginning and experienced teachers as well as one that would lend itself to reducing the amount of time needed to prepare lessons was felt by Church leaders especially considering the rapid growth of the Church around the world. Research was done to ascertain what those needs were. It was found that teachers needed a manual that was simplified enough to be used by a beginning teacher as well as adaptable enough to be used by experienced teachers. They wanted it to be sequential and to draw heavily from the scriptures as well.

Several brainstorming sessions were held by the instructional design team. They had many retreats where they studied the input they had received from all over the world including Japan, the Philippines, and Brazil. They had thirteen writers and reviewers who began working to write the lessons. Lessons were given to writers and plans were drafted for each lesson. Then the writers would meet to discuss the lessons and give feedback. This process was repeated over and over with each lesson undergoing multiple rewrites. Eventually, the lessons were given to the Project Manager who would also provide input. The lessons would then go to the Director and the Editors, each of whom would give their feedback as well. Each lesson had to be reviewed by the Church History Department to ensure historical accuracy, and the Correlation Committee of the Church, whose responsibility it is to approve all materials produced by the Church to make sure they are culturally sensitive and doctrinally correct. When the final hurdle had been passed, the curriculum materials went to print and were distributed to Seminary and Institute teachers all over the world. The process was repeated for the Doctrine and Covenants, the Old Testament, and the New Testament. Mr. Cottle was present for the first two projects, but not the latter two because of his having been asked to serve in his current capacity in the Washington DC area.

Most and Least Successful Instructional Design Projects

When asked about his most successful instructional design project, he said it was probably the redesigning of the curriculum for teaching the *Doctrine and Covenants* because by the second time around, he and his team had a better understanding of the principles and processes involved. He did not feel any of his instructional design projects were unsuccessful, but did express that it required extra attention to detail to make sure the contextual and historical information included in the second curriculum was accurate and corresponded with that of the Church History Department. He also indicated that time was an issue because they only had one year to finish writing the first manual.

Mr. Cottle offered the following advice to up and coming instructional designers. After explaining the process each lesson went through and how the initial drafts of the lessons were changed, altered, and rewritten multiple times, he expressed the importance of leaving one's ego at the door and not feeling territorial about one's work. While many changes were being made to each lesson, no one felt negatively about it because it was a necessary process to formulate the best lessons possible. This attitude would be especially important when working on a project as a team. I thoroughly enjoyed interviewing Mr. Cottle and sincerely appreciated his time and his advice.

Professional Organization Highlights

Although Mr. Cottle is not affiliated with any professional organizations, I had the opportunity to research and learn more about the ASTD, the American Society for Training and Development. According to the organization's website, ASTD was started in 1943 and is the largest association for professionals in the field of training and development. It works to provide numerous resources to its members and to give them opportunities to come together in many settings including conferences, workshops, and online gatherings. ASTD sets the standard for best practices in the training and development field and provides the opportunity for its members to pursue the only credential in the field, the CPLP (Certified Professional in Learning and Performance). It also serves as the "voice of the profession" to public policy makers and to the media. Their mission is to "Empower professionals to develop knowledge and skills successfully." Their vision is to "Create a world that works better."

ASTD awards distinguished leadership and professional accomplishments through The Advancing ASTD Awards, presented to teams and individuals for their outstanding contributions to the goals and vision of the organization. They also recognize individuals for their exemplary leadership and advocacy through the Advancing Workplace Learning Award. Membership in the US is \$199 for one year.

References

Retrieved October 11, 2013 from www.astd.org.