

Book review

Map it: The hands-on guide to strategic training design

Cathy Moore
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418 pages

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Cathy Moore's book first piqued my interest when I was transitioning from studying the Master of Applied Learning and Teaching at Deakin University, to working in the education consulting industry as a Learning Designer. I enjoy learning while I'm being active – exercising, gardening, travelling, walking my poodle – that allows the new ideas to wash over me and marinate as I work. I got into watching videos by instructional design YouTuber, Devlin Peck who highly sings the praises of *Map It*, by Cathy Moore.

Moore's book begins by discussing the current state of education and training in the same light as my master's degree - that learners are not vessels to be filled with knowledge. While this paradigm has been understood since the days of Dewey (1938), societies shift from rote to

active learning has been challenging and remains incomplete because as Moore puts it, “it’s hard to imagine what else it could be.” Without practical approaches to evolving our teaching practice, we fall back on what has been modelled for us, perpetuating a didactic method of teach-then-test. Cathy Moore’s book, *Map It*, the hands-on guide to strategic training and design fills this skills gap by providing a simple framework to create engaging and impactful learning experiences in any context – action mapping.

Who is a learning designer?

In Australia, Learning Design is a more common role title than instructional designer though they may be used interchangeably. The most notable difference in my opinion is that instructional design is a term used alongside Learning and Development ‘L&D’ roles that sit within Human Resource departments for internal corporate training. Learning Design can encompass corporate training as well but may be more focused on formal education pathways with set learning outcomes and assessment structures.

Map It is presented in the context of the latter. Moore’s experience is as an internal or external consultant working with businesses for employee development. While my new career as a learning designer was to be consulting mostly with universities and vocational education and training programs, I could see from Peck’s videos that *Map It* was underpinned by the same adult learning principles I had spent two years studying, writing about, and researching. I was keen to see if the book could help bridge the gap between my academic experience to working “in the real world”.

The role of a learning designer varies greatly depending on the context. The problem that Moore’s book is trying to solve is in response to the very common engagement brief given to learning designers:

1. We need a course to teach a X.
2. The content is ready – here are the PowerPoint slides to build as a course.

Moore urges the reader/designer to challenge the status quo by (1)

removing the assumption that a course is the correct solution and (2) written content equals learning.

Applied learning and design thinking themes

Overlapping themes between action mapping and applied learning were immediately evident: Both acknowledge that the most effective way to ensure learning outcomes are met is through a student-centred approach that embeds learner agency in the course design and ensures content and assessments are relevant to what learners will do in the real world.

There are reasons instructional designers are called *designers*. Moore points out that it is the role of the designer to guide stakeholders in the direction of the solution which will best meet the needs of the client. Creative consulting industries have adopted the design thinking framework to help guide the process of ‘doing the work’.

At the same time, action mapping bridges to design thinking with its iterative method. The repeated cycles of prototyping and refinement balance philosophical ideals with tangible design skills. Action mapping enables learning designers to create authentic experiences focused on hands-on application and continuous improvement. It's a powerful framework for leveraging both theory and practice.

- User centred (student centred, empathy)
- Define the problem (what should learners be able to do)
- Iterative design (prototyping and feedback process)

Cathy Moore's action mapping

Cathy Moore's action mapping methodology leverages the highly complementary applied learning ideals and design thinking methods to provide learning designers with a practical toolkit to implement active, student-centred pedagogy. The book takes readers through the entire end-to-end design process. Moore models how to create a collaborative environment with all stakeholders on the design team. She identifies peaks and troughs the designer can expect to encounter and provides expert advice on how to best work with their subject matter expert, as a great working relationship can make all the difference to the finished product, which I echo from my own professional experience.

The mapping process transforms theoretical principles into concrete outcomes by starting with learner needs and real-world relevance. This grounds the approach in applied learning theory.

Action mapping empowers learning designers to guide stakeholders by framing the conversation around learner-centric solutions. The iterative approach allows fluidity in responding to emerging requirements and priorities. Storyboarding enables transparency rather than rigid adherence to initial plans. At its core, action mapping draws on design thinking to position learning designers as creative partners in achieving outcomes, not just as technicians implementing fixed instructions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Map It* empowers anyone designing adult learning with a practical toolkit, underpinned by solid pedagogical theory. However, while my personal experience and education illuminated the usefulness of Moore's action mapping, I'm concerned that the consistent corporate examples and business terminology risk excluding wider audiences. The book's questioning of whether a course needs to be made at all could create an illusion of separation from academic settings that don't afford such a challenge. Incorporating more examples from universities, schools and community programs would bridge this gap and showcase the broad applicability that originally drew me in.

Additionally, the pages of the book could greatly benefit from the addition of varied visuals like illustrations, high-fidelity diagrams and graphic signposting would breathe life into the design while demonstrating the creativity that Moore aims to inspire. None-the-less I heartily recommend *Map It* to anyone interested in creating engaging and meaningful adult learning experiences.

Reference

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and Education*. MacMillan Company, New York.