

Trends and Issues in Instructional Design and Development

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## Part 1

Prior to this course, I did not have a clear definition of Instructional Design and Development. I had never even heard of it until I was reaching available Graduate School programs at UAB. When I first heard the program name and knew it was housed in the School of Education, I assumed it was more strictly related to academic instruction and possibly the development of instructors as professionals. After reading through the program information, I thought it was more about the design of the material and figuring out the best way to develop and even deliver content for courses, topics or trainings.

While that definition is technically true, it goes deeper than what I first understood. I have learned that instructional design is much less of an individual or internal process of just the instructional designer. It is collaborative and relies on many people to be successful (subject matter experts, stakeholders, learners, etc.). It takes into account resource availability and feasibility to design intentional and functional instruction that solves a need. This field is also ever evolving and changing due to the way learners interact with information and technology that is available. Understanding how much intentional thought and analysis goes into each specific instructional project or design, and that it is less about overall theory or someone's specific design-style, I would define instructional design as the collaborative and systematic process of developing instructional material for what people need to learn and how people learn today and in the future.

As we delve into how learners learn and designing content that is learner-centered, it can feel as though we are walking a line between ethical design and

manipulating learners by using what we know about them to get them to pay attention. As we approach design opportunities and encounter real-world complexity, we can use a corporative approach working with learners to ensure that we aren't crossing into a manipulative approach. (Matthews & Yanchar, 2018) By treating the learners as collaborative parties in our stakeholder group, we are ensuring that we are achieving the goals for everyone involved.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, "new technology forces learners to process and apply information in a very different way and at a very different pace from any other time in history." (Zain, 2016, p.17) Because of this, Instructional Design and Development professionals not only need to focus on and understand what the learner needs to learn but they also need to stay on top of changes in environment and technology to ensure that what they develop and design will be easily received and relevant to the learner.

Instructional Design and Development is not an individual or single process that always matches the initial request from a stakeholder. It requires Instructional Design and Development professionals to consider things from every possible angle. To do this, Instructional Design and Development professionals need to work with all stakeholders to gain information and see what expectations are for the learner, the instructor, subject matter expert, and other stakeholders. These relationships and connections are not a one-and-done, simple conversation but rather information gathering and analyzing that requires input throughout the process and the evaluations of the intervention. Working with this information an Instructional Design and Development professional can begin the process of analyzing and ensuring that what is designed will be effective in filling any gaps. (Bass, Kryder, 2018) Communication and

collaboration with these groups will need to remain open with all stakeholders throughout the development process and while evaluating success.

Not only does Instructional Design and Development require collaboration on specific projects but also within the field and ID community. The field has experienced great evolution during the past 30 years, with Gange, the internet, computer-assisted learning, etc., and will continue to as technology and our environments evolve. Collaborating and following trends of others in the field and those teaching the field, can bring useful introspection and continue to allow the field to grow and evolve as times continually change. (West, Thomas, Bodily, Wright, Borup, 2017)

### **Part 2**

My personal Instructional Design and Development belief statement is that by focusing on the learner and how they respond to instruction, we can produce successful and progressive instructional interventions to meet goals. While this field and process is very systematic, I believe there needs to be a strong focus on the design of the content and specifically how it is presented. Learners are served content instantly and frequently. They are used to seeing content that is well branded and high quality from companies to social media posts from family members. A well-designed and developed course needs to include great attention to visual literacy, accessibility, and functionality in the final deliverables.

Instructional designers and instructors focused on learner-centered instruction need to remain aware of learner's attitude and behavior to understand the best ways to connect and reach learners. Understanding that technology and the way information is

presented can motivate learners and enhance the classroom is important to engage learners is important to consider and apply when developing instruction. (Ashfaq, 2017)

While learners are used to and familiar with visual communication, if used inappropriately or unintentionally in instruction, the visual elements can be more of a disadvantage rather than an advantage. Dynamic visual elements, such as animations or videos, require more effort to understand than static visual images. This means that dynamic visuals can lead to higher *perceptual learning* and static images can lead to higher *cognitive learning*. (Castro-Alonso, Ayres, Wong & Paas, 2018) If the objective is to have learners understand more complex ideas, dynamic visuals would be a better approach to reach achieve those objectives. If the objective is to have learners recall or memorize content, then static visuals would be a better selection. It is important that ID professionals understand when and how to best use visual elements based on the learning objectives at hand.

This new visual culture requires a greater understanding and appreciation of visual presentation of materials. Incorporating visual communication and design into material is a practical application of what learners will be expected to do in their roles and models that example. It also helps learners not only understand the instructional content but develop a deeper digital visual literacy that is required in our culture today. (Ervine, 2016)

Lack of alignment between assignments and skills that can be used in the future can lead learners to feel that course work is “busy work.” Unless a learner goes on to work in higher education, they will probably never communicate through term papers in their careers. This is not to say that term papers should be excluded but rather

## TRENDS AND ISSUES IN INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

Instructional Design and Development professionals should enrich course design and development to engage learners so they can experience the content in multiple ways, including visually focused ways. Not only do learners better understand a topic or material through this engagement, they gain skills of being more visually literate and are better able to visually communicate ideas in other contexts. This engagement can create a more memorable experience for learners. (Stoerger, 2018)

I'm still not sure exactly where I see myself in this field. The more I read and study, the more I feel at home with the content. The systematic approach is very similar to my natural thought process and approach to projects or problems. I ask a lot of questions and really engage my clients or stakeholders on projects to identify what we are truly wanting to achieve rather than merely crossing off a task exactly as requested or creating a band aid for a larger issue. I enjoy developing systems, programs and processes to meet business needs and presenting them in a visually and easily understood manner. I love to take complex ideas or cumbersome processes and present them in a very approachable and understandable way. I think my ability to solve problems creatively and manage projects for myself and team members I work with, is one of my greatest abilities.

Having a strong background in creative communication, I also bring a strong understanding of visual communication, color theory, layout, etc. to the table. I am not always the most creative or artistic person in the room, but I have an eye and understanding for how an idea can be presented and be more easily consumed by a viewer/user/learner through visual elements. While I can create these elements myself, I

also have a lot of experience in directing and communicating ideas to work with other creatives to execute.

Considering these ideas, I think developing processes and programs along with job aids for learners to be able to easily step into a role, would be a good fit for me in this field. One thing I have also done in every job I have had is made what I've called a "desktop guide" for my position but also for other positions as well. I document tasks that are specific to the role and make them easy to find and work through. It has helped me to be able to outline and quickly communicate what functions the role is responsible for, especially where there are several small tasks that can be hard to explain or justify value to during a performance evaluation. These have become great tools that have allowed me to quickly create new processes or identify processes that are cumbersome and need to be streamlined or automated.

I've also been part of taskforces and committees to brainstorm ideas or even investigate employee perception of processes and leadership to identify areas of opportunities. In these groups, we've then worked to develop plans and present the ideas to leadership for adoption and execution. Developing ideas for improvement, based on need, and creating templates or models that are easy for someone else to step into and execute on an on-going basis, is something I think would leverage a lot of my background and interests.

### **Part 3**

Trends in technology innovation and the way people receive information instantaneously has impacted the ID field tremendously. People have less of an attention span and seek instant gratification. This hinders the way that more traditional

instruction can be successful. Those in the field need to be aware of those changes, understand how it affects learners and stay on top of ways to adapt and respond to those shifts.

Based solely on the recent pandemic, I think a large shift of eLearning is going to further shape the field. As universities, industries and businesses are quickly adapting to more remote delivery of services, learning and working, they are also finding there is more opportunity for success than may have previously been thought possible. We are going to need to watch and adapt to shifts to more remote learning and working as blended or hybrid opportunities evolve. Instruction will need to be easy to access and available for various modes of consumption and participation. While I think this was a trend prior to the current pandemic, things are starting to propel towards that even more quickly. Remaining responsive and flexible is going to ensure that the field grows with the trends and changes.

Design of any kind requires flexibility and adaptability. The future of the Instructional Design and Development field will be no different. Instructional Design and Development professionals will need to continually experiment with alternatives and look for evaluation in design that meet current needs. (Brown, 2018) Some of these adaptations may surprise or shock but need to be continually explored to ensure that we continually adapt to culture and how to best connect with learners.

As we look to move to more blended approaches of ideas and instruction that have served well in face-to-face classroom models, Instructional Design and Development professionals are going to need to consider how moving to blended or eLearning will impact that content. (Hack, 2016) Will that approach translate to another



environment and how can we develop rich and meaningful learning environments? This will call for more creativity and ensuring alignment with learning objectives.

With an increase in online environments in the future, there is going to need to be increased Instructional Design and Development support on the content so that instructors can focus on the connection with the learner. Learners will expect support and guidance from their teachers on how to interact and communicate online but it is not reasonable in all situations to expect them to also be responsible for converting and designing their instruction to fit online environments. (Rozitis, 2018) This will lead to a greater demand and focus on Instructional Design and Development professionals and their ability to create engaging instruction that can be delivered online or in hybrid forms.

As we have already begun to focus on eLearning, there is a need for ensuring that content translates well to the delivery method. eLearning will create barriers and issues that in-person instruction has not encountered and designing a blended experience of these two will continue to require thoughtful and intentional development. These efforts will also result in a continued need for comprehensive rubrics to ensure that eLearning is as rigorous and effective as traditional face-to-face environments. (Debattista, 2018)

### **Part 4**

I am an experienced visual communicator, so the design process is my favorite and where I think my background and skills really shine. I understand color theory, layout best practices, use of white space, can create motion graphics and have a knowledge of coding so I can develop things in various mediums. I am able to my own graphics and illustrations as needed but also understand copyright issues and have

sources that I reference for open source use. I am also confident in taking a large concept or idea and breaking it into smaller, more digestible pieces of information. This will help me to formally approach developing learning objectives, tasks and sub tasks before the design work begins. I work with highly technical people and have experience “translating” their ideas and information to a more general learner which will help as I approach learner analysis on Instructional Design and Development projects.

Assessments are the most challenging part for me. Developing quality and effective assessment tools, early in the planning process is hard for me to wrap my head around. I want to jump into the design and get to the nuts and bolts of that. However, without considering and planning for what will qualify as a successful instruction or intervention, a lot of time and effort can be wasted and result in an unused product. While this approach makes sense to me and the way I learn, I want and need to be more able to communicate how it should work and what success looks like so I can receive buy in and confirmation from other stakeholders rather than questions of that nature at the end, when it feels more like having to prove a process *might* be successful.

To more fully immerse myself in the field, I have found Facebook groups with instructional designers. Currently, I am more of an observer than a participant but am interested in how Instructional Design and Development professionals work in the real world. What projects they have questions on and how they are applying their knowledge. I also like to see examples of their work as part of my ideation for new projects and how I can expand my toolset and build on ideas. I am also looking at

professional organizations and companies that offer instructional design services to see what is trending and start building a network of connections in the field.

My current employment is as a graphic designer on a communications and marketing team. There are a lot of parallels to what I am studying and how I approach real-life projects in this role. However, my role is not specifically focused on the design of instructional material, nor is it systematic. I have worked with my current manager to develop a professional goal that will allow me to approach an upcoming project with more of a focus on the instructional material. I want to see how this systematic approach can be applied to what we do and result in more effective communication products. This project is low priority but something that is safe for me to experiment with and will provide me with a hands-on experience and I am hoping will result in concrete data that will allow me to explore other similar opportunities in the future.

Our office provides templates for PowerPoints and other documents to our department so employees can produce branded content on their own, if it is not a large enough project that our team needs to create it. I want to make these templates more accessible and increase adoption and usage with the employees. I am working on how to develop a way for the employees to be aware of the templates, properly use them and expand their knowledge of effective communication in the process.

In addition to these efforts, I am also reading articles and books to better see what is happening and understand how it relates to my experiences and backgrounds. The next book I am ordering is, *Design for How People Learn* by Julie Dirksen. This was a resource recommended in one of the Facebook groups I follow.

## Closing

In closing, the field of Instructional Design and Development is ever evolving. Those of us who wish to participate in this field need to understand the fundamental ideas and models to this systematic process but also be agile and flexible. We must diligently stay in tune with trends on a continual basis to ensure that we are moving and growing with the field.

There has been a lot of growth as more technology advances have happened. This has created not only new opportunities for delivery of instruction but also an understanding on the cultural and environmental impacts those technologies have for learners and how that needs to be considered as we seek to design successful interventions.

As individuals develop their own style and go-to tools in this field, it is important to understand how applying technologies and various communication will be received and if it will aid or hinder the learning experience for learners. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to Instructional Design and Development and requires systematically approaching each intervention to ensure that we are being intentional and thorough.

This is also community experience, within each intervention or project but also with one another in the field. We need to be comfortable working with stakeholders, communicating ideas, and continuing to follow research of our peers. It is important to build a network of connections and continue to stay current to learn from one another and what others are doing and learning about learners and how they evolve and learn as our society continues to grow and evolve.

**Digital Portfolio:** [jessikareed.com](http://jessikareed.com)

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