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Definitions of Learning Design & Technology

Initial Definition of Learning Design and Technology

Prompt:

1. *Before you read the textbook, explain in several sentences **your own definition** of the field.*
2. *Then read the textbook and **compare and contrast** your definition of the field to other definitions identified in Chapter 1.*
3. *Examine other students' descriptions of definitions, analyses of their definitions - **compare and contrast**, and career paths. What are the similarities and differences? **What can you learn from your peers' analyses and thoughts?***

Definition

My initial definition of the field (and the way I've been describing it to others) is that Learning Design and Technology (LDT) is the systematic planning of materials and activities to facilitate learning and performance. My experience with the field of LDT is primarily from prior coursework, so that is what has informed my definition. I have been emphasizing "systematic" because of the contrast between the processes I used in my former instructional design courses and the less methodical processes I use as a college educator.

While reading the various definitions described by Reiser in the first chapter of Reiser and Dempsey (2012), the first contrast I identified is that my definition doesn't explicitly incorporate technology. Despite its ubiquity, I don't think I could give a satisfying definition for the word "technology" without using a dictionary, but technology is what I mean by "materials and activities." Perhaps it's an issue of, "I know it when I see it," since the 2008 AECT definition and Reiser's own definition are also somewhat vague on the issue of technology (though both sources clearly go into more detail elsewhere).

Responses to Peers

One of the stranger issues within higher education is that many faculty have had no training in education. That was my situation when I started teaching. Because I study learning, I had some theoretical knowledge to help me make decisions, but what about new faculty in other fields? Generally speaking, we expect professors to figure out how to teach as they go along, and I would guess that most have encountered a professor who has NOT figured out how to structure and run a class effectively.

By less methodical, I mean it's common to plan one class at a time without having a larger framework, and to operate with only a vague idea of what objectives you want students to achieve and how your activities and assessments relate to those learning goals. I'm guilty of this myself (and hoping this program will help me kick some bad habits!). There's little incentive to plan more deliberately because it's not particularly expected and the oversight is so minimal. I work in the

Education Dept, where most of the faculty are former K12 educators, and influences of that teacher training on their course planning are clear in contrast with other faculty I know.

Interesting discussion! I'm curious about how to separate "learning" from "performance," since so many of us – Reiser and Dempsey (p. 5) included – used both in our definitions. Sometimes the distinction seems clear and other times not. For example, I can imagine situations where performance specifically is what needs to be addressed, and that, as Danielle mentioned, that might require "non-instructional solutions." I remember an example from an instructional design class I audited years ago about trying to get employees to use the office coffee machine instead of visiting a coffee shop. I don't have a corporate background myself, but I think that's why this example stuck with me – it's simplistic, yes, but draws your attention to the issues around changing people's behaviors.

I was just reading a text (not for this class) that defined learning as "an enduring change in behavior, or in the capacity to behave in a given fashion, which results from practice or other forms of experience" (Shuell, 1986, as quoted in Schunk, 2000, p. 2). When we discuss "learning," I feel like things can very quickly turn abstract – what is knowledge, how do know if someone has knowledge, can you have knowledge and not know how to use it? – so I think it can be helpful to focus on how learning is reflected in behavior. Generally we instruct because we do want a change in behavior, but not all behavioral changes require new knowledge or skills. So is it possible to change people's performance directly, or only their capacity to perform? Thanks for getting me thinking with your exchange!

Reference: Schunk, D. (2000). *Learning theories: An educational perspective* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey; Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Revised Definition of Learning Design and Technology

Personal LDT Definition

LDT is the systematic process of designing effective and efficient experiences to educate, train, and improve performance, using technological tools and strategies to optimize and individualize instruction.

Final Reflection

Prompt:

- *Engaging in these topics and projects, what do you think is the most important lesson(s) you learned from this course?*
- *How did this course and peers help you learn the lessons? What are the lessons learned and key take-aways?*
- *And finally, what are some areas, topics, and questions you would like to further investigate?*

As befits a course with "foundations" in the title, this course gave me a great sense of the breadth of the field of LDT. My experience with most of the topics covered is only introductory, but I feel like I understand much more thoroughly how these topics combine and connect to form the field. My biggest takeaway is that all of these elements – history, technology and media, learning theory, models, performance improvement, ethics, and career competencies – are necessary for successful learning design. I expect that this perspective will be valuable moving forward, serving as a reminder of the big picture as we begin focusing on more specific topics. None of these components function independently of the others, even if we emphasize different topics at different times. This lesson was partially learned through the connections made from week to week: thinking about how theories and models relate to sociohistorical moments, for example. I also found that writing my research paper gave me an opportunity to synthesis different topics. There were so many additional topics relevant to my research question that I couldn't address due to time and space restraints, and this emphasized the interconnectedness of these angles within LDT

One topic that particularly interested me was human performance improvement. Although I did know that improving performance is one of the main goals of LDT, I was conceptualizing performance too narrowly and did not appreciate the scope of this endeavor. I think this partly reflects my background – in the education sector, we less typically frame problems in terms of "performance", preferring more abstract, cognitive terms like "knowledge" and "learning" even when performance is really what we're interested in – and it stood out to me as something I should examine further if I want to make the transition into industry. I was fascinated by the readings and discussion about performance support systems. That unit prompted me to evaluate the designs of the systems I work with. Because of the varied examples provided by my peers, performance support was also one of discussion topics in which I feel I learned the most from my peers. Though my peers regularly helped me explore LDT in many different contexts by sharing their experiences, I found the examples from that discussion particularly vivid. This, as well as the closely related area of knowledge management, is definitely something I'd like to study further, and could see myself specializing in.