

Definition of Learning Design and Technology

Initial Definition

I originally defined Learning Design and Technology as “the systems and processes of positioning learners as active, autonomous, and reflective participants in their learning, facilitated by bundling instructional strategies and technologies designed to activate, engage, and motivate.”

After completing the initial set of readings for the course, and after reviewing my pre-reading definition, I can see I did exactly what Reiser identifies as the inherent tendency to think that the type of instructional design one does “is what instructional technology is ‘really all about’” (Reiser & Dempsey, 2012, p. 1). I can also see that my initial definition is a bit motley in terms of being stitched together with ideas from across the instructional technology definition timeline. This eclecticism may very well be a result of my experiences designing primarily asynchronous, self-directed online courses, which, despite the “self-directed” appellation that gets attached to this mode of online learning, presents for me an ongoing challenge to make truly learner- and learning-centered. Consequently, my definition of the field positions the learner as an active, autonomous and reflective subject in the absence of an overt source of instruction (other than the content itself).

I was surprised, then, to see the learning -instruction distinction made so early in the 1963 definition, which foregrounds “learning” over “instruction” (Reiser and Dempsey, 2012, p. 2), a distinction I assumed would have evolved later. Both the 1970 and 1977 definitions background media as just one more component in the instructional technology process, which is something that I feel is implicit in my definition. I will admit that it took some time in my own design efforts to overcome the attraction of using media (in particular, video) for the sake of using it rather than focusing on using the different media to best support the instructional strategies and, by extension, the learning objectives of the training. The 1994 definition adds the “theory” component to field, which is something that is not only absent from my definition, but is an element I had never considered in my state of freelance-instructional-designer solipsism since rapid e-learning development –still a relatively recent trend- seems to be grounded far more in practice, necessity even, than in theory. The 1994 definition also foregrounds the “improvement of learning” (Reiser and Dempsey, 2012, p. 4), achieved by incorporating different instructional processes, strategies and techniques. I feel that the 1994 definition most closely aligns with mine in terms of the emphasis on bundling instructional strategies and techniques to try to activate, engage and motivate the learner as opposed to relying on a singular mode of instruction.

Perhaps most glaring in my definition is the absence of an aspect for which the latest AECT definition (2008) accounts: performance. Many of my e-learning course design efforts have involved creating workplace training whose intrinsic goal is generally tied to enhancing employee performance by getting trainees to actually apply what they’ve learned (Reiser and Dempsey, 2012). From a design and development standpoint, creating online training that develops the soft skills needed for effective performance in many areas of today’s workplace is

perhaps my biggest ongoing challenge. In my next definition iteration, this idea of performance will definitely be foregrounded.

Reiser, Robert V. (2012). What Field Did You Say You Were In? Defining and Naming Our Field. In R.V. Reiser & J.V. Dempsey (Eds.) *Trends and Issues in Instructional Design and Technology* (3rd Ed. pp. 1-7). Boston, MA: Pearson

Final Definition:

“LDT is concerned with the meshing and mashing of systems, processes, and technologies with instructional principles, strategies and techniques to activate, engage and motivate users in an environment designed to facilitate learning or enhance performance.”

One word I would emphasize now in a definition of LDT is "environment" (as opposed to "course", "program", "training",etc); doing so seems to account for more contexts and technologies as well as keep the field fluid for any future contexts or technologies.