Defining and Labeling the Field: A Perspective and Position

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Table of Contents

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There are two main branches within the study of creating and delivering instruction that are expanding, converging, and intertwining as developments in communication, psychology, design, and technology emerge. A focus on how we instruct and deliver content to learners falls within the realm of instructional media, and a systematic approach to which we design learning and evaluate performance fall within the realm of instructional design. Key scholars such as Robert Reiser (2018) have aligned the label of the field, Instructional Design and Technology, with historical and scholarly references. In this paper, we will explore a brief history of instructional design, contemporary scholarly works in the field, and redefine and relabel the field to accommodate new growth and developments.

A Brief History of the Field

According to Reiser (2018), There have always been three primary instructional media, the instructor, the chalkboard, and the textbook. These tools for delivering instruction to learners have and continue to dominate many learning environments, despite rich developments in the world of instructional media. In parallel with the evolution of instructional media, an emphasis on the psychological implications of how humans perform and learn was simultaneously developed and paired with systematic design methodologies under the term commonly referred to as instructional design.

Reiser (2018) depicts a burgeoning boom of innovation and development within the field as it relates to learning and technology. The turn of the twentieth century brought visual learning to classrooms across the country, and the dawn of the mass communications from the 1920s through the 1960s increased the breadth of

instructional delivery methods. “The enrichment of education through the ‘seeing experience’ [involving] the use of visual aids,” was only the beginning (Reiser, 2018). The rise of mass communication through radio, television, and film was strategically leveraged to deliver instruction in both wartime and post-war reconstruction of American society from the 1940s through the 1960s. The advent of the computer in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s introduced automation into learning and built upon learning theories that were developing in parallel from influential learning psychologists and theorists like Skinner, Bloom, and Gagné (Driscoll, 2018). As instructional media expanded and developed, instructional design methods and models codified and matured. By the 1970s and 1980s, a systematic, or scientific, approach to designing instruction was widespread. Linear instructional design models like Dick and Carey and ADDIE were commonplace and described a large portion of activity surrounding instructional design.

Reiser (2018) continued to expound upon the technological revolutions of the late twentieth century and their implications upon instructional design and technology. The explosion of the internet, social media, and mobile devices has become a contemporary focus of early twenty-first century instructional designers. The media-rich nature of web sites, social media, learning management systems, and the support of high-speed broadband have brought instructional media back as an influential part of instruction and its design.

The definition of the field has shifted and changed over the last century. It has evolved from a focus on controlling messages and processes, to systematic approaches, and now ethical practices that aims to improve performance through process and resources (Reiser, 2018). An ebb and flow of media, technology, scientific

methods, and design approaches have dominated the field. Concepts of instructional media and instructional design continue to grapple and expand to embrace scientific and aesthetic approaches to designing instruction and learning experiences (Boling & Smith, 2018). This brings us to contemporary scholarly exploration and boundaries of instructional media, systems, design, and technology.

Contemporary Exploration

A survey of recent publications about instructional media revealed several interesting incorporations and expansions of the use of media to deliver instruction. YouTube videos, Instagram reels, and other social media are very influential in disseminating learning and reifying video as a meaningful instructional media (Shalawati et al., 2022). With the advent of new media, a burden is placed on teachers to play multiple roles as an instructor and media developer (Shalawati et al., 2022). This implies that it is important for instructors to find solid collaborators to ease this burden when designing instructional video.

Building upon some of the psychological components of learning theory, Tomita (2018) found that Cognitive Load Theory and John Dewey's aesthetics point to the importance of the way in which our learners engage with instructional media. Removing cognitive barriers and providing a positive, welcoming visual experience for learners can motivate them to engage and connect with the materials (Tomita, 2018). Tomita continued this research and expanded upon it four years later to include a more holistic approach. Factors like reading habits, attitudes towards a subject matter, and everyday media experiences affect learners' visual perceptions of instructional media and should be considered in the design of instructional media (Tomita, 2022). This holistic view of

aesthetics with instructional design pushes the field to pursue a better understanding of learners' emotional and motivational states to enhance and elevate their learning experiences through visual and graphic design practices.

In addition to influential visual design practices, learning experiences through web-based learning have provided experiences with technology as an instructional media and has been proven to increase learning motivation (Madziatul et al., 2021). Their study examined how the use of media within learning experiences leads to further clarification of concepts, and perhaps deeper understanding by the learner (Madziatul et al., 2021). This web perspective blended with digital media can be extended to help learners' cross borders and support varying needs of learning styles and environments (Grothaus et al., 2021). Understanding learner preferences and behaviors across digital cultures and learning environments can provide insight to best support learning through digital media (Grothaus et al., 2021).

Technological revolutions have continued to evolve instructional media and increased the demand for which instructional designers should expand their skills to meet the changing needs of designing instructional materials. There's a gap between instructional design methods and how designers make design happen, according to a study that pointed out a lack of preparation in instructional design programs concerning user-interface design and front-end website development (Tomita, 2021). The role of media developers or media practitioners is not well documented, with a widening gap in the literature between media selection and media production (Tomita, 2021). To make efforts towards closing this gap and to create inclusivity within the field for media

practitioners, “it is critical [for instructional designers] to learn how professional media developers make judgments” (Tomita, 2021).

Building upon the gap present in the body of literature, recent graduates of instructional design programs have also been found to focus too heavily on design models, and institutions have sought to improve graduate outcomes by adding additional training surrounding interpersonal communication, however, permeations into the field concentrated in creative problem solving, human-centered design, and leadership may better reflect the real-world environment of instructional design (Tracey et al., 2022). According to this study, encouraging and developing instructional designers to leverage leadership skills with purpose to resolve conflict, communicate, coordinate, negotiate, and cultivate a design community may prepare them for success in functional instructional design (Tracey et al., 2022).

The discourse within the academic community presented above centers around how the field is transforming because of shifts in instructional media and widening skill gaps between what academics see as instructional design and how functional instructional design plays out in practice. Today, there seems to be a stronger emphasis on the ethical, aesthetic, and empathetic qualities of design that incorporate an instructional media forward approach while meeting some or all the systematic and scientific design requirements of traditional instructional design models.

A New Definition and Label of the Field

Within contemporary discourse about the field, definitions of instructional design vary. Some academics view instructional design through a lens of performance. A recent study about post graduate instructional design consulting uses the Association for Talent

Development's definition of instructional design, where designing is creating learning experiences and materials that develop learners in applying knowledge and skills (Gardner et al.,2021). Others continue define instructional design through a more procedural lens, where design is the process of, "translating principles of learning and instruction into plans for instructional materials, information resources, and evaluation" (Ní Shé et al., 2022). Together they surround the dichotomy of the aesthetics and systematic approaches to defining design reflected in the academic discourse mentioned above (Boling & Smith, 2018). Equally important to the field is the incorporation of instructional media and materials.

Several components that begin to define the field emerged within the literature. In the literature, components of learning theory, film and video production, visual and graphic design, interactive media development, project management, leadership, consulting, data science, and design thinking are present in shaping what constitutes a learning experience. These components manifest as skills within the toolbox of instructional designers, instructional media developers, and are also inclusive of emerging titles such as learning engineers. Common among expert individuals in this field is the keen ability to explore and solve problems (Stefaniak & Hwang, 2021). Learning problems are becoming increasingly complex as technology advances. Given an increased focus by technology companies to improve product experiences, and an increase in consumer expectations, developing and expanding instructional designers' skill sets and inviting experts from other disciplines into our field is paramount. "A paradigm shift in the field is occurring regarding how learners experience or should

experience learning, not just from a subjective or observation-based perspective, but also from a data-based perspective" (Saçak et al., 2022).

The incorporation of new media, multiple disciplines of design practices, and data-based decision making, are building upon foundational roots of learning theory and traditional instructional media. Based on research found within recent academic discourse, the field's definition is shifting to become aligned with interdisciplinary work that is performed by cross-functional teams specializing in emerging media, technology, design thinking, visual and experiential aesthetics, and the science of learning psychology. The work these groups are doing pursues a human-centered goal of improving performance through experiences that facilitate learning. Given a shift towards an emphasis on learning experiences and performance improvement seen across the field, the field should consider adopting a new label of Learning Performance Design and Technologies.

New technology and media drive a large portion of innovation and change within the field. Aiming to address how humans learn and perform at the intersection of innovations in technology and new media should remain at the forefront of our exploration. From the instructor, chalkboard, and textbook to the expanding and diverse media, business, technology, and learning professionals of today, the field is dynamic and continues to evolve.

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