

Chapter 3

The Role of Instructional Design in Transformative Learning

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ABSTRACT

As transformative learning is rooted in the belief that humans make meaning of their experiences, the incorporation of instructional design (ID) techniques in classroom management as a planning tool is well suited to learning environments in which the facilitator subscribes to Mezirow's theory. ID refers to a systematic process for developing instruction by following a prescribed model focused on accomplishment of desired learning outcomes. ID provides a clear, direct map to guide educators through the creation of lessons in accordance with curriculum expectations. ID is an appropriate tool for the practitioners of the three primary learning theories: behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism. Reiser and Dempsey described ID as a systematic progression of steps undertaken to develop education and training programs in a consistent and reliable fashion; it enables educators to take a modular approach to delivery of learning. This chapter explores the role of instructional design in transformative learning.

INTRODUCTION

Transformative theory as offered by Mezirow (1990) asserts that each individual makes meaning of the current environments based upon the individual's repository of prior experiences and that such exposure prompts individuals to action. Formal education and other intentional learning environments are no different. Individuals prior learning influences the likelihood that learning objectives will be met. Prior learning, while a term that implies formality, encompasses much more than the formal learning exposures heralding that significant portions of the learner's repository – prior learning – was incidental

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and informally acquired. Incidental, informal knowledge is gained through simple – almost passive – experiences such as watching a travel program and also gained through leisurely experiences such as visiting a museum.

As experiences are acquired, the individual's frame of reference grows. Mezirow (2000) suggested frames of reference are two dimensional. First, frames of reference serve as a habit of mind. As such, frames of reference include an individual's personally held beliefs, assumptions, predisposition and generalizations. The second dimension is the manner in which the individual expresses the first dimension. The manner in which an individual acts upon beliefs, assumptions, predisposition and generalizations is manifested in feelings, attitudes, and behaviors.

When an individual's frame of reference is no longer suited to the current environment, the individual experiences a need to acquire additional knowledge and skills. Mezirow (1991a) proposed the need for change – or transformation – is followed by deliberate critical reflections. Mezirow's work produced the concept of transformative learning (2000) that enable the individual to acquire new frames of reference that are more suited to the current reality of the individual. Mezirow (2000) identified specific phases of transformative learning:

- A disorienting dilemma;
- Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame;
- Critical assessment of assumptions;
- Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared;
- Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions;
- Planning a course of action;
- Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans;
- Provisional trying new roles;
- Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships;
- Reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspectives (p. 22).

Mezirow (1991a) believed learning was either instrumental or communicative. Instrumental learning provided answer to "how" and scaffolded prior learning experiences with new ones that grow the knowledge and skill base of the learner. Communicative learning more aptly addressed the "why" and enveloped critical assessing and reflecting skills.

Emancipatory learning fits snugly in both the instrumental and the communicative fields. First noted by Habermas (1971) and later affirmed by Mezirow (1978), emancipatory learning referred to the liberation that occurs through learning as old (prior) learning is replaced by newfound knowledge or skills. In education centers of today, most faculty espouse the approach of leaning equating emancipation. To that end, concepts such as flipped classroom and instructional design have flourished.

Instructional design integrates learning theory with prescriptive activities intended to accomplish learning objectives. With theory as the guiding principle, instructional designers manipulate the learning environment to produce learning outcomes consistent with stated objectives. Instructional design (ID), also known as Instructional Systems Design (ISD) refers to the discipline of developing instruction delivery. Instructional design developers can be found in traditional classroom settings, online learning management systems, corporate training rooms, and just about any environment where planned learning occurs. A variety of instructional design models exists to guide practitioners in the development and delivery process. While the framework has existed since the mid twentieth century, the introduction of

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