

Chapter 46

Traditional Instructional Design for Online Learning vs. Unconventional Instructional Design

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ABSTRACT

In the field of online learning, instructors need to move past the limitations that are imposed by a traditional instructional design mindset and embrace new ways of approaching instruction. Online learning can remove barriers of space and time and provide a learning experience that is focused on the learner. Educators need to understand the way technology is reinventing communication and enhancing how information is processed. Only by accepting the unconventional instructional designs that technology can bring, can educators be prepared to reach and teach the students of this digital age.

INTRODUCTION

In just a few decades, the advent of the internet has opened the door for a whole new world of instructional methods. From virtual classrooms and learning communities to virtual high schools, online learning provides new opportunities for both the teacher and the student to engage the learning process. Some educators claim that online learning may drive traditional conduits

for education, such as schools and classrooms, into extinction.

Although these claims may be extreme, there is no denying that all levels of the educational system are increasingly embracing online learning as a viable method for educating students. In higher education, researchers have estimated that as of fall 2007, over 3.9 million students were taking at least one on-line course, and that the number of students taking on-line courses increased by 12.3% from the previous year as compared to the 1.2% of overall growth of higher education students

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(Allen & Seaman, 2008). The addition of online learning in the postsecondary system has allowed many nontraditional students, like adult learners opportunities to continue their education within the framework of their needs. Besides postsecondary education, there has also been more growth of online learning in secondary education. Although it is more common to see a high school offer a few online courses as an option for students, in Florida there is a movement to make an online high school, to which students throughout the states can have access (Prabhu, 2009).

According to Driscoll (1998), online learning has also opened up new methods of the delivery of instruction in the workplace. As businesses and employers seek to educate and train employees and clients, they have found that on-line learning provides a myriad of benefits, such as lowering costs from travel, reducing time of training, and allowing easy, convenient and quick access for the learner.

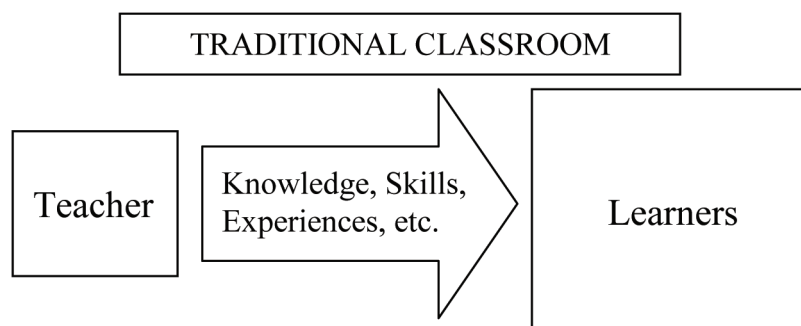
With all these new, growing avenues of online learning, instructional designers are given the task to transform traditional forms of education that occurred in a classroom into a virtual environment with limitless possibilities. With new technology come more possibilities to expand the way teaching and learning takes place. Technology and online learning offers synchronous and asynchronous interactions between teachers and students. Multimedia, virtual environments, and

networking provide alternative avenues to engage learners. Unfortunately, just because technology is added to the learning process does not mean that instructors will change their viewpoint on teaching or their teaching styles (Cuben, Kirkpatrick, & Peck, 2001). Instructors and instructional designers who have traditional styles of teaching or viewpoints on teaching often produce on-line instruction with a traditional design framework.

Figure 1 shows a basic example of a traditional classroom model with a teacher communicating knowledge, skills, and experiences to the learner. This model can be found as the predominant mode of teaching in most schools, universities, and training programs. There are many characteristics of the traditional classroom model. Several of these are listed below:

1. The teacher and the learners meet in a designated, physical location.
2. The teacher and the learners meet at a designated time for a predetermined length of time.
3. A majority of the learning occurs in the classroom with some expectations on the learner for self-study and work outside of the classroom.
4. The content to be learned is typically structured by the teacher and focused around preset objectives.
5. The pace of the learning is set by the teacher.

Figure 1. The Traditional classroom model



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