Definition of Instructional Technology

Since its establishment in 1923, the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) has been the leader in the field of Instructional Technology. As the leading organization, the AECT has defined and redefined the field over the years to respond to the changes in emerging technologies, theories and functions of instructional technology professionals in the field. The most recent definition of Instructional Technology published by the AECT in the book "Instructional technology: the definition and domains of the field" by Seels & Richey (1994).According to this definition "Instructional Technology is the theory and practice of design, development, utilization, management, and evaluation of processes and resources for learning."(Seels & Richie, 1994, p. 1).This definition was officially adopted as the organization's and the field's political stance until recently when, technology, theory, and practice has once again changed the field and the way professionals in the field function in the workplace. AECT has been working on redefining the field to reflect recent changes in the field. In January 2008, the AECT's efforts resulted in approval of a new definition for the field. The new definition indicates that "Educational Technology is the study and ethical practice of facilitating learning and improving performance by creating, using, and managing appropriate technological processes and resources." (Januszewski & Molenda, 2008, p.2). While the new definition builds on the definition proposed in 1994, several changes can be observed. Analyzing these changes in the definition of the field will help understand how the field is now perceived by professionals. The following paragraphs attempts to explore the similarities and differences between 1994 and 2008 definitions.

There are a number of common themes in the 2008 definition and the 1994 definition.   These themes include: the emphasis on theory and practice; focus on use of theories and models, and importance of resources. In addition, although it appears that the new definition does not include the domains of the field (design, development, utilization, management, and evaluation), they are embedded in the meaning of the concepts of "creating, using, and managing" (Richey, Silber, & Ely, 2008). Thus, one may conclude that by incorporating the words *create, use, and manage,* in lieu of design, development, utilization, management, and evaluation, the definition of the field is broadened to incorporate alternative approaches other than the Instructional Systems Approach (ISD) (Richey, Silber, & Ely, 2008). With both the 1994 and the 2008 definition, there is still an emphasis on the blend of theory and practice. This theme was emphasized in 1994 by using the term "theory" and in the 2008 definition with the word "study". Also, both definitions emphasize resources for learning.

In spite of the similarities, there are major differences in the 1994 and 2008 definitions. These differences include: the replacement of "instructional" with "educational, the emphasis on improving performance, and the inclusion of "facilitating learning". First, the AECT has replaced the term "Instructional" with "Educational". Professionals in the field have used the terms "Educational" and "Instructional" interchangeably throughout the years. Educational technology often referred to a wide range of systems in the process of human development. Instructional technology, on the other hand,

was used to specifically point to the processes and systems of learning and instruction (Gentry, 1987).Using the broad concept of educational technology as its framework, the current definition of the field is referring to a change in the professionals' perspective with regard to human development. This change could also be due to the fact that the emergence of the new technology has broadened the concept of human development and expanded the concept of instruction to include management of technological resources (Richey, Silber, & Ely, 2008).

Second, by including "improving performance" in the latest definition, the emphasis is no longer placed on learning solutions or knowledge but on the impact the products or knowledge have on an individual or organization. Furthermore, while an instructional technologist analyzes the performance problem experienced in a situation to propose a learning solution, the analysis may suggest that learning is not the proper solution to solve the performance problem. For example, a non-instructional solution may be changing the lighting in an office atmosphere to decrease the glare on the computer screens and therefore, improving performance. The term "improving performance" in the 2008 definition de-emphasizes the creation of learning solutions or products for all performance problems. In other words, the Instructional Technologist's objective is to increase the productivity of an organization or personnel. The emphasis on performance creates a bridge between Instructional Technology and Human Performance Technology (HPT) (Richey, Silber, & Ely, 2008). As Kenneth Silber stated ". . . it finally clarifies the relationship of ET [Educational Technology] to HPT in a way that will promote dialogue and cooperation between the two highly related fields." (2008, p. 25).

Finally, the 2008 definition includes "facilitating learning". Januszewski & Molenda (2008) contend that this inclusion implies a shift in the concept of instruction. The term "facilitating learning" clarifies the role of the instructional designer as a facilitator of learning rather than a preparer of products for learning. Given this emphasis, the instruction is learner-centered and situational. With the use of context based instruction, the learner is able to construct his/her knowledge based on prior experiences or through peer collaboration. This can be done through a variety of delivery systems such as computer-based instruction, web-enhanced environments, or face to face instruction. By creating the learning environments an Instructional Technologist guides the learner rather than providing direct instruction (Richey, Silber, & Ely, 2008).

In sum, by incorporating the term "Educational" instead of "Instructional", the definition has broadened the scope of the field. Although the domains are no longer mentioned by name, the use of "create, manage, and use" encompass the systematic activities of the former domains. Finally, the definition still holds true to the systematic process but now is allowing for a variety of mindsets and Instructional Systems Design models.