

Definition of Instructional Technology

The definition of Instructional Technology (IT) has taken many forms over the past 44 years and it is widely accepted by scholars that the emerging field of IT still seeks to clarify its definition (Seels & Richey, 1994). The field of Instructional Technology first began formally defining itself in 1963. The original definition has morphed many times since its conception, with each change allowing for new horizons for the field.

The field of IT actually goes by two names: “Educational Technology” and “Instructional Technology.” People who prefer the term Instructional Technology argue that the word “instructional” better describes the function of technology. They also say that it better encompasses a wider range of situations since the word “educational” can be perceived as applying to only a school or educational setting (Seels & Richey, 1994). Those who prefer the term Educational Technology counter with their argument that instruction is a sub-set of education and therefore Educational Technology better represents a broader range for the field (Saettler, 1990). Alas, most professionals use the two terms interchangeably today. Instructional Technology appears to be more commonly used in the United States while Educational Technology is preferred in England and Canada (Seels & Richey, 1994).

The word “technology” in the term Instructional Technology must also be understood before defining the field as a whole. “Saettler (1990) speaks of technology as focusing on improvement of skills and organization of work rather than on tools and machinery. Modern technology is described as systematized practical knowledge which improves productivity” (Seels & Richey, 1994, p. 6). Many believe that science and technology are inseparable; however, science and technology are merely related. Technology does, indeed, include science as a function, but it also “includes improvements in processes and tools that allow one generation to build on the knowledge of a previous generation” (Seels & Richey, 1994, p. 7).

Today, the most widely accepted definition of the field of IT is taken from the publication of Association of Educational Communication and Technology (AECT), which was published by Seels and Richey in 1994. The definition states that:

Instructional Technology is the theory and practice of design, development, utilization, management, and evaluation of processes and resources for learning. (p. 9)

The 1994 AECT definition may be deconstructed for clarification purposes:

First, it is assumed that the theory and practice of Instructional Technology are related. “Theory consists of the concepts, constructs, principles, and propositions that contribute to the body of knowledge. Practice is the application of that knowledge to solve problems.” (Seels & Richey, 1994, p. 11). Thus, practice relies on theory in that practice is the actual use of the information contained within theory.

Second, design, development, utilization, management, and evaluation are the five domains of Instructional Technology. Each domain is separate and unique and may be considered to be its own area of study (see Figure 1). However, the domains have a complementary and synergistic relationship, and the connection between the five is not linear (see Figure 2).

Third, processes are the procedures used to achieve a particular result; Instructional Technology processes are geared toward both design and delivery. Resources are the support mechanisms used for learning. They may include support systems, instructional materials, and environments.

And finally, learning indicates a change in knowledge, skill, attitude or behavior as the result of instruction (Seels & Richey, 1994).

Instructional Technology has found itself defined in a myriad of ways over the past 44 years. At last, with the wide acceptance of AECT's definition in 1994, IT stands today as an established field and profession upon a solid base of theory and practice with five domains for professionals to employ in the field.