

# Perspectives of a Dean, Department Chair, and Professor on the Role of an Instructional Design and Technology Program Within a College of Education

William Sugar, Trey Martindale, Diane Kester, and Marilyn Sheerer  
East Carolina University

In 2003 a senior university administrator asked our College of Education Dean to launch a graduate program in performance improvement. Because she was unfamiliar with the field of performance improvement, the Dean came to representatives of our Instructional Technology program, as well as other College of Education academic programs and asked: "Does your program do this?" As representatives of our Instructional Technology program, we (Sugar & Martindale) said "yes". This response led to many subsequent discussions to inform our Dean about the definition, purpose and nature of Instructional Design and Technology<sup>1</sup> (IDT) as a field and discipline.

We venture that these types of discussions are not unique to our particular institution. Administrators (deans, chancellors, etc.) may question the role of an IDT program within a College of Education and may be unaware of the purpose and value of an IDT program within a particular academic unit. Within our own institution, our IDT program has been mistaken for the Industrial Technology program or the Vocational Education program.

We maintain that the identity of IDT as a field and discipline must be clearly defined and differentiated to maintain its value as part of a particular unit—in this case a College of Education. In this article we address this issue of definition and differentiation by presenting three perspectives—that of a professor, a department chair, and a Dean. We also describe our current efforts (based on these perspectives), to clarify the role of an IDT program within the College and maximize the value of this program to the College.

The history of IDT has been clearly documented (Saettler, 1990; Reiser, 2002). Originating as university media centers, audiovisual education departments were formed in the 1940s at various institutions (e.g., Indiana University, Syracuse University, University of Southern California). James Finn's seminal 1953 article, *Professionalizing the Audio-visual Field*, contributed to formalizing this emerging Audiovisual Education discipline

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<sup>1</sup> We realize that there are several variations of Instructional Design and Technology amongst universities. In this article, we will use this label to represent the current programs within this discipline.

(Finn, 1996). During the 1960s and 1970s, this Audiovisual Education discipline gradually evolved.

This transformation was illustrated when a leading professional organization in the field changed its name. The Department of Audiovisual Instruction (DAVI) became the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) (Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1977) and began to reflect a new emphasis on using a systematic approach to designing instructional activities. The emphasis on instructional objectives, Programmed Instruction, and behavioral sciences principles all greatly influenced the field (Saettler, 1990). The audiovisual educator who previously focused exclusively on using media (e.g., filmstrips) began to evolve into an instructional technologist who facilitated and managed the instructional systems design process (Ely, 1963; Schrock, 1995).

Edgar Dale's (1969) book, *Audiovisual Methods in Teaching*, illustrated the field's movement towards the systematic instructional design process. Dale wrote:

Today, we are viewing the entire process of education as a systems approach. In so doing we can successfully integrate the older, more familiar methods and tools of instruction with the new ones as we modernize the curriculum of school and college. (p. 7).

IDT as a discipline has diverse and contrary aspects. For instance, though the *systematic* approach is widely accepted as a primary emphasis of IDT, there are proponents who also emphasize the *systemic* approach in IDT (e.g., Davies, 1996; Reigeluth, 1996). Despite IDT's educational roots, Heinich (2001) argued that IDT's foundation should be based on *technology* rather than in education. Heinich delineated specific characteristics and principles of technology including: replicability; reliability; algorithmic decision-making; communication and control; and effect of scale (Heinich, 2001, p. 13-15).

By focusing on these aspects of technology, IDT could build a more effective knowledge base as a discipline, as opposed to becoming a "service arm" for the field of Education. IDT is a prescriptive science that

applies and draws upon behavioral, cognitive and constructivist learning theories (Reigeluth, 1983). This reliance on multiple learning theories leaves IDT in an ever-developing state. As Seels and Richey (1994) observed, "Instructional Technology is an evolving field that attracts theorists and practitioners from many other fields" (p. 87). Ely and Plomp (1996) also affirmed "educational technology has different meanings for different people." (p. xiii).

### **An Instructional Technology Program From Three Perspectives**

The many definitions and evolving nature of the field lead to the question: What is the role of an IDT program in a College of Education? We decided to approach this question by exploring the current status of the IDT program within our own institution. To understand the status of our program, the reader should have some background information about our institution. East Carolina University (ECU) is a large state-supported Carnegie-designated "research-extensive" university in North Carolina. ECU was founded as a teacher training school. ECU's College of Education has the 16th largest teacher preparation program in the United States in terms of enrollment.

ECU's IDT program (actually named "Instructional Technology"), offers two degrees—a Master of Science (MS) and a Master of Arts in Education (MAEd). The MAEd is designed to prepare students to be instructional technology coordinators in the public schools. The MS is intended for students who are interested in "non-school" options. Recent MS graduates are working in higher education institutions and providing instructional design and faculty development expertise.

Now we present three perspectives on the role of IDT in a College of Education. To illustrate these perspectives, the Dean (Sheerer), department chair (Kester), and a professor (Martindale) responded to the following questions about the role of an IDT program in a College of Education.

#### **Professionally and philosophically, where are you coming from as you describe your perspective of IDT?**

**Professor:** Professionally, I am a teacher. I have been an instructor in a number of environments including public schools, higher education, religious organizations, and health care. I have an eclectic approach to instructional design. Speaking very generally, I follow behavioral principles for simple learning tasks, and more constructive approaches for complex learning tasks. I understand that IDT as a field encompasses both the use of media and the design of learning materials and environments, and I advocate a very broad view of the field of IDT. I have a

doctorate in instructional technology and have been teaching graduate courses in IDT for six years.

**Department Chair:** My thoughts go back to the time when personal computers were coming onto the scene in K-12 education. Graduate students at ECU were being asked to take a course about computers but the only course available was Computer Programming in the School of Business. At that time, there was no graduate program in IDT. A member of the library science faculty developed a new course-- "Computers in Education". It was co-listed in Library Science (a department in the College of Arts and Science) and with Educational Foundations (in the School of Education). As technology spread in the educational arena, the MAEd was initiated and the Department of Library Studies was relocated to the School of Education. The programs combined into one department, thus, the College of Education became the home for new IDT-related courses.

**Dean:** In my training as a secondary English teacher I remember having an audio-visual course as part of my professional sequence and I don't think I took it very seriously! During the last 10 to 12 years I have been involved in dialogue around and planning for the integration of technology into teaching and learning. Yet, it wasn't until the last five years that I put Instructional Technology per se on my radar. During my five years as Dean of the College of Education, I have become much more informed about the discipline and its directions because of the very well informed faculty we have hired.

#### **Briefly define Instructional Technology.**

**Professor:** I support the Seels and Richey (1994, p.1) definition: "Instructional technology is the theory and practice of design, development, utilization, management and evaluation of processes and resources for learning." This is a broad definition that includes some key activities for IDT professionals. The last phrase is very important—"processes and resources for learning". Resources for learning means the artifacts—hardware, software, materials, etc., while "processes" for learning means using instructional principles and the current understanding of how humans learn to foster learning.

**Department Chair:** Coming from the field of education, my initial definition would be the use of equipment and media for teaching. My first master's degree was in audio-visual instruction. We designed and produced video, slides, audio, as well as visual aids to use in teaching K-12 students. To these technologies, we now add television, computers, and DVDs. The purpose of this area of study would thus be the design and application of variety of instructional media to meet the learning styles of students.

**Dean:** I now see instructional technology as a field of study encompassing the design of instruction, the integration of

various technologies into the instructional process, and the evaluation of the learning process.

### **What should students learn in IDT courses?**

**Professor:** Theoreticians and practitioners in IDT should be experts in developing and evaluating instruction, and should be experts in how to instruct. They should have extensive command of learning theories, and instructional models, strategies, methods, and media. They should also have some skill in media production and have at least a basic working knowledge of current hardware and software tools, to know what is technically feasible or possible.

**Department Chair:** Again, I will address this from the K-12 viewpoint. Graduate students should learn about the design, production, and evaluation of instructional materials. In addition, they learn how to teach K-12 students and teachers to use the application software in the teaching and learning process. The functions of the technology coordinator in North Carolina include: (1) planning and facilitating teaching and learning, (2) planning and facilitating information access and delivery, and (3) planning and facilitating program administration. The ultimate goal is to increase student achievement (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2002).

**Dean:** From my perspective, students should be learning how to design instruction with a focus on the integration of technologies.

### **Why is it beneficial to have an IDT program within a College of Education?**

**Professor:** IDT faculty and students may possess a number of different strengths that are beneficial to the College of Education. IDT specialists can help instructors develop instruction—particularly online instruction. In online courses, the instructor cannot “wing it” or get by on personality. Any lack of effective instructional design is readily apparent. IDT specialists can contribute to an effective online course by suggesting appropriate instructional strategies and teaching methods, and by recommending tools that enable those strategies and methods. IDT specialists can be consultants for teacher-educators and teacher candidates on how to integrate various technologies to enable successful instruction.

**Department Chair:** It has been worthwhile to be able to have IDT graduate students assist in the mentoring of teacher candidates during their semester when they take our “Technology in Education” course. Both parties gain from the experience and opportunity. Having the graduate Instructional Technology faculty sharing the facilities and labs has strengthened the instructors and the selection of software and hardware for all.

**Dean:** As Colleges of Education strive to serve their constituent groups in new and more accessible ways, the respective faculties need the necessary professional development to help them shift their courses and delivery modes. Having an Instructional Design and Technology program within a College of Education makes such support readily available and underscores the importance of a process that emphasizes design and the integration of technology, as opposed to simply moving courses and programs to electronic delivery.

Additionally, housing an IDT Program within a College of Education can help to promote the integration of particular IDT courses into the teacher education curriculum at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Although current teacher education courses certainly speak to instructional strategies, they do not necessarily put adequate emphasis on instructional design and the integration of technology. I am comfortable advocating for an Instructional Design Center, run by our Instructional Technology faculty, which all faculty in the College of Education would be encouraged to use. Such a Center would address the needs of an undergraduate teacher education program, as well as our varied graduate programs.

### **How do other College of Education faculty members view the role and purpose of this Instructional Technology program?**

**Professor:** That's a good question. I'm not sure other professors know what we do in our program. Because we have “technology” in our name, we may be viewed as “techies”—that is, experts in computer hardware, software, networking, or technical support. Sometimes the IDT program is mistaken for vocational education or industrial technology, or more commonly, information technology (management information systems or computer science). However, some professors do know that we have expertise in designing instruction for all kinds of venues, particularly online environments.

**Department Chair:** The only group I have discussed this with is the Adult Education faculty. They are confused since much of content in the program overlaps with adult education theory and concepts.

**Dean:** We have a ways to go in having other faculty understand IDT. Education faculty believe that they are experts in curriculum and instruction; therefore, they may not see the purpose in having faculty from IDT work with them on instructional design. Most likely, they currently view the program as having only a technology (computer hardware and software) focus. Yet, they realize they need help as they shift from face-to-face courses to an online format. This current situation probably provides a good opening for educating other faculty about IDT.

### **What are the differences between instructional design and instructional technology and what should our program emphasize?**

**Professor:** The word technology in the common vernacular of the day and particularly in public education has come to mean computer hardware and software. As long as technology is part of our name, we will likely be “pigeon-holed” as the computer people (e.g., tech support, networking specialists, computer hardware and software teachers). While we use computers extensively, we are not computer scientists, nor are we business and vocational educators. We are learning and instructional specialists. “Instructional design” is therefore probably a better term to describe our focus as a department, and “instructional design and technology” (IDT) is a compromise to be inclusive.

**Department Chair:** Instructional design should be used by anyone creating a plan or product for teaching. It does not necessarily include the use of equipment to help in the teaching. I see instructional technology as applying the design while using anything from a pencil to a VCR to a computer to help in the process of learning.

**Dean:** I prefer to use the term “instructional design” when thinking about the field but I am also comfortable with including technology in the identified name. Otherwise, why not merge the IDT faculty with the Curriculum and Instruction faculty? In other words, IDT goes beyond design in my head to include the integration of technologies.

### **Are there other issues that you would like to address?**

**Professor:** Our program clearly has a recognition problem when we get only peripheral consultation on matters of online instruction, particularly when the COE is adding online courses and enrollment each semester. I would argue that this is not a problem unique to our department, nor is it unique to our discipline in general. The current culture in higher education does not reward collaboration; thus, collaboration is rare. The result is that often even professors within the same department don't know what each other are doing, much less beyond the individual department.

We have very limited interaction between departments. Each professor is like a sole proprietorship, with an agenda that likely is so specialized that collaboration would actually be a deterrent to completing that agenda. In the same way a department has an agenda that may or may not coincide with other areas within a college or administrative unit. As long as individual research productivity is the standard for tenure and promotion, this will not change.

**Department Chair:** The dialogue in this paper identifies some of the current issues, not only at our institution, but also across the field. Where will the graduates be working and what will they need to know to be successful? For the K-12 technology coordinator, the emphasis is on the integration and infusion of technology in teaching and learning. The person holding such a position must be a leader in collaboration, identifying resources, and working with children and adults. For students seeking employment in higher education, business and industry, and private companies, the design, development and evaluation of instructional products is imperative.

**Dean:** We need to distinguish and articulate the similarities and differences between IDT and other curricular areas within the College of Education, such as Curriculum and Instruction. We need to start a dialogue between various stakeholders and IDT faculty to understand each other's strengths and value to the College of Education.

### **Summary of the Three IDT perspectives**

Overall, we are encouraged by the many similarities between the answers of these three stakeholders. All parties recognized the value of having an IDT program within a College of Education. The focus of our IDT program should be on instructional design in addition to the existing instructional technology emphasis. Our IDT program and faculty need to continue our efforts to provide faculty development to various constituents as we prepare to develop a Center for Instructional Design in the College of Education. We plan to provide this service to the COE while simultaneously conducting research to determine effective design practice, particularly related to online learning environments.

Despite our initial consensus on strengthening and enhancing the instructional design emphasis of our program, there apparently is an obstacle to overcome within our College of Education. As reflected in the Dean and chair's responses, there is a potential conflict with the College's Curriculum and Instruction department. The Curriculum and Instruction faculty will likely assert that they have expertise in instructional design. In many cases, this assertion is accurate and points to the past conflict of IDT and Education.

We must concentrate our efforts in marketing our Instructional Design and Technology program internally to avoid this conflict. The goal of our marketing campaign will be to build collaborative relationships between our IDT program (faculty and graduate students) and the Curriculum and Instruction faculty. Though we considered requiring pre-service teachers to take an undergraduate instructional design course, we believe this top-down approach would create discontent between Curriculum and Instruction and IDT. Instead we plan to develop small

group discussions between individual IDT faculty members and Curriculum and Instruction faculty members.

There are two goals of these discussions. We will first informally assess how methods courses already incorporate and teach known instructional design practices to students. Through this assessment, we plan to propose and promote additional instructional design practices within the existing Curriculum and Instruction methods courses. The second goal is to utilize the *Teacher-Designer* perspective as proposed by Sugar & Warren (in press). We plan to promote the idea that teachers (including pre-service teachers and “Methods” faculty members) are natural designers and that they should take a proactive role in designing effective instructional activities. Thus, the inclusion of effective instructional design practices does not create an “us versus them” situation, but a “win-win” situation.

Pre-service teachers who successfully incorporate these instructional design practices in their clinical internship will signify an accomplishment for IDT, Curriculum and Instruction, and the College of Education. Our goal for this dialogue is to create this “win-win” mentality and environment.

## Conclusion

Our recent experiences in helping administrators at our institution understand the role of our IDT program leads us to believe that the IDT discipline still has an identity problem. The Dean’s unawareness of the IDT discipline until five years ago is typical. Key administrators at respective institutions need to realize the value of an IDT program within their particular unit. It is imperative that the IDT discipline to continue to establish its identity within a College of Education.

Teacher education programs now emphasize proficiency with computer hardware and software. Colleges and Schools of Education now must include “technology” as an integral component of their conceptual framework (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2002). It is essential that instructional technology is not thought as only providing technical knowledge and assistance. The IDT discipline not only provides this technology expertise, by offers expertise in how to design effective instruction. We disagree with Heinich’s “technology is the root” emphasis. Rather, we advocate a “design is the root” emphasis. We believe that we can work within our College of Education with education as our foundation by proposing technological and non-technological interventions for our clientele (e.g., pre-service teachers and higher education professionals.). This will not create a “service-only” relationship, but provide a more concrete identity for an IDT program and a better

appreciation of the value of IDT within a College of Education.

If you are an administrator in a College or School of Education and are unfamiliar with your own IDT program, we believe that our recent dialogue and this article provide additional insights in how an IDT program potentially can add value to your institution. We believe that our experience is not an “outlier” and we encourage IDT faculty to take part in a collaborative dialogue with key stakeholders within their institution. This kind of dialogue should lead to a more coherent identity of your own program and an understanding of your program’s role in your college or school.

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