

A Pivotal Alliance

Traditionally marginalized within the academy, instructional designers and instructional technologists have adapted well to working in intellectual, psychological, and political isolation from the mainstream of campus engagement. Reasonably content in their positions, they have been satisfied—as have also their institutions—with the incremental improvements they have been able to effect in individual faculty members' pedagogy. Few have seen themselves as having strategic influence, much less as being in a position to proactively influence the direction of teaching and learning on their campuses.

Depending on their professional and educational backgrounds, those who view themselves as *instructional designers* might choose to apply creativity and the principles of deeper learning at the margins, within the limits set by the faculty-client. On the other hand, those who identify themselves as *instructional technologists* might direct their focus to the technology itself, without dwelling on the possible implications of its introduction into the teaching and learning environment.

Instructional designers and instructional technologists have now reached a stage of professional maturity marked by mutual recognition of the strategic potential of their collaborative efforts. Professional maturity tends to diminish the swagger of the technologist, and it confers on the designer a receptivity to the potential of new tools and techniques. Perhaps we are beginning to see a melding of these two separate identities in professional practice. We may even be witnessing the birth of a new professional identity, signifying the merger of instructional designers and instructional technologists into "e-learning designers."

The level of interest from both technologists and designers in participating in the pilot offering of the EDUCAUSE Institute Instructional Technology Leadership Program, which took place at Penn State in July 2005, is a sign that they are ready to work more strategically and collaboratively. Aware of the pivotal role these individuals could assume, the EDUCAUSE Institute faculty guided the participants through some new learning techniques and activities intended to expose them to the challenges, excitement, pitfalls, and rewards of leadership. The result was an active learning experience that produced a rich resource for those involved in instructional technology and design.

Moreover, owing to the availability and ease of use of Web-based tools, the resources and outcomes of one course or institute program can serve as the starting point for the next offering or professional-development experience. The same tools permit students and faculty collaboratively to construct knowledge. Betty Collis, Shell Professor of Networked Learning at the University of Twente in The Netherlands and a pioneer in designing collaborative learning experiences, describes these new learning activities as the *co-construction of knowledge*. She presented her research findings at the 2005 EDUCAUSE Australasia Conference in Auckland, New Zealand, in April 2005 (http://www.educause2005.auckland.ac.nz/?Betty_Collis).

But nudging faculty in new directions upsets the status quo—in both obvious and subtle ways. At its core, lecturing in the traditional mode has focused on repetition of the learning experience. Faculty members have generally been able to recycle lecture notes and class exercises, with minor tweaking each time the course is taught. Consider the consequences for traditional

on-campus courses, for blended courses, for online courses, or even for professional-development offerings if the expectation is that the "course" will be an exercise in the co-construction of knowledge. Students or participants might repeat certain learning activities and collaborations, but they will also be using the knowledge generated previously as the basis for their own learning. For faculty members, each iteration of the course makes obsolete the lecture notes and supporting materials prepared for the previous offering.

As the Internet and the tools for collaboration gradually become more deeply integrated into the process of knowledge construction, it seems reasonable to expect that those who guide the learning experience will need to be deeply aware of the thought patterns associated with their disciplines and will need to be able to develop those patterns in their students. It is at this pivotal point that faculty are likely to turn to the instructional designer/technologist for guidance. The question is: How will these instructional designers and technologists and their institutions respond to this opportunity?

Applying new learning and knowledge-construction activities in a campus setting could shatter conventional notions regarding the acceptable level of influence permitted to those in instructional support roles. This is the juncture at which instructional designers, instructional technologists, and faculty align in the creation of a new learning environment. This collaboration needs to be allowed—indeed, encouraged—within the context of a realistically informed institution-wide learning strategy. The consequences of this new alliance could be surprising, perhaps even astonishing.

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