

Agency and the Instructional Designer

Transforming Higher Education: Agency and the Instructional Designer

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Abstract

In addition to the important role instructional designers play in the design and development of instructional products and programs, they also act in communities of practice as agents in changing the way traditional colleges and universities implement their missions. Through reflexive practice, interpersonal agency and critical practice designers are important participants in shaping interpersonal, institutional and societal agendas for change. This paper draws on the stories of instructional designers in higher education to highlight their interpretations of their own agency in each context. These designers tell a strong story of struggle and agency in higher education contexts, and it is a story that portrays designers as active, moral, political and influential in activating change. By viewing the stories of instructional designers through the macro lens of narrative, we can better illustrate the scope of agency and community that instructional designers practice each day.

Introduction

Instructional designers in institutions of higher education (HE) play a critical and transformative role in encouraging faculty to think more critically about the needs of all learners, issues of access, social and cultural implications of information technologies, alternative learning environments (e.g., workplace learning), and related policy development. This paper draws on the stories of instructional designers in higher education to highlight their interpretations of their own agency in each context. Taken as a group, these designers tell a strong story of struggle and agency in higher education contexts, and it is a story that portrays designers as active, moral, political and influential in activating change. Recognizing that any single person's story of agency is by necessity narrow and contextually bound we attempt to weave these threads together in a collective narrative of the designers we've interviewed. We hope that by viewing the stories of instructional designers through the macro lens of narrative, we can better illustrate the scope of agency and community that instructional designers practice each day.

Conventional literature in instructional design concentrates very intensively on process—how instructional design is carried out, what strategies and approaches work in various contexts, and how designers should systematically practice their craft (c.f. Dick & Carey, 2005; Morrison, Ross, & Kemp, 2004; Seels & Glasgow, 1998; Shambaugh & Magliaro, 2005; Smith & Ragan, 2005). Bichelmeyer, Smith & Hennig (2004) asked ID practitioners what instructional design and technology meant to them, and while the most frequent response was that it was broad and diffuse, the second most frequent response was the ADDIE (Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, Evaluate) model or systematic design of instruction. This may signal the possibility of developmental levels—stages of development or growth in an individual's agency- perhaps younger or less experienced designers talk about tasks and technologies rather than larger implications of their work (Schwier, 2004). Recent research examining the actual practice of instructional designers suggests that designers do refer to conventional processes in instructional design, but practice varies significantly according to context (Cox, 2003; Cox & Osguthorpe, 2003; Kenny, Zhang, Schwier & Campbell, 2004; Rowland, 1992; Visscher-Voerman & Gustafson, 2004) and that key aspects of instructional design have been overlooked in conventional literature. For example, Gibbons (2005) argues that we need to re-examine the assumptions and foundations of instructional design and align it more closely to other design sciences such as architecture and engineering, while Campbell, Schwier and Kenny (2005) call

for instructional designers to frame their practice as moral action. And Bichelmeyer, Boling and Gibbons (in press) argue forcefully that the continuing focus in our field on ADDIE as a “model” of instructional design has a detrimental impact on both what we research and what we teach, and that the goal of faculty should be to develop instructional designers rather than to teach design models. In our interviews with instructional designers we have heard many stories of transformation that transcend the technical and systematic boundaries of conventional ID, even when instructional designers aren't necessarily aware of this transcendence.

We suggest that clients working with instructional designers in development projects are actually engaging, as learners, in a process of professional and personal transformation that has the potential to transform the institution; that this is a reciprocal process. Rogoff (1990) argues that participation in learning hinges on communication between people in a group, in terms of shared understanding or shared thinking. Glaser (1991), Tergan (1997), Ewing and his colleagues (1998), and others (cf. Gunawardena, Carabajal & Lowe, 2001; Thomas, 2002) believe that learning is most effective if it is embedded in social experience, and if it is situated in authentic problem-solving contexts entailing cognitive demands relevant for coping with real life situations, and occurs through social intercourse. The instructional design process, in which faculty, designers, and others develop new ideas and understandings through conversation, may be a form of cultural learning or collaborative learning.

In essence, we argue that clients (in our research this means faculty members, or “faculty”), while having high status in the institution, are actually novices in the teaching-learning community and are being invited to engage in legitimate peripheral participation in this arena. Designers may never achieve full participation in the university communities because they never learned their skills there as novices (Keppell, 2004). But the converse may be true as well; faculty participating in a *design* community of practice may not achieve full participation in the instructional design community of practice because they did not learn instructional design skills as novice academics. There seem to be multiple reciprocating or overlapping communities of practices in the process of instructional design—the community of designers, the community of the client's academic discipline, and the teaching-learning community within which projects are embedded.

We use the following theoretical constructs to challenge the discourses that contextualize instructional design as a rational, technical, non-subjective process: instructional design as a

social construct and critical pedagogy, in which designers act as agents of social change. In post-structuralist terms, we propose that instructional design practice is constituted by socially and culturally produced patterns of language, or discourse, with socially transformative power through the positioning of the self in explicit action (Francis, 1999). This construct is contrary to the idea of instructional design as decontextualized science. In other words, we view instructional design as a socially constructed practice rather than a technology to be employed.

In addition to the social implications of practice, we recognize that instructional design exists within a larger context of social change. A cultural shift has been occurring over the past decade in education – a shift towards environments and approaches based on the ideas of social constructivism. In this worldview, learning is situated in rich contexts, and knowledge is constructed in communities of practice through social interactions. Cobb (1996) argues that knowledge is not held objectively, but is unique, wholly subjective, and passed on by establishing common ground between the knower and the learner. This common ground must embrace interests and personal values, which requires a sharing at both the socio-cultural and the cognitive levels. (Ewing, Dowling, & Coutts, 1998, p. 10). Constructivists are interested in prior experience, but prior experience that is shared, through conversation, negotiation, and construction of new knowledge products. In other words, an individual's (designer's) practice, to which self-reflection is critical, will reflect his or her values and belief structures, understandings, prior experiences, construction of new knowledge through social interaction and negotiation.

Instructional designers widely engage in faculty development (Kenny, Zhang, Schwier, & Campbell, 2005) through both formal and informal learning processes. Learning occurs through social intercourse, or design conversations. Even though much continues to be written about the effect of technology and computers on society, designers have not necessarily recognized their agency in the development of a knowledge economy that reflects culturally biased views of teaching, learning, and the construction of knowledge. We believe that instructional designers have not been encouraged to examine their cultural values and assumptions critically, and we challenge the idea that the expert knowledge of designers, gained through education, experience and interaction, should remain unexamined.

Our team of researchers conducted a three-year program of research to investigate the roles of instructional designers as agents of social change and transformation in higher education.

Very little of the extensive work describing the development of theoretical models of instructional design (e.g., Reigeluth 1983; 1999) has been drawn from the lived practice of the instructional designer and, consequently, instructional design theory is not grounded in practice. Institutions of higher education increasingly seek the expertise of instructional designers to facilitate the strategic development of technology-based instructional programs, and the professional development of involved faculty who themselves become critically reflective designers of learning. Therefore it becomes important to examine the theoretical and experiential backgrounds of these agents of instructional technology, their personal understanding of and values related to learning with technology, and the relation of these to their practice and continuing professional development in the higher education setting.

This program of research investigated the nature and relation of instructional design practice to cultural change within higher education institutions, and implications for socio-cultural change leading to agency in the global knowledge economy. More specifically, we asked, "Can instructional designers be viewed as agents of social change and transformation, promoting the cultural shift "required" of emerging learning systems?" As part of this larger program of research, we argue that the practice of instructional design is collaborative, and the effective practice of instructional design requires that instructional designers draw on current and emerging knowledge and experience. In this paper we address how instructional designers describe their roles as agents of social change and transformation.

The Research Design

The stories reported in this paper were drawn from a three-year (2002-2005) study involving twenty instructional designers at six Canadian universities. Initially, we selected participants from Medical Doctoral Universities, those with a broad range of PhD programs and research, as well as medical schools. The participating institutions also have an administrative and/or academic unit whose mandate is to support faculty who, for the most part, are developing technology-enhanced, "blended", or online learning environments. Participation was elicited through a range of strategies including personal email invitations, advertisements on lists and in institutional communications platforms, personal contacts at professional meetings and through collaborative projects, membership lists from professional associations, contacts through

delegate lists from conferences, and visits to graduate classes. Sources of data include research conversations with instructional designers, email, and group meetings and/or focus groups.

Two different approaches were used for gathering data. Initially, instructional designers were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol, and participants were asked to discuss their backgrounds, identities, practices, communities and concerns. Participants were also encouraged to tell stories of their practice. Transcripts were sent to participants for correction, clarification, elaboration, and approval. Post hoc analysis of transcripts was done using Atlas ti software, and data were analyzed to identify shared themes and understandings. Two researchers reviewed each transcript and negotiated the units of meaning that were extracted from the data.

For most interviews, we used narrative inquiry and the storying of experience because they are socially and contextually situated interpretive practices, starting from the personal as “personal knowledge has a practical function, not in a technical sense, or as an instrument for previously determined outcomes, but leading back to Aristotle, as a source for deliberation, intuitive decisions, daily action and moral wisdom” (Conle, 2000, p. 51). Narrative inquiry is transformative, because as we critically examine ways to understand our own practice, the practice itself is examined and understood. In this way, thinking about and telling stories of practice requires a critical, reflective engagement leading to changed or transformed practice. Thus the methodological approach for the study mirrors a social constructivist framework for instructional design practice, which is one of social interaction and construction of meaning through conversation and within a community of practice.

Findings

The data, especially the stories told by instructional designers, suggested that instructional designers think deeply about their practice, and their professional and personal identities are intertwined in a zone of moral coherence, although they are sometimes required to practice outside that zone. The importance of values and how they informed the practice of instructional design emerged as a resonant theme that ran through stories that instructional designers told.

A Word about Moral Coherence

We contend that instructional design is a moral practice that embodies the “relationship between self-concept and cultural norms, between what we value and what others value, between how we are told to act and how we feel about ourselves when we do or do not do act that way” (Anderson & Jack, 1991, p. 18). Agency refers to doing and implies power (Hartman, 1991). Designer agency is at its most powerful when it is acted out from a foundation of moral coherence, where the designer's values are aligned with the values of the clients and their institutions.

Can instructional design be practiced in a morally incoherent environment? It often is; instructional designers with whom we spoke often felt at odds with the value systems of clients, their presumptions about learning, and even the culture and expectations of the institutions in which they practice. In some cases instructional designers must deliver products they don't believe in; some are assigned projects that offend their own value systems or challenge their identities as moral actors. Moral incoherence causes dissonance for instructional designers, particularly when they feel powerless to challenge the source of the dissonance, and may lead them to question whether they can stay in the profession. On the other hand, a strong sense of moral coherence among designers, clients, organizations, and ultimately learners contributes to a feeling of purpose and meaning, and probably leads to a high degree of contentment and commitment. We suspect that compatible, shared interpretations of moral coherence contributes to shared identity and a more coherent community of practice, and ultimately to greater impact on the transformation of the institution.

Agency is Multivariate

Through designers' stories of practice it has become clear to us that what we initially thought of as change agency was actually multivariate. The narratives revealed several different types of agency in play, intersecting at different points in practice and context; expressed in quite different and individual ways. Eventually, we came to characterize the expressed types of agency as personal, professional, institutional and societal, and now propose a complex and reflexive “agentic model of instructional design” with both instrumental and operational dimensions. In this paper we explore this model as moral action through the voices of our participants in this instructional design community.

Interpersonal Agency

Interpersonal agency is characterized by the commitment made by instructional designers to others involved in the project. Collegial advocacy is often directed to subject matter experts, but it may include other team members, for example, among participants on a small scale, project-level community of practice or a larger “improving teaching and learning at the university” community of practice. The emphasis in this type of personal agency is on collegial engagement and advocacy; suggesting that instructional designers have a strong sense of moral responsibility to their clients. The consensual act of instructional design is a social, relational process created and shared through language, which is a form of action (Herda, 1999). For example, when we engage faculty in a conversation about the consequences of designing for active learning, including the development of critical thinking skills, we are “altering and changing (a) social context (and), those statements, themselves, contribute significantly to a basis for personal and social change” (p. 26).

Relational practice. Designers exemplifying interpersonal agency discussed the importance of deliberately building relationships with faculty clients as requisite to the process rather than what happens before the design process begins: “A lot of the initial work has nothing to do with instructional design. I give them little tasks; I get them comfortable; but it's basically having them learn to trust me.”

In many cases they must overcome a tacit layer of emotional attachment to content and fear of exposing a precious part of a client's identity to criticism and change. How that is done varies from designer to designer, but the end-goal is similar: to build an atmosphere of trust that can be nurtured throughout the design process, and sometimes long after. This designer acknowledges the client's personal conflict before the ‘design conversation’ begins.

I mean it's really easy to say, when I walk into an instructional design process, that there's no emotion here. We're just going to take this pure physics content and we're going to turn it into a lovely physics course. But this is, of course, someone who's been passionate about this content for God knows how long, and they've been asked to do something they're fundamentally afraid of at some level. So it really is a trust issue as well as a physical process and making sure that we have the same language, and making sure that I'm able to translate what they're saying. But the trust has to be there first.

The trusting relationship often endures long after the course has been delivered.

They've trusted you to get [the course] up; now they need to trust you to get it through to the students. By the second time they've taught it, it's easier; by the third time, the only time I hear from my SME is when they want to go for coffee.

Campbell, Gibson and Gramlich (2004) write about a similar relationship that evolved from one of service to one of friendship and collaboration.

Trust and faculty self-efficacy. Instructional designers describe how trust evolves in projects, and how trust is related to the professional identities of the clients. However, their workplace daily underlines differences in power and status. They know that the relationship, and ultimately the success of the project, depends to a large extent on the comfort levels that are established. Interpersonal agency includes a felt responsibility that goes beyond professional competence into the realm of personal advocacy. For example, this type of agency is expressed in the frustration that designers feel when their clients fail to receive the level of instructional support needed in their home departments.

You have to be a little bit intuitive when you're an instructional designer. And you get to know your SME, and you get to know in what ways this person is comfortable, and threatened, and what you have to do, basically, to make the person look good, because that's what the challenge of our job is. We not only get across what she wants to get across, but we also make her look good.

The client's confidence influences the agency of the designer. In many cases, instructional designers find themselves working with novice instructors who may enter projects with reasonable levels of confidence about their content, but who are much less confident about their relationships with students, their skills with technology and novel instructional pedagogies. A designer with interpersonal agency realizes that their client is vulnerable.

99.9% of the time we're working with first-time faculty. They've been told to come to this process. Many of them have no choice. The early adopters have long-gone. So they enter this whole new realm of how to do this with a confidence level equivalent to going to kindergarten for the first time. Because they have the content knowledge, they know exactly what is required, but this whole thing about technology, the relationship with

students, being online, being on television, using a blended model, is really setting them back, because they don't feel they walk into it with confidence.

The politics of interpersonal agency. Interpersonal agency may have a political dimension. Instructional designers work with clients in political contexts, and projects inevitably respond to socio-political influences. For example, if a client is in a departmental culture that is characterized by suspicion and competition, he/she client may want to treat any product as private and proprietary. Instructional designers know that part of their interpersonal agency is related to advocating for the client's position within the political culture of the institution, although whether their support is feigned or genuine they may consider this type of agency unproductive: "I seem to be spending time on is putting out fires around issues of professionalism and old wounds." These situations often cause inner conflict for the designer. One designer talked sympathetically about a client whose contract was not renewed although the project was not complete, "He expected to finish the course development, but won't be back next year. It's difficult to be understanding to the personal situation, but also needing to meet a deadline professionally."

Learner advocacy. Professional development was identified as an important part of instructional designers' interpersonal agency, particularly helping instructors learn how to perform in new learning environments. Not surprisingly, this was also identified as an empowering facet of agency. Many instructional designers came from the teaching profession, and drawing on a positive and coherent identity see faculty development activities as opportunities for reciprocal learning; as potential for transformative practice (reference), believing that "that's really important and not only because faculty then begin ... this cross-fertilization, if you will, and a deeper understanding of what the issues are in teaching and learning within a multitude of disciplines." Another designer described the impact of the design process for "people who...have never thought about what their process is to teaching and learning, or...how it might be improved, made it more positive...the values... that work together and [clients] get exposed to...I think this has an opportunity for transformation."

While collegial, interpersonal advocacy is also expressed as a personal obligation to learners—those whose learning will be influenced by the success of the instructional design project. This level of advocacy is deeply held, morally entrenched, and profoundly reflects the personal values and philosophy of the designer. One designer described his role this way, "I need

to be the learner before there is one...design for people who don't usually have a voice in what happens to them in their educational lives...I have to be their voice until they can speak for themselves.” Another designer stated:

I am working on a Palliative Care project. There's meaning in this... I don't think I would have stayed as long as I did ...If I couldn't find meaning in the project ... if I didn't find meaning in the people; if I didn't find meaning in supporting their success.

We argue that at the personal level agency is a moral relationship with others. Essentially, we extend Christians' (2000) observations about qualitative research, and believe that instructional design practice is not primarily a rational process, but rather an intimate social process in which caring values are contextualized in webs of relationships.

Professional Agency

Professional agency is characterized by a feeling of responsibility to the profession – to do instructional design well and to act in a professionally competent and ethical manner. But what does it mean to comport oneself as a professional instructional designer?

Given the extensive literature on instructional design models and the widespread teaching of these models in graduate programs, it is likely that practicing instructional designers have a strong view of their design practice as primarily instructional planning in one form or another. Many designers learn such models in graduate work or other studies and worry that they weren't performing their roles as designers well if they augment or ignore particular parts of the conventional ID process (Hill, Bichelmeyer, Boling, Gibbons, Grabowski, Osguthorpe, Schwier & Wager, 2004). And yet, our respondents puzzled over whether models of instructional design described their work or were even relevant. The fact that instructional design practice is such an ill-structured problem domain (Jonassen, 2004) filled with conceptual and practical ambiguity, is a source of stress and doubt for designers, as expressed by one of our participants, “The whole nature of instructional design with its military origins, and the connotations that it has of putting people in straight jackets so they'll sit right, I think has turned a lot of people off.”

Professional agency in an advisory role. While our respondents discussed formal design approaches, they tended to describe their role as one of giving instructional advice. The forms of

instructional advice they provided varied, but they frequently did so in a tacit or surreptitious manner by modifying materials presented to them by faculty.

In the end I took the notes...and tried to make them more interesting by inserting at least opportunities for them...to think and apply what they had been learning to that particular context, or to think about implications that wasn't there....I added sort of pre- and post-assessment questions for them to work through after every lesson...

However, this was not always the case. These designers also indicated that they were able to engage in an active discussion of instructional strategies with faculty members.

So we start there but once we get into the process, it's...'Ok, how can we best get across this content that, first of all, encourages, critical thinking, encourages people...helps them in the process of assimilating into their already existing knowledge and respect them as people?' And, how can we just avoid that, 'I am the expert and you are the learner and memorize this' kind of approach?....A lot of faculty in nursing I think are really open to that....sometimes I think it is a learning process."

In addition to providing instructional advice, instructional designers in higher education appear to view their role in part as developing some level of knowledge of the particular content to be taught.

We have to figure out what we are testing. If it is Community Health Nursing...I need to be able to help a student toward valid assessment strategies and to do that I have to know what they're up to....Obviously I can never in a million years teach Community Health Nursing, but working through some materials that come with faculty members over there I think we were able to (ask)...the right kinds of questions to get them to think about the right kinds of things.

Professional agency as team-building. The instructional designers we talked to frequently mentioned the importance of working in teams. This was often viewed in terms of project leadership and oversight, but it was also seen as building relationships, communication and conflict resolution. Our respondents focused strongly on the concept of service to others. They considered project leadership to be a major part of their role as instructional designers, but they viewed this in terms of service to their clients.

Having respect for other people's points of view and trying to develop curriculum in a way that reaches...a mutually agreed upon goal (is)...part of being a professional (and) is

also being a servant to others. So it is not just a leader telling people what to do...it is more of a servant leadership goal where you actually serve the people that you work for and serve the people that are developing for you and you work as a team. It is not as if you are an authority figure telling people what to do.

These instructional designers also viewed leadership as a process of building relationships and communicating with their clients. Behaving in a professional manner and treating individuals with respect was a major part of this.

I think (leadership) means treating people with respect and being cognizant of the challenges that they have on their plate too. You may be working with a multi-media person who has two or three projects going at the same time, you need to be able to work as a team member and to get the goal accomplished, and that there is give and take in that...dealing with people with integrity and acting in a professional manner with others and your clients.

Building relationships also sometimes meant having to deal with personality issues and to engage in conflict resolution. Our respondents frequently discussed how they worked with difficult clients. One approach was to show flexibility and to allow the clients time and space to resolve their issues.

...these two guys were Engineers...they were task (oriented)...styled to analytical, 'let's talk this thing to death, let's decide on all the possibilities, let's drag it out forever' and I am very much 'let's get it done!' And they could see that...they knew right away '(one designer) is a little bit of a task master, she is going to meet her guidelines.' But then I also knew that these guys like to beat things to death. So we understood that I had to be a little flexible in order to let them think it through to make sure they'd thought they were making the right choices for curriculum but at some point I was going to say, 'Ok, that's enough, you have to make a decision. We have to move on!'

Professional agency as facilitation. In higher education instructional design clients are almost invariably faculty members. Our respondents indicated that working with faculty was a major part of the instructional design process and described building relationships with them as facilitative.

I think I'm always a teacher... I don't have a classroom that I teach for 13 weeks...but I am training people all the time....I train faculty how to use WebCT very often. I have

small courses or faculty development courses on line for nine days or two weeks or three weeks...I think as an instructional designer...I'm always facilitating, I'm always training; I'm always working with people trying to help them learn a particular tool or particular way of approaching things.

Despite issues concerning identity and the negotiation of status (see below), many of our respondents viewed their role, in terms of working with faculty, as having a real expertise that faculty did not and which needed to be shared.

As an instructional designer though myself, I think the influence...has to do with the quality of...not just the curriculum, but the entire learning experience that the distance ed student can have, and part of that's a major conversation with course authors or content experts or subject matter experts....And that conversation for me has always been persuasion. I...see the instructional design possibilities as a kind of a long spectrum, and it's just how far can you get to the people down the line?

The expertise that our respondents felt they had to share frequently focused on how learning occurred in technology-based learning situations.

I don't think (he) had the experience to develop PBL on-line on it's own, so I couldn't expect him...with templates that he could copy and paste... 'cause he had no idea how it would look like. So...you have to do it...set the whole environment...and even set for yourself a failure. If it didn't work you'll have to start from scratch but if you don't do it it's not going to happen, so you have to reorganize the whole course, how you would see it work as PBL and then show it to him, and if he likes it, great, and that can serve as the template because the context is there plus the content is there. So...for the next module (he can) just copy the content and change a few things but the structure is there.

Professional agency and identity. Like any other professional activity, instructional design cannot help but be influenced by the embedded values and identity of the institution in which it operates. Higher Education, at least at the university level, is organized in faculties as independent units and, while universities are ostensibly egalitarian organizations, faculty members are seen as the central players with the highest status. In most fields, a doctorate is the required level of professional preparation for faculty members. Instructional designers, typically employed by such groups as Extension Divisions or Distance Education Departments, are generally seen as support staff whether or not they have official faculty status.

Generally the course authors have proposed working with distance education, have proposed a specific project and a course they want to develop what they feel is suitable, for whatever reasons distance education meets our criteria. So there's already...an opening there. So it's a question of actually developing a relationship...hopefully one of mutual respect. In the end we're a service unit, so my focus is, 'we're supporting you in your desire to provide a really high quality learning experience for students, students need this, students is what this is all about'.

Not surprisingly, our respondents frequently raised the issues around their perceived status and how that influences, positively or negatively, their effectiveness as designers and their professional agency. In this regard, the usefulness of instructional designers holding a Ph.D. in higher education was frequently challenged in terms of the credibility within the HE culture. One designer acknowledged, "I have...the "Ticket", the PhD...so if I interact as a faculty member that kind of gets me in, is assumed. If I go out as an Instructional Designer I certainly don't feel that same level of respect." Professional agency, then, also encompasses professional education and the question of academic credentials was often raised by these instructional designers. Most often, they indicated that they had graduate training, usually a Masters degree, in Education with a focus on media, educational technology, or instructional design theory. However, a number of our respondents began by using learning technologies at the K-12 level, which led to a decision to do graduate work.

In (Italy) I taught full-time at an English speaking school; my teaching practices were different than the traditional practices used. The second year I was asked to be a director and so I taught part time. I really loved to do both of these things. I love being able to design programs and then I was also able to work with teachers, some (of) who didn't have a BEd., and get them to use more student-centered approaches. We were also quite an innovative school so we had a lot of technology and they were using CD-ROMs to train English...I was interested in using the Internet in learning and then I heard about the program hear at the (university) and I thought I'd go try that...The field of IT was so exciting to me. I thought, 'Wow no one does this in (Italy)...and you are influencing and making change.

However, instructional designers working in higher education do not always enter practice with credentials in instructional design or teaching. They frequently take alternate career paths and

their career choices are often pragmatic, even opportunistic. It is not unusual, for instance, for individuals holding instructional design positions to first gain graduate credentials in an academic area and start out teaching at some level in higher education. They then become interested in and involved with distance education or teaching with technology and learn about instructional design formally or informally on the job.

I was actually in the English department here at [Western Canadian University] and the (open learning agency)...was created in 1978...by legislation...it basically got rolling in 1979 and again I was invited...to move over there to help with that small operation that needed to grow in a big way and in a hurry.

Regardless, formally trained to be instructional designers or not, respondents saw themselves as part of a larger community of practice.

I needed to synthesize a wide range of experiences and educational considerations in order to make decisions. I often felt the need to vet these decisions with experienced designers; however, I also needed to prove that I was capable of being a designer in my own right. Finding an appropriate balance was a challenge.

Institutional Agency

This agency includes a felt responsibility to advance the interests of their host institutions or deal with the tacit and explicit values of host institutions. If universities, for example, are promoting a teacher-scholar model, then instructional designers may emphasize activities that tie the research programs of faculty to their teaching, or help them see ways to include the scholarship of teaching (Boyer, 1990) as part of their research programs. If the institution emphasizes a cost-recovery model, instructional designers may see themselves as leaders in developing learning environments that the organization can market to a wide audience. In any case, this type of agency considers the way that instructional designers align their work with institutional goals, and it may be expressed in tension they feel between organizational needs and personal values. For example, if instructional designers feel a moral/ethical responsibility to provide the best possible learning experiences for students, and they feel that an institutional emphasis on cost recovery is in conflict with that goal, the instructional designer may feel in conflict with the organization (Campbell, Schwier, & Kenny, 2005). This designer felt that if HE institutions didn't seriously consider the issues "moving forward in distance education,

especially technology-enhanced learning issues...very soon, they're going to find themselves in policy nether land, where nothing works.”

Cultural considerations of agency. Our analysis found evidence that instructional designers had an appreciation for the culture of the university. In higher education, the cultural considerations of agency include several dimensions. One dimension is political, and instructional designers were acutely aware of the importance of political knowledge, experience, process and actions involved in their work.

I think every institution has an embedded culture. That culture thrives on shared values and shared perspectives of the world. An open learning perspective of the world carries with it a different set of assumptions than a traditional university carries.

Another participant described the designer's political role as critical, “There is a whole range of political knowledge, political processes that you need to have, and political action you have to take to exercise your instructional design role...if you're not aware of the politics of the various tiers of organizations and sub-institutions, you're dead.” But the interpretation of culture wasn't singular; there are many cultures at work in HE, and a designer would “go from Engineering to Dentistry to Education to Vet Med and I was just shaking my head. What I had to learn, over time, was...there is a pedagogical culture (in the Academy) that is strong.”

An element of cynicism, or perhaps pragmatism, suggests that “you have to learn that there's a poly-culture here of pedagogy. You've got to have your sensors out, so when it's time to rip off the cognitivist hat and...put on the constructivist hat...you don't have any personal conflicts happening.

Designer status and ability to effect change. The designer's effectiveness is also related to the broader university community of practice, and the instructional designer's status in the institution. In our interviews, instructional designers spoke passionately about how they felt powerless to create meaningful change and the resistance of institutions to change. We think this is important because it illustrates how change agency is a posture taken by individuals, and an instructional designer can be a change agent, even if she/he is unsuccessful at provoking change.

[I am a] mediator between the SME and the institution, the department...My most spectacular failure was because I didn't know that and we lost one of the most

amazing projects that we've ever funded...because the SME involved was seen as not being devoted enough to research and devoting too much energy into what we were asking of him. Because this person was such a great team player, and didn't want to disappoint anyone, he almost lost his job.

Another designer described the institutional culture as “a lake”.

It's fundamentally taking...an instructional designer...throwing them into a lake, and expecting the lake to transform....To some extent, you can do instructional design without ever having been thrown in the lake, without ever trying to do any transformation; but the really good stuff, the stuff that gets talked about, the stuff that changes a student's life...a faculty member's life, happens when you break through those barriers.

Instructional designers have a strong sense of significant issues that higher education institutions will face when they adopt technology enhanced learning projects. Institutional priorities and reward systems, the perceived value of teaching as compared to research, ownership of content and authority to alter content are all important challenges that institutions face, and instructional designers are leading discussions that have the potential to change how institutions manage teaching and demonstrate its value.

The inclusion of a wide-range of instructional design concerns in the scope of things that professors do poses several new institutional challenges. First...the current reward system, i.e., tenure, promotion, increases in enumeration, is highly biased toward rewarding research activities. Excellence in teaching is appreciated, but not necessarily rewarded. Therefore, if professors are going to be asked to spend copious amounts of time developing instructional design expertise, then perhaps the reward system needs revision. Once an institution has invested significant funding in the development of (technology-enhanced) versions of courses, will these courses become static, rather than dynamic? Will room be made for including specialized expertise? What happens when a course is passed on from the person who developed it to a new instructor? Will the new instructor lose his or her academic freedom to significantly alter content? Will funding be provided for major revisions?

Cultural conflict. When instructional designers find themselves in conflict with institutional values, and powerless to effect necessary change, they are often left with a decision about whether to continue in the employ of the organization—a decision based on an ethical dilemma. In these cases, frustration emanates from a lack of moral coherence between institutional and personal values. If instructional designers do not leave the organization in these cases, the organization's goals may be impeded or sabotaged.

I knew that I had to leave when after the fourth time in one day my supervisor gave me new instructions on the same thing and...my frustration level just went right through the roof. And I [didn't] apologize for that either.... (1) sort of went away from that and caught my breath and regrouped and realized that...this was the expectation, this is what they wanted from me and I couldn't give it and that I was really not able to stay in that kind of an environment because I couldn't adapt the way they needed for me to adapt in any real sense and they weren't going to change... they had a very specific structure, it was very much cookie cutter from one place to another and so...it was a dead end for me on a number of levels.

These are a few ways that institutional agency plays out in organizations. Other ways include challenges such as professionalism, wages, workload, pedagogical orientation, institutional context, efficiency, creativity, a culture of innovation, and competition. In every case, institutional change agency is a tug-of-war between values and cultures, and in this type of agency—probably more than any other—the interactions are moderated by an overlay of power relationships. Who has authority to make change, and how change is negotiated—or rejected, is at the heart of institutional agency.

Societal Agency

Societal agency is characterized by a need to see beyond the confines of immediate work to know that design is contributing to a larger, more significant societal influence. For many of these designers, societal agency has its roots in interpersonal agency, embodied in relational practice with faculty clients and in learner advocacy; and institutional agency, at which level designers may see their impact on pedagogical transformation. Fundamentally, these designers represent a “social morality in which caring values are central but contextualized in webs of relationships and constructed towards communities” (Christians, 2000, p. 142). The designers

who spoke about a vision for change on a “global” level tended to characterize their work as process-oriented, unfolding in a social context in which they were able to connect with their clients through a discussion of shared values about the purposes of education for a “better world”. However, in many organizations instructional designers are considered “instructional support” instead of “instructional leaders” and this translates into an important disconnect between their perceived responsibility and their perceived authority to influence change on a meaningful scale.

Societal agency and early socialization. Designers with societal agency located their core values in early socialization through parents and influential teachers and colleagues; several referred to an experience of dissonance that was instrumental in setting them on the path to societal agency through instructional design. They spoke of early role models, of life-changing international experiences, and early career choices that reflected social activism. One designer worked for approximately two decades with immigrant service organizations, community work programs, and international language programs, including several years at a community college teaching English to political refugees. She recounted her career trajectory as based in her “lower middle-class background”.

I think that you do pick up certain values... become socialized to a certain place.... I worked with people who had a very radical orientation to education, were quite active in a number of political movements...I think it certainly has molded me in a lot of ways or awakened my awareness to larger issues because when you talk about teaching in that context, you're not just talking about content...like what are issues...of social justice? How do you orient a person from a different culture into this new culture...there are just so many complex things...and it's quite interesting for me to come here and work with professors...who are very knowledgeable in their area but they're so focused...it's hard for them to convey...the significance of that content...within the wider context of the world. So that's an interesting situation for me.... it's more my informal education through working with people who were very, very committed educators...a very inspiring bunch...who really walked the talk of what they believed...who were very much into...Freire.... And then just...my observation of what has happened in society through the '80s and '90s...in what I see as sort of the conflicting (values).... There's kind of a political landscape that has allowed...especially people who are disenfranchised or just

disadvantaged in some way, to even be pushed further down in terms of their...opportunities...that has been... a consciousness that has evolved for me in the past twenty years.... I kind of wonder, 'You know, I still have the same values or was it an accident that I ended up there.'.... I think the fact I was 21 when I started.... If I had done a degree and then gone on to get my masters in instructional design and then worked in an academic environment I'm sure I would have very different perspective. I don't know how different because I think there are also other values that I bring from my early life, to that mixture, but I think certainly that would be an issue.

Another grew up in a medical family, her father a respected community member in a rural area. Her mother "will clothe you, feed you and make sure you have a bed to sleep in no matter who you are and she will go, 'Have you had enough to eat?' and that is just the way we were raised. It's like... where Christ fed the multitudes...I tell her she is an angel on earth." At the time she came to the instructional design unit she

had just finished working in the private sector in this really sketchy job...a lot of single moms, there were a lot of aboriginal students, a lot of ESL, it was run by this company downtown...all they were interested in was getting money from these people. They weren't interested in the educational aspect of what they were delivering, they would charge the people \$6,000 for three months of education...it was just brutal.... I was just appalled.... I had just finished this provincial job but I actually quit.... I saw the void between the technology and what skills they were really lacking...sometimes coping skills, sometimes it was personal skills. Like these people were in there getting Microsoft training and they had little if any people skills, so they couldn't get a job...

Interestingly, a number of designers in this group developed an awareness of social and cultural issues through their work in ESL settings. This may be a fairly typical route into instructional design for these individuals, most of who did not follow a traditional career path that included a related undergraduate degree or even a related graduate degree. One designer has

a theory that people who are ESL materials developers are good instructional designers...ESL is about making meaning, and it's problematized. You're making meaning for someone who doesn't have easy access to language resources....And they've got a desire to learn it, so you've got this motivation. Very important to have a group of

people you can teach, so you then have to present the information, so you always have to be thinking, 'Gee, this is going to be hard, is this culturally the same? Language is an aspect of culture, so I've got this cultural divide. How am I going to make meaning?'.... I've got to present information on this page in a way that's going to make sense to them. I might have elderly learners. You get different kinds of audiences, and you're constantly worried about every single thing you put on that screen or page, and how it's going to be interpreted or make sense to people. So you do spend a lot of time discussing with other teachers the pros and cons.

Designers with a highly developed sense of societal agency may risk "burnout". Dealing with refugees who "had seen their families killed in front of them" meant that "(instructors) were dealing with...not just content, but how do people learn to live in a new environment...(Through that) an instructor learns how to...teach more effectively." This designer acknowledged that "working in a high needs area is very, very demanding and I'm not sure I could do that anymore."

Disorienting dilemmas and ethical challenges. As the previous excerpts illustrate, although few of these designers traced the genesis of societal agency to a particular moment in their personal or professional lives many reflected about the contexts in which they encountered "disorienting dilemmas". A disorienting dilemma is a trigger point that, though critical reflection, challenges one's existing worldview and may lead to a foundational reframing of core beliefs, assumptions, and values (Mezirow, 2000). In our conversations these designers traced learning design decisions, or even their decision to become an instructional designer, to such an experience. For example, one designer talked about how his father's radical politics resulted in the family moving to a community with

a fair number of First Nations people and so the children of these workers were my playmates and friends as I grew up. So that sort of working class, union based, multi-cultural mix was always a big part of my life, and it's something I took naturally as I got older and ran across people who had very strange ideas about people because of the color of their skin and so on. I got very disturbed about that because it just made no sense to me whatsoever."

In the early 80's, after obtaining a graduate degree in English Literature and teaching at a socially-politically active institution, "the social mission took over from that sort of subject

content area or interest that I had” and he joined a public open learning agency to work with aboriginal communities that were “quite forward looking nations and individual bands within that were looking to taking over or getting more control over their own education.” One of the leaders

wasn't having very much success with the local college...and of course the universities weren't interested, so he asked me if we would be interested....The only issue I had over that was the senior administration who declined the project. So I went and did it anyway. It's been sort of a practice that gets me in hot water now and then, but everybody needs hot water now and then...I started contacting other groups and they networked fairly well themselves, so other people would contact me as well....There were about 23 different First Nations groups....We were fortunate also that we had people who also felt that that the social issue was important and that distance education students needed different kinds of support.

Another designer related his experience in an international development project to his eventual decision to work on “social projects”.

I had an opportunity to go to Indonesia with (this youth group) and that was just totally life changing...It was four months in Canada and four months in Indonesia and you paired up with (a Canadian family)...You were supposed to be considered a son of that family and the same with Indonesia....We helped the women's organization in the little village we lived in...no electricity, no running water, nothing like that, and we helped them apply for a grant from the Canadian Embassy in Indonesia in Jarkarta...they got \$500 Canadian to fund an income generating duck farm...harvest these eggs, sell the eggs, and then (part of) the money that was used to sell the eggs...went to purchase books for a little library that our main group put together, and part of the money went to a vaccination program....

In some cases, if the institution permitted a choice of projects, these designers gravitated towards Faculties and projects that reflected their own values about the social purposes of design. For example, immigrating from an Asian culture and trying to adapt to post-secondary education in Canada in a foreign language gave one designer insight into designing for inclusion, and led to her recent participation in an institutional task force

to bring global perspective into our curriculum...to educate our learners to be a global citizen...and also to bring our program out to other countries and to add value to those learners....I was picked out of the over 30 people who were very interested...we are doing our rounds of introduction and everyone can speak...why we want to be there....I am always interested in issues related to language and culture...if I can bring that together...

She found her institution compatible with her values because, for example, “Our program launched here has a really high profile of international human rights...”

In some cases ethical issues in, and of, design became trigger points for these individuals. I see...the same parallel in working on a project in instructional design as doing development work in emerging countries...this comes from my studies in global and human rights education and critical theory (which) has been fundamental in shaping my own philosophy of design and education. Any time (an OECD country) went in and said, ‘This is the way we think you should develop...This is the right way, this is our way’...there has been no success....Social change requires that people change how they are in the world-their thinking, their feeling, their actions- and this is extremely personal. Dr. B. could have come out of that (Palliative Care project) hating technology...but the major change he experienced...wasn’t really his attitude towards technology, but rather his view towards instructional design.

A designer who has a theological doctorate, and whose first career was as a teacher at a faith-based college, explained the ethical design implications of his background and philosophy. ...because it was a Christian college I was trying to get them to think about what does it mean to be a Christian...by drawing attention to the fact that...(a particular contentious issue) often becomes a test of whether some people are considered an authentic Christian or not. I said, ‘...think about the amount of ink that is spilled on that...by implication...versus treatment of the poor and the oppressed and the marginalized, and how (political) parties who are often...classified as Christian actually harm the poor, do little to best help them’....And I thought, ‘Here I am working (on a training contract for a multinational company) with \$21 billion in the bank and...in many ways (they are) the

Internet....And there's this networking juggernaut and most of (the trainees) aren't yet thinking about how you are actually shaping the society around you, with the technologies around you....That's partly because of my training in religious studies and actually my M.Ed. (in adult education)....If I can angle things towards the social justice...stance...to get people to think critically....that's pretty important to me (to work with those kinds of issues).

A third designer was involved in a course re-design for the Pharmacy Faculty. The curriculum involved an Animal Care project, in which

There's a lot of issues...(of) treating the animals properly...so that researchers aren't doing more harm than they need to do to animals....I do see that as kind of animal slavery and although there are good things that come out of it...(it) leads to larger philosophical issues of what are beings. Say every living thing has the right to be untouched and left alone....It's a bit of a complex question but on the whole, I can say, 'Yes, I think there is some need to use animals for research, but I would guess it's probably about 1% of what's actually going on, and we don't need to be doing all the unnecessary suffering.' So I had difficulties with that.

Referring to the disconnect between his own values and the institutional expectations of him as an instructional designer, he reconciles the conflict by "let(ting) the main subject expert person know to some extent what I felt about that." Not all instructional designers in post-secondary contexts have the personal freedom to be able to work only with clients with whose values and disciplines they are aligned, but designers with societal agency have found ways to engage the institution in the conversation. Perhaps this is because in reconciling their experiences, values and beliefs with institutional culture and expectations they have achieved a degree of moral coherence in which equity is an important element.

Core values and learning designs. So far we have shared stories of the experiences that have shaped the values of the designers we've identified as practicing through societal agency. How do these values influence the types of projects they choose to become involved in, and how are they reflected in their learning designs? We asked them to tell us about one project that best reflected their change agency. One designer, who worked with a faculty member involved with the World Health Organization (had)

a positive feeling because I think we accomplished a lot, where there was nothing in that area. We have eleven really good consultants...they have at least basic training to move ahead....After two years...there's been so much positive feedback...in the Faculty...and the International Union against Tuberculosis and the World Bank from this project.... Another told us about developing a simulation in veterinary medicine that created a virtual lab demonstrating the intubation of a horse.

He saw the benefits from capturing the demonstration in a video format as twofold. First, students could see the 'inside' view of the movement of the tube, as well as the outside view of the response of the horse and the actions of the veterinarian....Secondly, in response to concerns raised by animal welfare groups, the college was looking for ways to reduce the number of times that the procedure was performed on live horses....As the team worked through the design and development of this project, the client began to see that further benefits could also be achieved.

Ultimately a socially agentic designer may be able to make an impact through actions that integrate other types of agency, for example, professional and interpersonal agencies.

A family came back in a (series) of...case studies...I tried to make them lower middle class in terms of how they talked....One of the characters...announced at the dinner table that she was an ovo-lacto-vegetarian and her father said, 'What the hell is that?'...The instructor...said, 'That's really funny. That's exactly what my father would have said.' And not necessarily that (what) somebody said...means you're lower middle class, but I kind of wanted to set the stage. Here's a family that is struggling financially and in the case study the father loses a job....The daughter is in university and in one of the later case studies...the daughter is visiting the food bank at the student union. So we have a whole case study in terms of student hunger. We wanted to make the case studies relevant to student life and the fact that there are probably people on campus who don't have enough money for a balanced diet...

Instructional design as a subversive activity. One of our designers suggested, "(part of) instructional designers as agents of social change...is subverting the traditional system." This designer may be one of the most reflective of, or at least articulate about, societal change agency in a culture slow to respond to issues of inclusion and access. He could see how an instructional

designer in a very highly regarded research university might do very good work in helping transform teaching in better ways for the elite....

(But) everybody else needs quality education that's equal to what the elite are offered. I think they deserve an equal level of support and recognition and this has always been the biggest problem with distance education...is so often it's seen as second rate education, as (serving) second class students. I've heard, even from people in the biz...talking about a lot of these students as losers.... as people who never would be qualified to get into a traditional university or college, and I just never agreed with that. I think there's all sorts of reasons why people don't get on that sort of traditional high class, upper class route, and I don't think that's a fair approach for people to take, but it's an easy one. I don't think (this research-intensive university) has that aspect of social mission...as strong as at (an open learning agency) because...the mission from the government was to provide access to the rest of the population....(At this university) we've been doing that through social development programs....We...accept quite a number of (alternative route) students to our (online) classes with the rest of the (university) students...and no one in the class knows that they're not (formally admitted) regular students.

Holding ethical stances and higher values can have profound effects at the personal, professional, and institutional levels. In the institutional view instructional design may not be so important on a grand scale, but the contributions made can have wide and profound influence in the long run. As an example, if we insist on giving marginalized populations authoritative roles in the cases we design, we may in the long run contribute to a new understanding of equality.

Interactions among Types of Agency

Interpersonal, professional, institutional and societal categories of agency are not mutually exclusive; in fact, we speculate that they seldom work in isolation. As areas of agency interact, we use three levels to describe the types of interactions that take place: micro-level, meso-level, and macro-level interactions. These interactions can be based on coherent, incoherent or conflicting expressions of the types of agency.

Micro-level

We classify micro level interactions as those that stay within the personal or professional contexts of instructional design performance. This agency is typically local, intimate and concrete and often tied to particular projects, although the level of influence is bounded only by the size of the communities within which the practice occurs. Examples of micro level interactions include instances where interpersonal dimensions conjoin professional dimensions. For instance, if a client advocates an instructional methodology that can interfere with learning, the instructional designer might draw on persuasion based on the trust within their relationship (interpersonal), but might also draw on the experiences of other instructional designers and the literature to recommend alternative approaches (professional). As agencies interact, so do the communities of practice that bound each type of agency.

As developers and designers, we then went back and said, 'Ok, how can these learners feel valued? What can they bring to the learning that they feel is of value and how as a designer do you build on that?'

Macro-level

At the macro level of interaction, we see the interplay of societal and institutional agency. Examples of macro level interactions are characterized by instances where institutional needs and goals interact with societal influence. For instance, if an institutional goal is to increase access to courses and programs, the societal influence might be the intention to increase the literacy and productivity of the population, and through that, effectively contribute to a robust economy. But in most cases in our research, macro level interactions revealed a recognition that institutional and societal issues interacted to allow the instructional designer to have a wider range of influence than other educational positions allowed.

I found it hugely satisfying that I could write materials that would affect more people than just my class. And I found it most annoying as a teacher that I could do a good job in my own class, and Joe Blow next door could do a really shocking job, and you know, we were having about the same kind of impact on about 30 people each. So I found that once I got into doing resources that I didn't want to go back to teaching.

Meso-level

And meso level interactions occur when interpersonal or professional agency engages institutional or societal agency. For example, if institutional goals are in conflict with individual

goals, the effectiveness of any agency may be threatened. Interpersonal agency, for instance, might be based on advocacy for equitable treatment of French and English students, but institutional agency might emphasize marketing to one group to increase the cost-benefit to the organization. Or an interpersonal level of agency can give rise to a concern for a much larger issue, one that has institutional or societal implications.

In one conversation, a participant told a story about a campaign to get the central computing support group on his campus to make some changes in WebCT and student lab support to shift the orientation of the support group from emphasizing technology/security/software to emphasizing the faculty and students who use WebCT. The instructional designer spoke about “using the professors’ voices” to make these changes because they were politically aligned with the issue and in a stronger strategic position to influence change. The end goal was better learning support, and it was the instructional designer who was the catalyst for change at the intersection of personal and institutional levels of agency.

Another instructional designer spoke of paying attention to language in products, and how careful language can contribute in small ways to much larger societal concerns.

I'm working on something and I think the writers have used a whole new stereotype.

They've referred to this person who was really difficult, and said ‘of course he was the union rep.’ And just by saying that's not a reasonable thing to do and changing it....It's going to go out to thousands of people.... It's good for us to be informed and to be aware of those types of issues around stereotyping and to talk about goals and what we want education to be like. We may get frustrated with one little unit, but a lot of students are going to have to engage with that unit for a long time.

Revisiting Moral Coherence

In cases where there is agreement among agencies concerning the values, ethical and functional dimensions of agency, we suggest that the overall agency is operating in a zone of moral coherence. Where the agencies are incoherent or in conflict, we argue that the overall effect of agency at every level is tempered, and potentially negated. And instructional designers often find themselves navigating levels of agency that are in competition with each other, and the resolution of these interactions, if recognized at all, requires personal and moral courage.

These interactions illustrate that a great deal of agency is tied to a strong sense of responsibility—to colleagues, students, the profession, institutions, and society. It is not

surprising that instructional designers sometimes feel conflicted about what they do. But we are reminded in our research that instructional designers feel responsibility for more things than they have authority to influence, and that they regularly find themselves in positions that require them to act beyond their authority, or in a vacuum of authority. A dramatic example of this was illustrated by an instructional designer who was on the verge of leaving her position after a series of deep staffing cuts were made in the organization. She was the only remaining instructional designer in the organization, and yet her commitment to her clients and responsibility to the organization was firm.

There are also a few projects we were working on for the college that someone will have to accept responsibility for, or the work will have been for nothing. But I know what to do about those. I am burning the projects onto CDs and requesting the deans or department heads sign a deliverable acceptance form. A couple of departments don't have a dean (actually 3 were fired) so the president will have to sign off on them. He feels so bad about our unit right now I think he might actually do it. Then at least someone will be thinking about what to do with those courses, and hopefully they'll assign an instructor to them in the fall.

Intentional and Operational Dimensions of Agency

When we considered the types of agency and the interactions among the various types, it became apparent that instructional designers make decisions that emphasize intentional dimensions and operational dimensions of their work. By intentional, we refer to those dimensions of instructional design that are related to the intentions, principles or values associated with actions – deciding which things are important and those things we mean to do. In this sense, intentional dimensions include personal judgments about what is significant, preferential, moral or ethical. By contrast, operational dimensions include the practical implications or the expression of particular intentions, principles or values. In other words, intentional dimensions deal with what we feel we should do, whereas operational dimensions deal with concrete actions or outcomes.

These are significant dimensions because instructional designers often find themselves under pressure to emphasize the operational aspects of their work—the tangible decisions that are made in projects. Intentional dimensions are often assumed, but unless both the intentional

and operational dimensions of agentic decisions are considered explicitly, the instructional designer runs the risk of making design decisions that are inconsistent with the underlying intentions of the work. For any single intentional dimension, there can be several operational expressions that are consistent with it. For example, an intention of efficiency can spawn a host of efficient practices depending on the context of the decision, such as choosing inexpensive media for production, building a boilerplate for a development team, or using outlines in lieu of text wherever possible.

We suggest that the greater the propinquity of intentional and operational dimensions of agency, the greater the possibility that decisions will be made within a zone of moral coherence.. As an example of the use of intentional and operational dimensions of agency by designers, one participant related her experiences working with marginalized groups early in her career, over time reflecting on the interaction between that background and her value system. When working in a university with health professionals, her background influenced her to write case studies/narratives with social justice bent, working with faculty to get them to think about this in the institutional context. She used design projects as an opportunity to challenge an ethnocentric understanding of access, actually writing about digital divide issues. All the while she problematized her role/identity/agency as a designer in higher education, but she found a way to advocate for social issues through her work and relationships at the intentional and operational levels:

So I don't know if I do that in a meaningful way. I think the chance to write about it in this book chapter is important to me just because I think digital divide issues, the fact here's a person who is developing a book on technological and information literacy and had a list of chapters, calling for proposals for these and nothing on digital divide, nothing on it. So just keeping that at the table ... A lot of people don't want to look at it though. ... I think a lot of professors think everybody's got a computer, everybody's got high speed, everybody ... I think the university would love to close the institutional labs but you really can't. And there's an argument for that. Let's face [it that] a lot of students are using those computers for chat and things like that. I can see the other side of that too. I guess we just live in an era where education continues to be under funded for what it's expected to do. So as a result ... it's easy not to look at let's say groups who don't fit into your top 5 percent...

The Agentic Model, Proposed

The stories we are hearing from instructional designers are leading us toward a model of change agency, and we offer a tentative picture of what the model is beginning to look like (Fig. 1). We do not want to suggest that this model is complete; it is emerging as our investigations continue to alter and elaborate our understanding. We have many questions, perhaps more than when we started this study in 2002. For example, do different types of agency share variance? Can an agency exist on its own? Does one type of agency have to be in place before the designer can work on another? Is this a developmental process? How does one's social experiences influence agency? Does a matured level of agency lead to leadership in the profession?

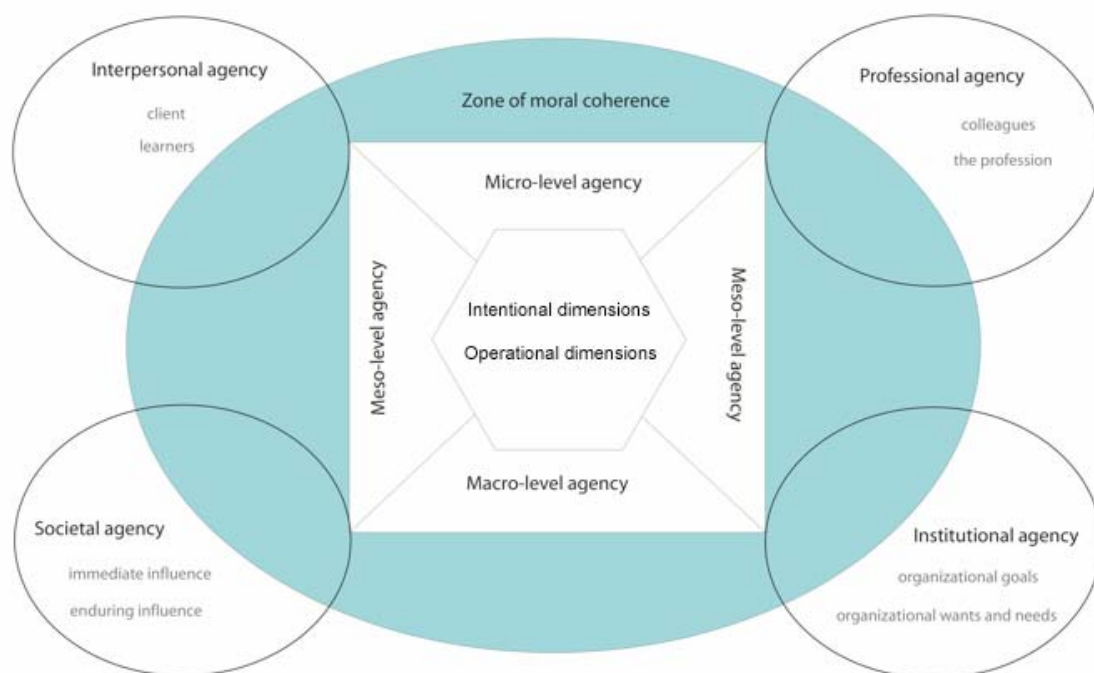


Figure 1. Emerging model of change agency in instructional design.

Although the field is evolving, the dominant technical discourse of instructional design deskills the instructional designer in HE institutions in fundamental human ways. We maintain that instructional design is a moral practice that involves the ethical knowledge of the designer

acting in relationship with others in a dialogue about how to create an alternate social world of access, equity, inclusion, personal agency and critical action. Herda (1999) captures this notion of transformative social change when she credits language with a “generative role in enabling us to create and acknowledge meaning as we engage in discourse and fulfill social obligations...(that) are characterized as moral activities” (p. 24). What then are the implications for instructional design practice that is transformational; that contributes in significant ways to the public good?

We believe that designers are not technicians that simply implement techniques and principles, although when challenged they can certainly use that language to describe what they do. They are principled actors whose practices embody core values. What could we achieve if we were thoughtful, deliberate, and unapologetic in aligning design projects with the ethical knowledge of designers? If we developed a community in which the moral dimensions of practice were explicitly developed through reflexive dialogue? If we publicly explored the “conscious and unconscious influences on (our) practice and personal resistances to change” (Kugelmass, 2000, p. 179) by asking ourselves, “Who am I, why am I practicing this way, and what effect does this have on others?” How might we redefine the curriculum in graduate programs of instructional design? Several possibilities exist within the framework of agentic practice. For example, engaging pre-service designers early in identity work through approaches such as autobiographical writing, providing more situated experiences that are then deconstructed in group conversations, working with cases based on ethical dilemmas, developing international links and project teams that challenge cultural assumptions about learning, internships—these are a few of the activities embodied in the change management process. In the meantime, since most graduate programs of professional preparation in educational technology are silent on these issues, narrative communities seem the best sites for this inquiry as designers rehabilitate their identities and “emplot” new narratives that effect structural changes in their institutions (Hartman, 1991). The discussion of agency provides language for discussing the roles played by instructional design in the larger context of education and society.

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