

Learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in solving real world problems.

-M. David Merrill (2002)

My goal is to fully engage workplace learners to increase knowledge transfer and meet instructional objectives. Prior to entering the Instructional Technology program at the University of Tennessee, I had little knowledge of instructional theories and models despite years of experience developing, adapting, and delivering workplace training for the Social Security Administration. I knew that the workshops I developed, delivered, and attended for my fiction writing career thrived on learner engagement, an element that was all but absent in the workplace learning setting. Fiction writers typically sought out the workshops, paid for them, and had a true interest or passion for the topics. Some of the workshops involved dry content, such as filing self-employment taxes and using various software programs, but the learners stayed focused and actively participated.

Training at the Social Security Administration tended to be more successful with new hires or the newly promoted regardless of the subject matter, which ranged from medical to legal to procedural. Face-to-face training outperformed video segments and online training. I identified a few of the influencing factors: lack of accountability, lack of assessments, dry topics, agency resistance to creative solutions, and heavy workloads that did not allow for focus on training. In my coursework for the master's program, I sought out and identified ways that these learners could be more effectively engaged in workplace learning to meet the agency's objectives.

Instructional Technology and Workplace Learning

When I studied the ADDIE model and its emphasis on analyzing, designing, developing, implementing, and evaluating, I realized that my past approaches to instruction had skipped many vital steps, including analyzing and evaluating. Training development was often rushed or adapted from past training approaches rather than allocating time and resources to develop solid objectives and analyze learner characteristics and needs. Assessment and evaluation were overlooked entirely.

Now that I know the deficits in my past experiences with instruction, I will align my future practice in Instructional Design with the professional standards from the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (2012) Standards 1 and 2 by applying content pedagogy and “creating instructional materials and learning environments using a variety of systems approaches” (p. 81). Collaborating with my team, I will evaluate the instruction and implementation of educational technologies and processes and assess the adequacy of learning as required by Standards 1 and 2.

To engage the learners and transfer knowledge, my team and I will focus on knowing our learners and knowing the instructional needs. I have experience communicating with diverse individuals, including education level, disabilities, language barriers, cultures, backgrounds, and age groups. I have designed instruction for individuals ranging from teens and unskilled workers to judges. I will use my experiences communicating with this wide range of individuals, at times through language interpreters, to design effective instructional materials tailored to the learners. In accordance with AECT Standard 4, I will continue to demonstrate ethical behavior within the applicable cultural context during all aspects of my work and with

respect for the diversity of learners in each setting. I will learn which cultural factors influence learning and design for a cross-cultural workforce. I will not hesitate to consult subject matter experts to navigate cultural differences. After earning a degree in anthropology and working with diverse groups of individuals, I am mindful of these differences and the need to design appropriate content for situations and users.

Throughout the master's program, I have examined theories, models, and best practices with a framework from my background in government, small business, and law. As a student immersed in the program, I experienced and assimilated the application to higher ed. However, I also tackled each new concept with a workplace focus, reflecting on the following questions:

- How can I use this in a workplace setting?
- Can professional development and complex legal topics be taught this way?
- Can constructivism be cost effective in workplace learning and professional development?
- How can I best engage workplace learners?

Larson and Lockee (2014) urged learning designers to consider the nature of the content and proposed instruction, the contexts, and “whether different approaches are needed at different points in the learner’s development” (p. 81). They noted that instructivism is most appropriate in situations when the time for development and/or delivery is limited, when there is high accountability for learning results, or low tolerance for content ambiguity (p. 80). Workplace learning often involves limited time for development and delivery, but engagement can be increased through cognitivist and behaviorist strategies and systematic design.

I will employ Gagné’s Nine Events of Instruction, as well as the cognitivist concepts of advance organizers, schema theory and cognitive load, Gestalt theory, reviewing and summarizing, chunking, and similarity, proximity, and closure. Thoughtful incorporation of

these practices will ensure knowledge transfer and impact engagement by preventing the information from overwhelming the learner. I will work with my team to use techniques to gain and retain the learners' attention with "authentic" tasks to increase their perception of the usefulness of the instruction.

When constructivist theory best fits the context, learners, and content, I will collaborate to incorporate collaborative learning and authentic learning environments. In online learning, the development of social presence is essential. During the pandemic, we have witnessed the need for individuals to feel connected while learning. Tu (2001) found that studies showed "social presence impacts students' learning, interpersonal relationships, and satisfaction" (as cited in Cui, Lockee, & Meng, 2013, p. 678). Whenever possible based on the context, content, needs, and learners, I will design to increase social presence and learner-learner interaction in online courses.

Accessibility, diverse representation, and inclusion are essential components to learning design that can also impact learner engagement. I have authored three instructional modules in the last year to contribute to "fostering a learning community that empowers learners with diverse backgrounds, characteristics, and abilities" in accordance with AECT Standard 3 - Learning Environments (p. 10). I designed a module about diverse representation in course design and collaborated on a Canvas course with two teammates. Laird (2014) emphasized the importance of inclusion to all learners as it "(1) creates more equitable opportunities for students from marginalized groups to participate in higher education and (2) promotes the kinds of outcomes for all students that employers and society need, such as complex thinking

skills, the ability to work across difference, increased civic participation, and decreased prejudice (see, for example, National Leadership Council 2007).”

I designed and developed a microlearning module for the Rumie Initiative, a Canadian non-profit focusing on learning for all. The objective for “Interacting Appropriately with Individuals with Disabilities” was to empower learners with the knowledge and confidence to approach individuals with disabilities instead of avoiding interaction. I have also worked with an accessibility committee to propose changes to the Rumie learning module design and educate microlearning module designers. I focused on alt text, appropriate use of headings, and color contrast to meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0. I designed modules for 190 learning designers to promote best practices in writing alt text to empower learners who rely on screen readers.

Competencies Gained

I entered the master’s program to gain knowledge of pedagogy and instructional design theory. I had insufficient experience with collaboration. I needed experience designing and developing instruction grounded in strong learning theory and instructional design concepts. In addition, I identified several areas for improvement. I lacked the basic graphic design skills to communicate ideas through graphics and prototypes. I knew I needed to invest significant time in gaining proficiency with technology, including audio and video editing software, presentation software, and web-based tools. The graphic below conveys my professional development and commitment to lifelong learning.



Figure 1- Through work, school, and volunteer work, I have completed more than four dozen Instructional Design Projects.

Throughout the last four years, I have focused on collaborating with my peers and subjective matter experts according to AECT Standard 4 - Professional Knowledge and Skills. With my volunteer work and dozens of team projects during the master's program, I have practiced collaborative design through sharing ideas, listening, and negotiating. I enjoy working closely with peers, subject matter experts, and team leads to achieve learning outcomes.

With my goal-directed work ethic, I have developed other skillsets as well. I have worked to apply instructional design concepts and theories in class projects, my work projects, and volunteer work. I have gained proficiency in a variety of technologies and explored instructional design trends, such as gamification, escape rooms, and animated presentation software. I have acquired sufficient graphic design skills to express ideas through graphics and prototypes rather than words alone. In addition, my love of storytelling has found an outlet in creating engaging, authentic scenarios for instructional materials.

Through my coursework, I have focused on the study of pedagogy and learning environments. I have taken advantage of every opportunity to learn from the faculty and my peers. I have also dedicated many hours to volunteering with Rumie to gain hands-on experience with a wide range of topics in eLearning design. My portfolio demonstrates my achievements consistent with the AECT standards for content pedagogy, learning environments, professional knowledge and skills, and content knowledge.

[A Work in Progress](#)

As an instructional design practitioner, I still have much to learn. I look forward to applying systems approaches and learning theories in a variety of contexts. I am committed to lifelong learning in the field to continually identify areas in which I can improve. Each project brings new opportunities for my growth as a practitioner. I view workplace training as a challenge in problem solving. Every instructional need interests me. I am excited to dive into a career as a full-time instructional designer and facilitate learning by engaging learners in solving real world problems.

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