An Overview of Gustafson and Branch's Classification of ID Models

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Abstract

Gustafson and Branch (2002) provides an overview of instructional design and the three main classifications of instructional design models used to classify it. This paper explores the some of the advantages and disadvantages of the classifications and discusses that best teaching/learning situation in which each class of models might best be suited for.

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According to Alshahad (2013) "Instructional Design is the practice of creating "instructional experiences which make the acquisition of knowledge and skill more efficient, effective, and appealing" (p.50). These experiences are usually formed using models that instructional designers use to produce materials and strategies to support teaching and learning. Morrison, Ross, & Kemp, (2004) state "Instructional design models provide for a systematic approach of implementing the instructional design process for a specific educational initiative". An instructional design model is the place to start—it is a framework that helps guide the structure of a course and leads the learner to a topic that provides focus while removing distractions but still allowing a learner to take control.

Instructional design models are useful for teaching professionals to guide their practice. However, with the spread of variations in ID theories and applications how does one decide to select a model? There have been numerous attempts to compare and classify various ID models. Notably, Gustafson and Branch (2002) proposed a taxonomy of ID models with three classifications: Classroom-oriented, Product-oriented, and System-oriented. With the help of these models instructional designers produce materials that help them achieve their teaching and learning goals.

The first classification of Gustafson and Branch's taxonomy, Classroom-oriented models, are of interest to, and are usually designed for K-12 teachers, community colleges and vocational schools. They usually consist of one person, in a technologically low environment with limited available resources, in charge of designing and conducting a few hours of instruction. This instructor is usually a novice in Instructional Design, therefore the models proposed are relatively simple and straightforward (which can be an advantage in any situation). These

models take into consideration the environment of teachers with the emphasis on the selection and adoption of ready-made learning materials as opposed to custom development. The output of these models is small consisting only of modules or units of instruction used within the school year.

Product-oriented models are the second class of Gustafson and Branch's taxonomy and are specifically focused on the development of instructional materials, i.e. on the production of tools for interaction or for presenting content as support to the instruction. With respect to Classroom-oriented and System-oriented models, it is like zooming into the Develop Materials phase. They therefore consider situations in which a development team is at work with a high degree of technological complexity and require fine design/technical skills. Generally, the requirement analysis is not included in such models, as it is supposed to be completed during the instructional design process. One strength point of these models is the production of highly distributable and reusable learning materials and tools.

The last classification of models described in this taxonomy is Systems-oriented models. "Systems-oriented models normally assume that a large amount of instruction, such as an entire course or whole curriculum, will be developed with substantial resources being made available to a team of highly trained developers" (Gustafson and Branch (2002). System-oriented instructional design models can be considered a classroom-oriented model that covers a much larger scope. In such a situation, the amount of front-end analysis, testing, and revision is usually high and can be very complex from a technology standpoint.

When performing a comparison between the three classifications it should be noticed that all three models allow for some differences in implementation. Both Systems and Product-oriented models rely heavily on front-end expert analysis. This means that the model assumes

that step one will involve a wide-ranging needs analysis. The information gained from the analysis will be crucial in the next phases of the design. In particular, System-oriented models are best suited for large scale projects. The downside to these two models is that typically end users have little to no input with the finished product therefore delivery may be problematic.

End users may have a great impact on Classroom-oriented models, and the main strength of these models is that practicing classroom teachers can identify with the process it suggests. These models allow inexperienced instructional designers to perform front-end tasks that are required by experts needed for the other two. As a result, it is more likely that classroom teachers will use the classroom model.

However, there is no trial and revision in Classroom models, and the models focus on the use of existing materials rather than the design of new which may become outdated over time. Creating new instruction based on old content without using any front-end analysis could support traditional learning teaching patterns rather than researching and promoting the best practices to be used in classrooms.

Conclusion

As previously stated there are many advantages and disadvantages to each classification. Classroom-oriented models can be used by instructors with little to no ID experience and are fairly straightforward. Systems and Product-oriented models are better suited for larger projects but need a great deal of investment in both time and resources.

Personally, I feel Systems-oriented models would fit me best. Systems-oriented models align with the ADDIE approach, stressing front-end analysis and design phases. They typically undertake a large scope of effort, which I would normally be involved in, and spend more time analyzing the goals of an organization before committing.

References

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