Abstract

Constructivist instructional design (ID) models have emerged with more frequency within e-learning. These models offer guiding principles congruent with constructivist approaches to teaching and learning. Although constructivist ID models share common principles, each model also offers a unique approach to e-learning based on its context of development. Consequently, certain models will also be more authentic and meaningful for a particular situation depending on their compatibility to that particular context. If that context can be understood, then direction can be given as to the best application for the model. This chapter introduces activity theory (AT) as a lens from which to understand the context of constructivist
**Introduction**

The trend for e-learning instructional design (ID) models is shifting to include more constructivist perspectives that offer guiding principles congruent with constructivist approaches to teaching and learning. This trend is perhaps related to the number of experts recommending constructivism as the optimal approach for e-learning (Hill, 1997; Jonassen, 1994; Jonassen, Peck, & Wilson, 1999; Relan & Gillani, 1997). Willis (2000) suggests that one of the major strengths of constructivist approaches to ID is that each constructivist ID model is unique and reflects a different angle of approach to e-learning based on its context of development. He recommends that this diversity between models be recognized by moving away from the tendency to view one ID model as “THE way to think about design” (Willis, 2000, p. 5). His recommendation suggests that there is value in distinguishing between constructivist models and in determining their authenticity as a tool for ID within different e-learning contexts. The goal of this chapter is to present a conceptual framework that will allow for the examination of constructivist ID model development with the aim of identifying the unique contribution to the field of constructivist ID that the model makes.

The emphasis on context is unique to constructivist ID models in e-learning, but not to the field of education in general. Numerous studies within education suggest that context influences educational process. For example, Boud and Walker (1998) recommended that teachers create a microcontext within the classroom to overcome barriers to reflective practice that may be present in the dominant context. Turner, Meyer, Cox, Logan, DiCintio, and Thomas (1998) found that in classrooms where the students were highly engaged in activity, the teachers negotiated understanding, supported intrinsic motivation, and allowed students to take more responsibility for their learning. Perry (1998) demonstrated that context factors such as specific tasks within the classroom and evaluation practices facilitated self-regulated learning with young children. Further, a number of other researchers have highlighted the influence of context on such aspects as learning and motivation (Ames, 1992; Blumenfield, 1992), instructional practices (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986), classroom climate (Turner & Meyer, 2000), and leadership (Gronn & Ribbins, 1996).

The challenge with many of the studies examining context is that there is no common language or framework for comparative analysis. Context becomes a description that is situationally bound and limited as a comparator to other contexts. Different studies are apt to offer different expressions of context, especially if there remains no conceptual framework to guide the descriptions. Agreeably, context is
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