

Is That my Cousin or my Mom? ...Or both? The *Unnatural* Similarity of Instructional Design and Human Performance Technology.

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I love debates about whether or not instructional design and human performance technology are twins, siblings, or cousins (see Foshay, Villachica, & Stepich, 2014). Put 12 instructional designers or performance technologists in a room, and you will get 12 different perspectives on this.

Without bringing up jokes about family trees not branching, and other such tasteless things, let me just put my position out there right at the start: instructional design and human performance technology are closer than siblings. That family tree doesn't branch. They have a pretty *unnaturally* close relationship when you really think about it.

I recently re-read Foshay, Villachica, and Stepich's (2014) chapter in the *AECT Handbook of Research in Educational Communications and Technology* (4th Ed.) about the relationship between these two fields. I love that chapter, and, if you haven't availed yourself of this valuable online resource, you can access the *Handbook* for free if you are an AECT member. On the AECT website, you simply click on the "Reference Library" after logging in with your member credentials. It is a great resource for AECT members. Foshay, Villachica, and Stepich (2014) conclude that while the two fields share common backgrounds and perspectives, they have matured into two distinct fields of practice

with two different research and methodology bases.

And that is a fair conclusion, if you focus on methodologies and research bases.

But the two fields have one common component that ultimately dictates their relationship. At their highest and best, both fields point directly to accomplishment.

So the two fields are not the same, but they point to the same end.

So maybe not so different, after all?

Except for academia (how many times must we start a sentence that way?), the relationship between these two fields is crystal clear. Because, except in academia, the goal of organizational entities is accomplishment. And for most organizational entities, there is a kind of agnosticism towards how they get there. Don't get me wrong, most organizations have their values, and most conduct themselves with integrity. But they have their missions, and really, for the most part, they are willing to accomplish their missions in as expedient a way as is morally possible.

To them, learning is most often a means to an end, not the end in itself. And for most, if they can accomplish their mission without having to teach people things, that is a win (continued next page).

Episode 1: The Awkward Truth...

When HPT and Instructional Design first met, there was a very awkward moment.

Of course instructional design—the older of the two—knew the secret. It was HPT that had to deal with it.



So, wait! You're saying you are my brother and my mom, right?

Ummmm, so our family tree doesn't really branch?

THE PERFORMANCE



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Don Robison

Accomplishment does not always require learning, but intentionally designed learning should always lead to accomplishment.

For this reason, though I self-identify primarily as an instructional designer, I ultimately see myself as a performance professional. I invest my skills, imagination, creativity, sweat, and time in the task of helping individuals or organizations achieve their visions.

Ask practically any senior business, medical, industrial or military leader which is more important: learning or accomplishment, and they will invariably answer, “accomplishment.”

Reference

Foshay, W. R., Villachica, S. W., & Stepich, D. A. (2014). Cousins but not twins: Instructional Design and Human Performance Technology in the workplace. In J. M. Spector, M. D. Merrill, J. Elen, & M. J. Bishop (Eds.), *Handbook of Research in Educational Communications and Technology*. New York, NY: Springer Science+Business Media.