The civic-minded instructional designers framework: An alternative approach to contemporary instructional designers' education in higher education

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Abstract

This paper argues that an emphasis on training-for-the-job approaches has distracted designers from thinking about the meaning of their profession and the grand purpose of practising instructional design. Drawing from literature in the fields of sociology and educational technology, this paper synthesises discourses on civic professionalism in instructional design and technology, and proposes a conceptual framework that highlights the roles and qualities of a civic-minded instructional designer. It is claimed that a critical discussion on civic professionalism in the field of educational technology can offer an alternative perspective on educating instructional designers, and have practical implications on instructional design and technology curricula in higher education.

Practitioner notes

What is already known about this topic:

- Instructional design and technology (IDT) academics and scholars have acknowledged that the current gap in teaching IDT is the discrepancy between the way instructional design is practised in real-world situations and the way it is taught in IDT classrooms.
- To address the gap, IDT academics and scholars have proposed authentic learning approaches into IDT education.
- IDT literature is dominated by the perspective of preparing designers to be technically competent professionals, thus undermining designers' transformative power to initiate social change.

What this paper adds:

- This paper critiques the career-centric view and training-for-the-job goal embedded in contemporary authentic learning approaches.
- This paper suggests the application of civic professionalism in preparing instructional designers who are both socially aware and technically competent in performing their job.

- The civic-minded instructional designers (CMID) conceptual framework is proposed to scaffold our thinking of the undermined yet critical social aspect of the IDT profession.
- The CMID framework highlights the paradigm and the qualities to be instilled into IDT curricula in an effort to produce civic-minded IDT professionals.

Implications for practice and/or policy:

- Makes explicit links to social issues in micro, macro and mega contexts in teaching IDT
- Clarifies the roles of IDT profession in solving social issues
- Stresses the importance of nurturing designers' civic identities by embedding the CMID conceptual framework in IDT curricula

Introduction

Academics and practitioners have expressed concern about preparing instructional designers at higher education institutions for academia (eg, Cox, 2003; Larson, 2004; Rowland, Parra & Basnet, 1995) and corporations (eg, Julian, 2001; Larson & Lockee, 2009). There seems to be a consensus that there is a discrepancy between the way instructional design is practised in real-world situations and the way it is taught in instructional design and technology (IDT) classrooms. Part of this discrepancy is because IDT is almost always taught as a set of procedures and most often focuses on media production. Such a narrow focus of IDT 'ignores the complexity of this discipline and the high level of communication, negotiation, and other related skills needed for the practitioner to successfully approach instructional problems' (Bannan-Ritland, 1999, p. 1). Also contributing to the discrepancy is that most teaching approaches heavily emphasise an understanding of the various instructional design models available in the field (Bichelmeyer, Boling & Gibbons, 2006). This model-centric approach fails to address the broader scope of instructional design knowledge, and, consequently, does not successfully prepare students to be professional instructional designers in the field (Ertmer & Cennamo, 1995). In addition, students' confidence in exploring new ways of doing instructional design (Bichelmeyer *et al*, 2006) may decrease.

The problems associated with these approaches have resulted in a call for authentically based teaching approaches that mirror actual design practices (eg, Cox, 2003). In response, researchers have begun to explore new approaches to instructional design that prepare students for the actual jobs that they will perform and situations that they may face. This includes the studio-design model (eg, Boling & Smith, 2009), action learning (eg, Bannan-Ritland, 1999) and cognitive apprenticeship (eg, Ertmer & Cennamo, 1995).

Critiques on current approaches to educate instructional designers

Contemporary authentic approaches have undoubtedly contributed to a deeper understanding of the actual design practices in real-world situations. However, this paper argues that contemporary teaching approaches are more focused on preparing students to enter their desired instructional design career than satisfying the needs of the industry. Consequently, teaching focuses on equipping instructional designers-in-training with an assortment of technical skills and tools so that they will be technically competent in performing their jobs. These tools include the ability to perform a variety of analyses, instructional activities and assessments (Schwier, Hill, Wager & Spector, 2006). Additionally, contemporary teaching approaches highly emphasise the work process, 'how instructional design is carried out, what strategies and approaches work in various contexts, how designers should systematically practice their craft' (Campbell, Schwier & Kenny, 2008, p. 1)—in other words, the issues of *what* and *how* of the field.

In this paper, we argue that an overemphasis on career preparation has led IDT faculty, practitioners and scholars to subscribe to the perspective of training-for-the-job. Consequently, this perspective has caused us to overlook another critical yet undervalued aspect of IDT, that is, the *why* aspect of the profession and the meaning of being instructional designers (Campbell *et al*, 2008). This overemphasis on career preparation also distracts us from considering the relevance and 'grand purpose' (Schwier *et al*, 2006, p. 75) of practising instructional design. Accordingly, as Campbell and her associates (2008) have asserted, instructional designers' critical and transformative powers to initiate and to activate change at an interpersonal, institutional and societal levels are undervalued.

What worries us the most is that a career-centric approach to IDT may result in the production of IDT professionals who view their professional work and lives as detached and separated from the public's life. Rather than looking at their work as publicly related, these professionals are more likely to think of their profession from technical and economic points of view. That is, they think of commercialising their IDT knowledge and skills in the pursuit of gaining economic benefits and enjoying better social status.

Consequently, these technocratic IDT professionals may become an elite group of instructional designers—designers whose services become exclusively available only to selected clients, especially those associated with profit-making organisations. We may therefore have unintentionally withheld our professional services from the larger society, which includes citizens of low socio-economic status, community-based and non-profit organisations as well as public school systems. If this is the case, then we as IDT professionals have not met the 'social expectations of professionals to serve the public good' (Hatcher, 2008, p. 2).

Purpose of this study

Considering these situations, we see a critical need to establish an alternative approach to designers' education, one that encourages designers to value the civic meaning of their profession. To date, however, there is little scholarly discourse on the civic aspect of the IDT profession. One of the reasons for this silence could be that the study of professions and professionalism is beyond the scope of IDT. Indeed, it can be principally attributed to the field of sociology (Hatcher, 2008). Second, discourse on professionalism in IDT literature centres on ethical codes that govern the profession (eg, Yeaman, Eastmond & Napper, 2008). These discussions reflect a structuralist analysis of a profession (Hatcher, 2008) that focuses on ethical practices. What is still lacking is a scholarly discussion from a functionalist perspective, one that emphasises the role and the ethical practices of an individual professional in a society with respect to civic professionalism in IDT (Hatcher, 2008).

What follows is an attempt to (1) synthesise literature related to civic professionalism and (2) based on this synthesis, propose a conceptual framework that highlights the roles and qualities of civic-minded instructional designers (CMID). We argue that developing a new conceptual framework is critical to helping IDT professionals scrutinise the conceptualisation of IDT as a profession. Moreover, this new framework offers an alternative perspective on how we prepare instructional designers at higher education institutions.

Civic professionalism

The concept of civic professionalism has been discussed across disciplines and professions including education (eg, Peters, 2004), history (eg, Kimball, 1996), political science (eg, Dzur, 2004) and nursing (eg, Day, 2005). However, because the main purpose of this paper relates to the academic preparation of future IDT professionals by higher education institutions, this review focuses almost exclusively on civic professionalism from the perspectives of John Dewey (1927) and William M. Sullivan (2004, 2005).

Discussions on civic professionalism can be dated back to John Dewey's (1927) writing in *The public and its problems*. Dewey believed that professionals could serve as critical intermediaries to educate the public on the effects of larger social and economic forces and, consequently, could shape them to accommodate public needs (Dzur, 2004). Dewey (1927) emphasised the importance of public participation in contemporary democracy. Specifically, Dewey (1927) thought of professionals as experts who do not just 'represent and act for the public' but rather 'facilitate the public's solution to social problems.' This facilitation, Dewey theorised, can be accomplished either directly by 'providing analysis for motivated community groups' or indirectly by 'influencing the conduct of other professions' (Dzur, 2004, p. 11).

Thus, Dewey rejected the liberalist view of knowledge and intelligence as an 'individual possession' (1987, p. 47). Rather, he advocated for the concept of social 'scientific intelligence' which refers to the 'egalitarian distribution of the capacity for scientific thinking and its incorporation into democratic decision-making in the polity, workplace and elsewhere' (Westbrook, 1991, p. 187). From this point of view, knowledge is considered an asset of the society (Boyte, 2003) that needs to be shared through dialogic conversations and interactions (Hatcher, 2008).

William M. Sullivan (2004, 2005) expanded on Dewey's (1927, 1987) civic professionalism. He proposes two concepts of professionalism: technical and civic. Technical professionalism supports the view of professionals as experts with specific knowledge and skills. These professionals are considered 'purveyor[s] of expert services' (Sullivan, 2005, p. 9). Conversely, civic professionalism refers to the ideal of social reciprocity between professionals and the public, that is, the people that they profess to serve, in which 'professionals ... learn to bring their particular expertise into a larger, more complex deliberation about ends as well as means' (2005, p. 279). What really distinguishes each concept is the ethical dimension of professionalism, which Sullivan argued is 'institutionalised in the profession's social contract' (2005, p. 23) with the public. According to Sullivan (2004, 2005), this ethical dimension is the most essential yet jeopardised, dimension of professionalism.

Sullivan (2004) also argued that professionals and their professions are directly pledged to the ideals of public service. Professionals make an implicit pledge and social contract with the public that they will deploy their skills and expertise to advance 'the social values in the interest of those they serve' (Sullivan, 2004, p. 15). He argued that this responsibility and orientation toward public values are the important characteristics that distinguish professionals from other knowledge workers. From this point of view, an individual professional acts as a community or social trustee of knowledge.

Civic professionalism in IDT

The review of literature revealed that the term 'civic professionalism' has not previously been explicitly mentioned in IDT literature. There are attempts, however, to bring forth discussions on the social aspects of the IDT profession and on the roles of an instructional designer in society, one of the characteristics of a civic-minded professional outlined by Sullivan (2004, 2005). For instance, Campbell, Schwier and Kenny (2005, 2008, 2009) are among the few IDT researchers who have consistently attempted to discuss the roles of instructional designers in today's society. Using a combination of grounded theory and narrative inquiry, they conducted a 3-year study on the topic of instructional designers' roles as agents of social change with 20 instructional designers working with faculty (ie, clients) at six Canadian universities. This research led them through 'a web of interacting variables, including things such as professional identity, experience, institutional change, professional preparation, and professional communities of practice' (Schwier *et al*, 2006, p. 76), aspects that are not thoroughly discussed in the mainstream IDT literature.

These findings led Campbell *et al* (2005, 2008, 2009) to conclude that instructional designers are potential social-change agents at interpersonal, institutional and societal levels. This perception

is based on the researchers' view of instructional design as 'a socially constructed practice ... with socially transformative power through the positioning of the self in explicit action' (2005, p. 244). They have asserted that instructional designers initiate and activate changes by expressing their personal values, beliefs and convictions while engaging in social interaction or design conversations with their clients. Through these design conversations, instructional designers discuss issues that challenge clients' perceptions about concepts, purposes, forms and cultural implications of learning. By doing so, they contribute to modifying the social context that leads towards personal, institutional and social changes. In this sense, the practice of design, at least to these researchers, is not just an act rather it is a process that involves moral and political consequences.

Similarly, Inouye, Merrill and Swan (2005) proposed the concept of IDT as a helping profession. Help, they have asserted, is, has always been, and should always be the central concern of IDT, but is rarely and implicitly discussed in the literature. In fact, they contended that helping others to learn 'is the very reason for the existence of our [IDT] field—the reason why we apply science, design artifacts, and use technology' (p. 4). Thus, 'help' needs to be acknowledged as the new paradigm of IDT around which revolve the other three 'traditional' (p. 4) paradigms—of scientific, design and technology. Inouye *et al* (2005) contended that the scientific paradigm views IDT as a science that focuses on seeking, discovering and applying invariant laws, relationships or principles as embodied in IDT instructional research, theory and measurement. The design paradigm views IDT as a design-based discipline that seeks effective, efficient and appealing approaches to design. It is embodied in IDT and the instructional design and development subfields of IDT. On the other hand, the technology paradigm views IDT as technology centred, that is, using technology to accomplish a user's purposes.

Because the act of helping people and making a difference in their lives is, 'by definition, ethical' (Inouye *et al*, 2005, p. 5), the new fourth paradigm is called the ethics-centred paradigm with 'help' as its main concern. In this realm, other paradigms are viewed as subordinate to ethics. Ethics is the utmost important purpose or the *ends* of doing instructional design. The theories, techniques, models and the technology that characterise the other three paradigms are considered the *means* of doing instructional design. Instructional designers, then, are viewed as instructors and teachers, not technologists. Their main role is to help 'foster growth of individuals in all of the important venues of their lives: school, workplace, home, church, and community—the traditional locations of interest for education and the social sciences' (Inouye *et al*, 2005, p. 4), using 'the best available technologies and techniques' (Inouye *et al*, 2005, p. 15).

So far, this section has synthesised literature on civic professionalism as applicable to the IDT profession. The discourse in the literature on this issue is clearly limited. Therefore, it calls for development of a sound conceptual framework on *what*, *who*, *why* and *how to* educate CMID. In an attempt to answer these questions, the next section of this paper discusses the important attributes of CMID. These attributes become the foundational elements of a proposed conceptual framework that highlights the roles and qualities of CMID.

Attributes of CMID
The works of Campbell *et al* (2005, 2008, 2009) and Inouye *et al* (2005) have shed light on the concept of instructional designers as civic-minded professionals. They have contended that instructional designers contribute toward positive social change, or in Sullivan's (2005, p. 4) term, 'public goods', by engaging in social relationships and discourses during their design work with people who acquire their services. This contention is consistent with Sullivan's (2004, 2005) view that a civic-minded professional is an active participant in public life and is engaged in a reciprocal relationship with the public he or she professes to serve.

Secondly, both Campbell *et al* and Inouye *et al* have emphasised the educational role of CMID. Though one could argue that viewing instructional designers as teachers and as instructors undermines this role with respect to larger social contexts, Inouye *et al* (2005) explained that the social purpose of the IDT profession is to help people learn effectively in various learning contexts—formal, informal and non-formal—that transcend the learners' geographical locations—home, workplace and places of worship, among others.

Finally, the responsibility for deploying technical expertise for the public good—in the case of IDT, helping people to learn and activate change—is placed on an individual's instructional designer, not on the profession of IDT as a whole. This view is aligned with sociologists' functionalist view of the role of a profession (Hatcher, 2008).

All four contributions offer some insights into the roles of instructional designers in society. But how can these insights be translated into the education and preparation of CMID? The answer requires one to take a holistic view of the concept of civic professionalism in IDT and to summarise it into a practical conceptual framework.

The CMID conceptual framework

Our synthesis of the literature review became the foundation of an emerging conceptual framework called the CMID framework. This proposed framework is comprised of two main components: (1) a paradigm and (2) qualities of CMID. A professional civic-minded instructional designer is defined here as an instructional designer who has the public interest and a sense of civic responsibility at the forefront of his or her work. He or she is also attentive, responsible and responsive to the emergent instructional needs of the members of the community. Most importantly, he or she utilises knowledge and skills in IDT to improve learning and performance of others. According to this perspective, a professional is defined based on the type of occupation and tasks he or she performs that reflect his or her expertise in the area, rather than on formal education or training in a specific area and/or membership in a specific professional organisation. The basis for this choice is grounded on a few studies (eg, Cox & Osguthorpe, 2003; Winer & Vázquez-Abad, 1995) showing that a number of IDT practitioners do not necessarily receive any formal IDT education or training. They are assigned, rather, to the tasks by their organisations, people who Merrill and Wilson (2007) refer to as designers-by-assignment. In addition to offering this definition, this framework asserts that a CMID needs to embrace a civic-minded paradigm and a set of civic-minded qualities.

The CMID paradigm

The literature refers to the term 'paradigm' as a particular worldview, perspective or set of shared values that 'bind[s] people together into a common community' (Davies, 1997, p. 35). Because civic professionalism relates significantly to issues of professional ethics and integrity, the CMID framework finds its base in IDT's ethics-centred paradigm as proposed by Inouye *et al* (2005). As previously described, these authors view helping people to learn efficiently within various contexts as a central concern of this paradigm—the ultimate social purpose of IDT as a profession. An instructional designer, then, is seen as a teacher and an instructor who utilises his or her knowledge and expertise to help people learn.

This study extends the view of Inouye and his colleagues (2005) on 'help' and the instructional designer's role toward a broader social-level perspective. It takes the view that the social purpose of IDT is to empower people to making informed decisions. CMID, then, are viewed as educators—not just teachers and instructors—and agents of social change who have realised their knowledge and technical expertise to help people make informed and wise decisions in order to improve their lives.

Adapting Kaufman's (2009) organisational elements model to explain three levels of organisational planning, the CMID framework takes the view that a professional civic-minded instructional designer functions at three different context levels: micro, macro and mega. The micro context refers to a person's immediate environment, such as the organisation in which he or she works, the neighbourhood in which he or she lives, or the school he or she attends. The macro context refers to a person's extended environment beyond the immediate environment, in which he or she is directly involved and to which he or she attributes membership, such as his or her country of residence, socioeconomic status and others. The mega context refers to an individual's larger cultural environment, one in which he or she may be indirectly involved and to which he or she belongs beyond the macro context. This mega context also assumes that any instructional design work done by an instructional designer has its own implications with respect to each of these three contexts.

For each context, there are possible issues to which a civic-minded instructional designer could contribute in performing his or her design work. For instance, a civic-minded instructional designer can create instructional materials and/or conduct on-site training to educate members of the community in which he or she resides about what to do in case of natural disasters (ie, the micro context). Using appropriate technologies, he or she can distribute the materials to wider audiences, for example, to people in other states (ie, macro context) and/or other countries (ie, mega context) so that they, too, can benefit from the materials. In this example, the civic-minded instructional designer has utilised his or her instructional design knowledge and technological skills to address one important issue, the issue of safety, to others beyond his or her immediate context. Figure 1 presents a graphical illustration of the relationship between each context that will affect a civic-minded instructional designer's work.

Qualities of a civic-minded instructional designer
To distinguish a civic-minded instructional designer from a non-civic-minded instructional designer calls for identification of specific characteristics or qualities. Building on Hatcher's (2008) categorisation of characteristics of a civic-minded professional, four major components that make up a civic-minded instructional designer can be identified. They are (1) belief, (2) knowledge, (3) skills and (4) dispositions.

Belief
Shabajee (1999) stated that it is important for a designer to have a clear set of beliefs to help clarify and internalise the overall mission or objective of the design work he or she does. Beliefs also inform the designer's decision when he or she must make compromises during the design and development process.

The CMID framework identifies three sets of beliefs of a civic-minded instructional designer. First, he or she needs to be aware that his or her existence and design work are socially interdependent on the clients and the public. That is, the work may have implications with respect to broader societal problems (Sullivan, 2005). Second, the designer needs to believe and represent himself or herself as a community or social trustee of knowledge who vows to deploy technical expertise for 'public-regarding ends and in a public-regarding way' (Hatcher, 2008, p. 25). Finally, the designer needs to believe he or she possesses the transformative power to produce positive changes in society (Campbell *et al*, 2009) by actively participating in dialogues, activities and social policies that affect public life.

Knowledge
In the case of CMID, knowledge of social issues in their local, micro context is important to help them understand just how they can utilise their knowledge and expertise to address broader social issues experienced by other communities in macro and mega contexts. Such social
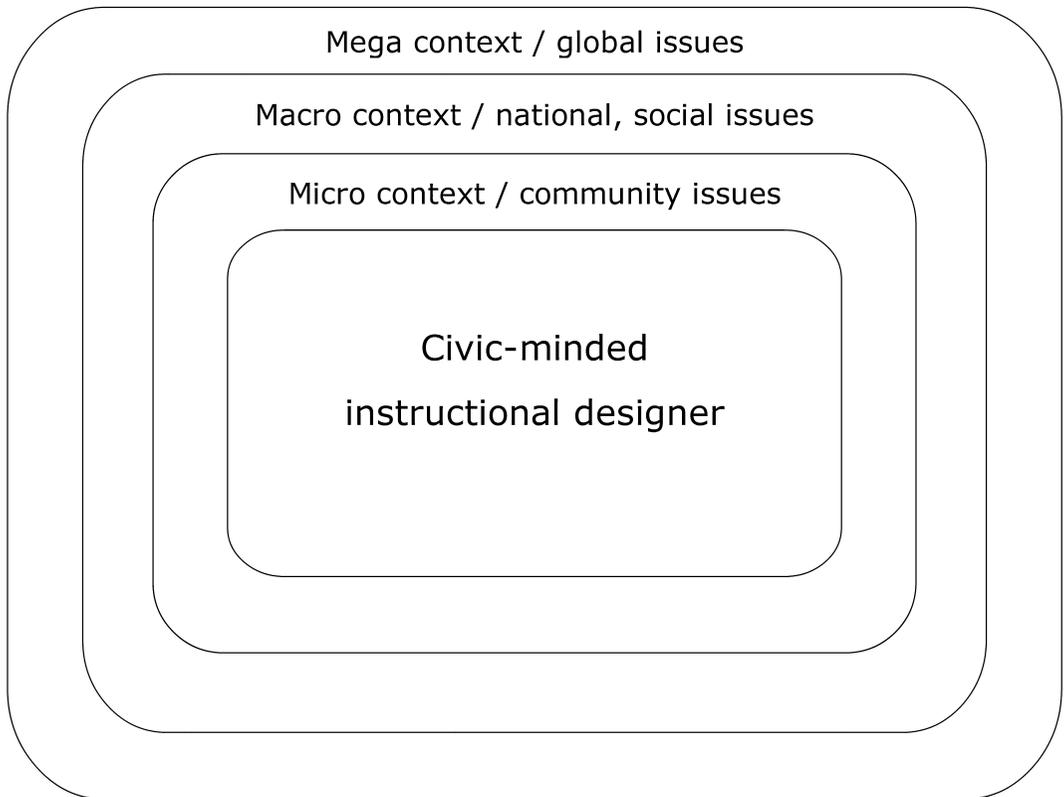
Figure 1: A civic-minded instructional designer's contexts

knowledge can also inform their understanding of how they can make their design work, especially on issues related to cultural sensitivities, applicable and relevant across these three contexts. However, it should be noted that designs that might be workable in local, micro contexts could be unworkable in macro and mega contexts. In this situation, knowledge about cultural diversity is important so that designers can integrate elements of culture into their designs (Young, 2008).

For example, an instructional designer might be determined to address issues of teen pregnancy in her local community. Using the needs analyses that she conducts, she can identify a need to educate teenagers in her neighbourhood about the importance of using birth control, and may make this the central focus of the instructional materials that she designs. While the idea of birth control may be well accepted in the designer's local community, it may be perceived as unacceptable to others, for instance those in faith-based communities. In this situation, a designer's knowledge about what works in her micro context is non-applicable to the macro and mega contexts.

Skills
In addition to IDT technical skills, a civic-minded instructional designer should be competent in interpersonal skills such as the ability to interact with others, especially those from varied backgrounds. Because CMID are expected to take the lead in solving public problems (Sullivan, 2004), they also must have leadership or 'participatory civic skills' (Hatcher, p. 45), including the ability to inspire and organise others to address community needs and to participate in voluntary
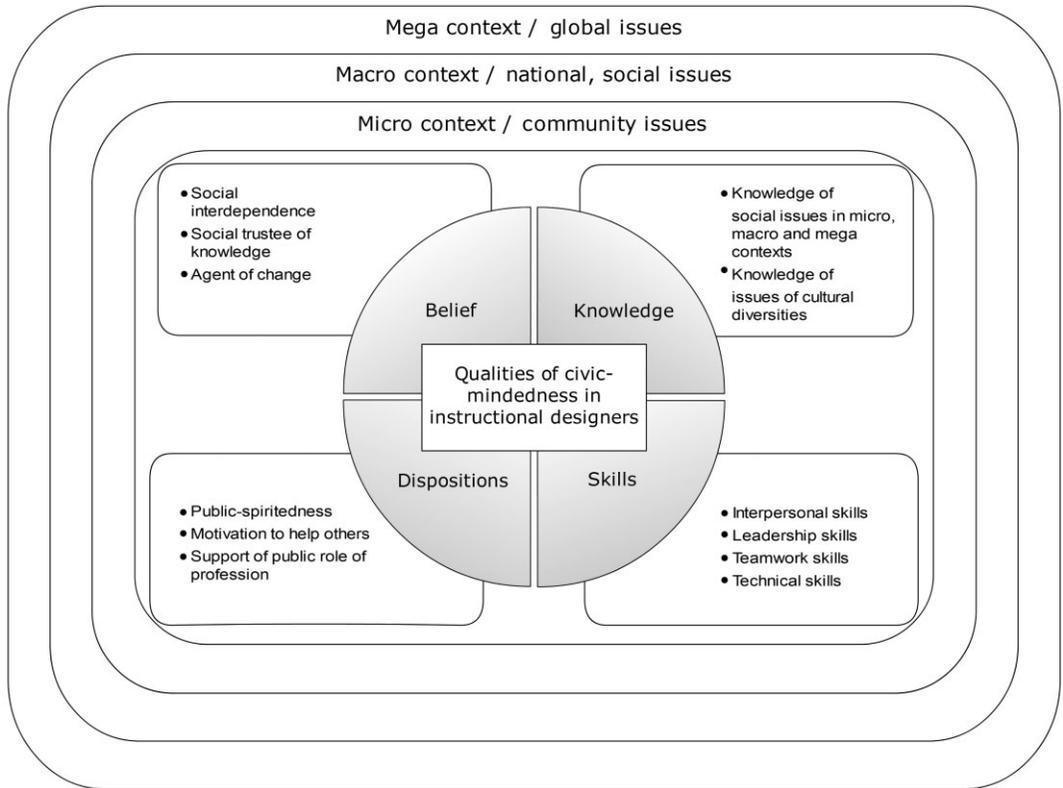
Figure 2: The civic-minded instructional designers (CMID) framework: paradigm and qualities necessary for civic-minded instructional designers

associations. Additionally, they must acquire teamwork skills such as the ability to listen and understand another's perspective, to build consensus across diverse opinions, to engage in dialogues and to have strong relationships with others (Hatcher, 2008).

Dispositions
The CMID framework recognises certain dispositions of CMID. These dispositions include public-spiritedness, or having an interest in issues related to public welfare. Sullivan (2005) recognises public-spiritedness as 'the bedrock of civic culture' (p. 265). Because helping others is the fundamental value of the IDT profession (Inouye *et al*, 2005), CMID are expected to be motivated to help others improve their lives. They also need to support the public role of the profession and to see their professional work as the main platform of a vocation to advance people's lives.

Figure 2 presents a graphical illustration of the CMID framework.

Conclusion
A review of available literature on the topic of instructional designers' education in higher education revealed a lack of focus on educating designers to be active contributors in improving public life or the civic aspect of the IDT profession. This paper argues that most contemporary approaches to teaching instructional design are career-centric and technically oriented. It is asserted that rather than nurturing the transformative roles of an instructional designer in his or her society (Campbell *et al*, 2008), the focus is much more on equipping designers with a variety

of technical instructional design skills and tools that will satisfy the needs of the design industry. Drawing from literature in the fields of sociology and educational technology, this paper synthesises discourse on civic professionalism and its application to the IDT field. It also proposes a conceptual framework that highlights the roles and the qualities of a civic-minded instructional designer that is useful for generating CMID.

This study contributes to the field of educational technology in several ways. It offers an alternative perspective on our current practice of preparing instructional designers at higher education institutions. It argues that current preparation programmes should focus on preparing civic-minded professionals who practise IDT with the purpose of improving public life. Additionally, it offers the CMID conceptual framework which is critical to helping IDT professionals scrutinise the current conceptualisation of IDT as a profession. IDT faculty will be able to use the CMID framework as a guide to embed a civic dimension into their graduate IDT curricula. In general, such curricula will encourage students to explore real-life issues in their immediate contexts (ie, the micro context); relate these issues to broader contexts (ie, the macro and mega contexts); be more reflexive, especially in thinking about how their professional roles and work affect society; and conduct more explicit rather than implicit discussions on moral and ethical issues. Ultimately, this new framework is a significant step toward educating instructional designers to see the social implications of IDT for the broader social perspective, and to address issues such as war, poverty, substance abuse, disease, interpersonal abuse and so forth in their instructional design work.

In sum, the CMID framework offers a conceptual understanding of the relationship between an instructional designer and his/her work in larger social contexts; this is the paradigm of the framework. It is argued that such understanding is critical in transforming the current practice of training instructional designers. Once this relationship is understood, the framework offers insights as the qualities that characterise CMID. Both the paradigm and qualities should be viewed as the desired ends, that is, desired goals or purposes of IDT training, so that we, as IDT faculty, will be able to utilise the appropriate means, that is, instructional strategies and pedagogical approaches, to achieve these goals.

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