Title: Instructional Design: Centering the Learner's Experience

Description: In this episode, Alicia Willis explains how instructional design impacts all facets of learning. From ensuring the accessibility of learning materials to supporting educators and organizations in curriculum and training, instructional design puts the learner at the center. Alicia Willis is an Instructional Development Specialist and has been with The Center on Education and Training for Employment since 2013. Alicia provides curriculum recommendations, development, and guidance for the Center's programs.

Fara Allen: Welcome to CETE Works, a podcast produced by the Curriculum and Training Team at the Center on Education and Training for Employment—a translational research center on Ohio State's campus. We work where research meets reality. I'm your host, Fara Allen, a Program Coordinator at the Center. This podcast series will focus on the various approaches and supports that our center offers to educators of all learners. How do educators engage, nurture, and support their learners? Listen in on these discussions that highlight how educators can connect with and understand their learners! At CETE, we believe that everyone deserves to experience lifelong learning! To learn more about our work, you can visit our website CETE, that's C-E-T-E, dot O-S-U dot E-D-U. Alicia Willis joins me as our guest today. Alicia is an instructional Development Specialist at our center and provides curriculum recommendations, development, and guidance for our center's programs. You'll get to hear Alicia talk about the importance of accessibility and analyzing learners and their needs, as she also explains her knowledge and skills involved with the overall design process. In the real world, you may hear other terms associated with Instructional design, such as instructional technology, curriculum design, and instructional systems design.

Fara Allen: Alicia, welcome back. You were a guest in our first series where you talked about on-the-job training and what works. We're happy to have you back today talking about another topic that you're an expert in and that's instructional design. Can you start us off by explaining what instructional design is, what it means, and how it relates to our overall theme of this series?

Alicia Willis: Yeah, great, thanks for having me, Fara. So, instructional design encompasses all of what we do at the Center from analyzing learners and their needs, which is done by the evaluation team. Part of that also includes conducting job analysis and task analysis, done by the DACUM team. And then, our curriculum and training team plans, designs, and implements instruction. That includes goals and objectives, designing, and developing instructional activities, conducting training for both face-to-face and online learning environments, either synchronously, which is where all learners participate at the same time, asynchronously, which is at the learner's own pace, or a hybrid of the two. And then, also an instructional design is written in performance assessments, which is done by the assessment team, and evaluating learning and evaluating learning interventions, which it goes back to the

evaluation team, and this is a cycle, so it happens in a cycle over and over. And it follows the ADDIE process of analyze, design, development, implement, and evaluate. Within the development phase, I use SAM, which is the successive approximation model created by Allen Interactions. It allows for faster prototyping, review, and revision during development. Each instructional designer has a preferred process and, when asked which I prefer, I usually say that I prefer SAM with an ADDIE. And learners are at the center of instructional design, which suggests that the learning experience design may be a more appropriate term. Learning experience design, or LX design, is the process of creating learning experiences that enable the learner to achieve the desired learning outcome in a human centered and goal-oriented way, this puts the learner at the center. Learning experience design is newer but may eventually become the go to term for this type of work. Without learners there isn't a need for instructional design. So, before starting any instructional design project, you have to analyze learners and their needs. Instructional designers must also understand how people learn and think, along with the variety of abilities and disabilities that learners have that may impact their learning experiences. All instructional designers need to provide accommodations to ensure instruction is geared towards every learner.

Fara Allen: Alicia, tell us a little bit about how your work at the Center directly connects to instructional design and how you originally got involved in it.

Alicia Willis: Well, at the Center, I'm the instructional development specialist, so, I pretty much live and breathe instructional design. I just finished one project, so, currently I'm working on three different instructional design projects that all involve creating online modules that are going to be taken by learners at their own pace. And then, they'll be followed with facilitated sessions that will expand on what learners learned in those modules. When I'm not planning, designing, or developing instruction, I'm learning new ways to understand learners and how to address their needs. Also, I try to stay on top of best practices and technology. Those seem to change daily. I was raised by teachers, so I grew up surrounded by instructional design, but I didn't know that was what it was called until my second or third year at the Center. Growing up, I was always driven to help show others how to do something if I saw them struggling, so it just kind of comes naturally. The first time I created an instruction professionally was in 2001 with my first job out of college. I was one of the first people hired as a site services coordinator tasked with managing flexible offices for a computer company. It wasn't long after I started that I was tasked with creating training manuals and using them at other locations to train new coordinators. My next position was with an educational publisher, and there I developed textbooks and online education programs for elementary reading and career technical education courses. Then I joined the Center in 2013 and now have more than 15 years of instructional design experience under my belt. Saying that makes me feel really old and a little exhausted. I love instructional design, because the field is constantly changing. New tools and techniques come along every day to make designing instruction more effective for learners. And I love working at the Center because I don't feel the pressure of being the sole expert on every phase of instructional design. Some instructional designers

are the only one at their organization who does this work. Some instructional designers are the only one. And, for me, that would be overwhelming.

Fara Allen: So, you're always learning. And tying into the overall theme of this series, can you tell us help this work benefits, educators, and learners.

Alicia Willis: As I said before, this work is all centered around learners, but a lot of what we do at the Center is geared towards educators. When I started at the Center, I designed instruction for Ohio's Aspire administrators, teachers. and support staff. Aspire is Ohio's adult basic and secondary education program. And with that work, I had a lot of pride and being able to help educators improve the lives of their students. My current work has a variety of audiences. One project is going to be delivered to teachers and pre-K through middle school students to help them and their schools improve practices of working with families to build student literacy. Another project will be delivered to K-12 leadership to help them implement positive changes to make their schools more equitable and inclusive. This work will ripple out to have positive impacts on teachers and students. A third project I am working on is going to be geared toward professionals who train employees in their organizations. The instruction provided by this work will help the training professionals learn how to develop it, learn how to develop competency-based instruction that builds on what they've learned in the DACUM virtual Institute. During a typical day I might be planning the goals and outcomes for one project, designing learning modules for another, and recording or editing audio and video for third project.

Fara Allen: Alicia, following that very inspiring explanation, can you tell us what motivates you to do this work?

Alicia Willis: Yeah, of course. As I said before, my parents were educators, so I kind of feel like it's in my blood to help learners gain knowledge and skills. I also feel that I've been privileged and was exposed to anything and everything I wanted to know and learn, and so I think it's my duty to do whatever I can to help others learn and grow.

Fara Allen: Now that we have a look into what motivates you, how do you turn this around and inspire and support others in your work?

Alicia Willis: This is a difficult question because I don't think I am very inspiring at all. I have a habit of downplaying my abilities or thinking everyone else already knows what I know. I'm trying to get better at this, and I have worked with colleagues to help them learn whatever phase in instructional design they're interested in. I tried to look for strengths in others and align those to part of instructional design that they might enjoy. Also, I try to make myself available for others to ask questions, but I don't know if I'm perceived as available, I try to be.

Fara Allen: Well, I can tell you, as someone who utilizes your expertise and your knowledge, you're always accessible to me, you're very helpful, and I've learned a lot from you, so I appreciate that. Along these same lines of inspiration and support, we're

a learning organization at CETE. And since we're learning culture, I'm going to turn the table just a bit. Can you share with us what professional development you have participated in most recently and what your biggest takeaway was, or how did you grow from that experience?

Alicia Willis: I love learning new things, so I take advantage of all the free trainings I can. Recently I completed trainings on accessibility, both through LinkedIn learning and courses that are offered to employees at Ohio State. And in those trainings, I learned how to make documents more accessible. I knew the basics of what was covered, but they were good refreshers. It's always good to like keep it fresh in your mind. My biggest takeaway is that the styles in Microsoft Word are crucial to ensuring that text is accessible. If you use the styles properly, you'll have a lot less work on the back end to ensure a document's accessibility. And the more trainings I take, the more I realize that I'm my most dreaded type of learner. I want information quickly, I don't like to participate in group activities, and I don't complete the application activities provided to make what I learned stick. I would not like to design a training for me.

Fara Allen: That's funny. Thank you for letting us have a deeper look into your own learning. I have one last question, and I have to ask it. Is there any knowledge or skills that you sought out to gain during the pandemic?

Alicia Willis: With the pandemic, because we were putting more and more things online, and online has more accessibility challenges, and right now accessibility is big. I have been trying to gain all the knowledge and skills I can regarding accessibility to ensure that my instructional design projects are as accessible as possible to all learners. Accessibility is so important because if instruction isn't accessible to all learners, their needs won't be met. Learners have enough challenges in their lives, and I don't want accessibility to be an added barrier to anyone's learning experience.

Fara Allen: That's such positive reinforcement, Alicia. Thank you for taking the time to share your expertise insights and your personal story with us.

Alicia Willis: For anyone interested in developing learning experiences or providing instruction to learners, our Center has experts in every phase of instructional design. So we're a one stop shop.

Fara Allen: On behalf of the Curriculum and Training team at The Center on Education and Training for Employment, we'd like to thank our guest today. If you would like more information on this topic, please contact us at go.osu.edu\OhioState4Work. We would be happy to hear from you and share more information about our services and our work. Follow us on Twitter at OhioState4Work. See our description for details. Thank you for listening to CETE Works, we hope you enjoyed this episode. Be well and bye for now.