9

A Critical Discourse on the Role, Motivations and Beliefs of the Educational Technologist in Irish Higher Education

Larry McNutt, Institute of Technology Blanchardstown

Corresponding author: Larry.McNutt@itb.ie

Introduction

The current discourse on sustainability in Higher Education is often accompanied by an analysis and critique of structures and roles, some of which can be portrayed as archaic and inflexible. In terms of policy in the Irish context, the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* was published in 2011 (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) and the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education was established in 2012. In the midst of what might be perceived of as rhetoric, there is also a parallel commentary that applauds many of the innovative teaching and learning practices and approaches that have evolved in the higher education scene as evidenced in the National Academy consultation document (Higher Education Authority, 2011:4):

> This period has seen a transformation in the resourcing of teaching and learning, with greater availability and uptake of professional development opportunities, the adoption of new forms of pedagogy for enhanced student engagement, extensive usage of technology in Irish higher education and an increasing emphasis on teaching in the tenure and promotion processes for academic staff.

Gosling (2008) argues that the creation of Education Development Units within the United Kingdom has been influenced by the massification of higher education, the reductions in funding per student, the diversification of the student profile, the growth of educational technologies and the funding made available for educational development projects (p.9). In some respects, the Irish experience has lagged behind its UK, European, Australian, and United States counterparts and in effect has skipped a generation in relation to the development of educational technology. It is only recently that sources of formal funding have enabled the clear identification of a need for, and the subsequent establishment of, the role of the educational technologist. Viewing educational technology solely through a technology lens places an emphasis on the tangible, measurable aspects of these developments, for example, the number of learning objects created or the number of courses present on a VLE. However, switching the lens to focus on the practitioner values and beliefs illuminates the 'off stage', often unacknowledged, compromises and tensions required in balancing the many competing agendas at the heart of the higher education sector including the learner, the academic, technology and the higher education system.

This chapter will discuss the findings from a two year study, carried out during 2008 and 2009 that investigated and captured the hidden voice of the educational technologist in the landscape of Irish higher education. In the following section, I will briefly explore the background to this study including a description of the research design.

The Research Design

Background

This research has its origins in the unexpected outcome of a request made to a group of educational technologists in December 2007 at the Irish National Digital Learning Repository (NDLR) symposium. They were asked to choose to view either a video segment describing in detail the underlying architecture of an award winning educational technology solution or alternatively a video clip presenting a narrative of a student's experience who, because of a disability, was unable to attend college, but through technology could attend online. The majority of the group wanted to view the impact on the student; of course, they were also interested in the technology but at that juncture they had a clear preference to view a narrative account of an educational technology intervention. This event had an impact on me because I recognised that a group that would be labelled as 'techno-centric' displayed an emotional response which reflected values and beliefs that receive scant attention within the field of educational technology.

At this time, I was also introduced to the work of Pierre Bourdieu whose concepts of habitus, field and capital resonated with me for reasons. My instinct was that these conceptual tools could explain the inherent contradictions and tensions within the educational technology domain. I wanted to excavate beneath the surface of the emotional response of the aforementioned participants in order to illuminate the views, opinions, beliefs and accounts of their practice. In so doing, I hoped to present a more accurate picture of the field of educational technology and the habitus of the main players within that field. I was also influenced by the realisation that this exploration would require an approach that would encourage self-reflection in order to counteract the criticism that Bourdieu (2000) has levied at research activity which, he suggests, tends to take as given, the values, questions and categories of the field and the society in which it operates:

> The agent engaged in practice knows the world… too well, without objectifying distance, takes it for granted, precisely because he is caught up in it, bound up with it; he inhabits it like a garment… he feels at home in the world because the world is also in him, in the form of the habitus (p.142).

The main conceptual challenge posed by this study was how to examine the habitus of these innovators in higher education i.e. the values and beliefs of those who use technology as a means to enhance or transform their approaches to teaching and learning. The decision with regards which research method to adopt was guided by the several published studies that employed Bourdieu's concept of habitus in their research (Hulme, n.d.; Dumais, 2002; Barber, 2002). McNutt (2010: 84) referring to the work of Webb, Schirator and Danagher (2005), outlined how Bourdieu has explored the relationship between people's practices and the context in which these practices occur, whilst noting that academics who are disposed to turn an inquiring gaze on others are often reluctant to turn the gaze onto themselves. The approach of the researcher in attempting to reveal the habitus of an individual(s) is, according to Maton (2008):

> …to analyse practices so that the underlying structuring principles of the habitus

> are revealed. However, empirically, one does not 'see' a habitus but rather the effects of a habitus in the practices and beliefs to which it gives rise. The structure of the habitus must be captured by excavating beneath practices to capture its relational structure as one among a range of possible structures (p. 62).

Visual aids were chosen as the tool to 'excavate beneath practices' and to capture beliefs and values. As Mason (2005) notes:

> images may be used to prompt research participants to talk about something that may be uncomfortable, something personal such as their family history, or something such as their direct experience of a phenomenon illustrated by the image (p. 331).

This identification of a method was important – there was a sense of a viable approach emerging to give voice to the underlying research questions. I was interested in the underlying conceptual frameworks in terms of educational technologists' perceptions and views regarding the use of educational technology.

I considered that focus groups would be an appropriate data gathering method for my research question as discussion and conversation would be key to accessing the breath and depth of information and insights required. Silverman (2010) describes the focus group where the researcher 'acts more as the facilitator of a group discussion than as a questioner' (p.110). This approach, coupled with the use of visual imagery informed the design of the six focus groups all of which would begin with a series of the eight reflection points designed to prompt and to initiate dialogue (see Table 1).

Participant Selection

The focus groups occurred during May, June and July of 2009 in Dublin, Athlone, Belfast, and Galway. Table 2 notes the numbers of people who attended each focus group and whether they represented the university or the Institute of Technology (IoT) sector. The focus groups lasted approximately 2-3 hours in duration. Though all participants had agreed to attend voluntarily, participants had been invited to attend the focus groups by email through a known point of contact in each participating institution. Inviting the participants, in and of itself, uncovered some interesting issues; in some organisations, the role of educational technologist is a formal appointment whilst in other cases it is filled by an academic who may receive support or time in lieu for their efforts. Thus the diversity of the group was already apparent. I facilitated each focus group with reference to guidelines and good practice (Iedema and Braithwaite, 2004; Kitzinger, 1995).

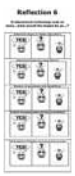
Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5	Theme 6	Theme 7
						
Motivation	**Profile of Higher Education**	**Observations on education**	**Characteristics of my voice**	**My influences**	**Impact – if remove educational technology**	**My assumptions**
Personal view/belief	General observation	General observation	Personal view/ belief	Personal view/belief	My opinion	My opinion

Table 1: Focus Group Reflection Points

Number	Type of Institution	Location	Number of participants
1	IOT	Rural	7
2	IOT	Urban	5
3	University	Rural	3
4	IOT	Urban	4
5	University	Rural	2
6	University	Urban	2
			23

Table 2: Profile of Participants

Data Analysis

The audio recordings of the focus groups were transcribed and submitted to each of the participants for their final comment; very few edits were requested and the individuals were satisfied with these records of the discussions. The transcripts were saved in six individual word documents, each representing the full discussion by each group of all the themes. The next stage involved using *ATLAS.ti*, a qualitative data analysis tool, to assist in the coding and subsequent analysis of the data. The first step involved creating a new Hermeneutic Unit – this is the actual project data and includes the documents, codes, quotations, memos and any other files associated with the work. The range of media that can be incorporated includes images, video, audio, Google maps and various text file formats. The initial approach to analysing the data 'sliced' the six transcript files horizontally by theme and stored each 'slice' in a separate document – each of these documents was then assigned to a separate Hermeneutic unit. The Hermeneutic Unit (HU) editor is the main window which displays the contents of the documents and provides the tools required for coding and analysis. Gibbs and Taylor (2005:1) have described the coding process as 'combing the data for themes, ideas and categories and then marking similar passages of text with a code label'.

The end result of this process is a set of documents overlaid with a coding scheme and associated highlighted segment of texts i.e. quotations. All of the codes identified during this process emerged from the data and reflected the essences of the discussion at that point. Gibbs and Taylor (2005) refer to these as grounded codes which 'emerge from the data because you put aside your prejudices, presuppositions and previous knowledge of the subject area and concentrate instead on finding new themes in your data' (p.1). Dey (2004) uses the term 'open coding' as 'the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorising data' (p.84). The process commenced with a set of 'a priori' themes to which the focus group discussions were filtered through, yielding a set of code families representing a rich body of commentary captured in a bank of quotations. However the vibrancy and interconnectedness of the discussions could not be adequately contained within the original reflection themes – once these artificial boundaries were removed the data settled into the final four themes which were:

- Theme A: Views on Educational Technology
- Theme B: The Role of the Educational Technologist
- Theme C: Motivations and Philosophy of Educational Technologists
- Theme D: Higher Education Today

In the next section I will discuss these findings by focussing on two of these themes (i) the role of the educational technologist and (ii) their personal motivations and beliefs.

The Role of an Educational Technologist

Tension and balance

The role of educational technologists in contemporary higher education in Ireland could best be described as a balancing act. Oliver (2002) notes that in educational technologist appointments there can be, '… tension between the marginal nature of the posts and their importance in terms of institutional change' (p.248). Gornall (1999:48) points to the hybrid nature of the role: 'And what of the 'new professionals' themselves? Do they recognise their liminality, the hybrid nature of the role?'

A critical success factor in being an effective educational technologist is the ability to identify technology interventions that support not just the teacher, but also sustain the relationship between the learner and the educator. This capstone belief requires an ability to balance the support required by the stakeholders i.e. the academic or student, with the underlying priority of ensuring the relationship is fostered and encouraged to grow. The tension in the role is captured by the often conflicting motivations of the educational technologist, who is generally learner-centred, and the academic who may be willing to explore the potential of the technology, where the technology may offer more tangible and realised benefits for the academic rather than the learner. For example, functions within a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) that automates the collection and marking of assignments could be viewed as a support primarily for an academic's administrative duties rather than providing any significant benefit to the learner. This potential conflict was noted by one of the focus group participants:

> A very prominent tension in this job is that we are going out from our team with a remit to support staff in enhancing student learning generally, but we have a real double-edged sword there because they may well be looking to us for convenient methods for getting over administrative and other problems they have.
>
> (Focus Group 5)

Promoting the benefits of educational technology for the academic, whilst also maximizing the benefits for the learner, can be mutually exclusive. An additional tension which emerged from the focus groups was the reluctant admission that decisions and initiatives are often technology-led or involve chasing a 'shiny new gadget', rather than employing a solution with a clearly demonstrated pedagogic value. One participant indicated this dilemma:

> The people who are innovating are maybe slightly more geeky, maybe their focus is a little bit about that how they can, I suppose, display their prowess rather than having maybe more fundamental aims about how they might improve education…
>
> (Focus Group 3)

However, the newness and potential of the technology, while not always an end in itself, could provide the necessary catalyst to spark an interest in an innnovative pedagogical solution which incorporated some technology. Engagment with technology also has an

added benefit for staff in that it lessens the risk of being labelled a laggard. The links between personal/academic identity and use of technology are well researched. Yi et al. (2005) note the importance of an individual's propensity to experiment with IT and Roca & Gagne (2007) consider perceived playfulness as an important motivational factor, defined by Davis as 'the extent to which the activity of using a computer is enjoyable in its own right aside from the instrumental value of the technology' (p.1587). Despite some staff enjoying their forays into technology, it is recognised that some academic staff are challenged by the demands placed on them in this regard. Educational technologists recognise this:

> I would have a lot of empathy for people who are kind of being, not oppressed by technology but having technology kind of forced upon them.
>
> (Focus Group 3)

This ability to act as a broker between the hard edge of technocentrism and the needs of learners was noted as being integral to the role of the educational technologist. This view is echoed by McCauley Jugovich & Reeves (2006). Describing feedback from academics who had attended an intensive seven day technology workshop presented by them, they refer to one comment made to them:

> 'You're not like normal IT people.' When asked for clarification, the faculty member said that we (the authors) talk on their terms in non-technie language and that we are committed to their success instead of telling them what they should do or how they should do it (p.60).

More than just a technical role

Gosling (2008) comments that Education Development Units (EDUs), within which many educational technologists are based, have to 'work hard to ensure that they work alongside academic staff, and learning support staff, in a way which is based on conversation and dialogue…' (p 43). A requirement for empathy, balance and dialogue are necessary to allow educational technologists navigate through the various competing agendas that define higher education. Participants in this study identified advocacy, and personal, professional and technical attributes as being important. These included: good communication skills; the ability to be supportive; negotiation skills; technical expertise; and the ability to teach people at all levels. These attributes were seen to be common to both innovative academics, in the educational technology field, and formally appointed educational technologists. This list clearly suggests that educational technologists do not see their role as a solely technical position which simply promotes technology for technology's sake; rather, they seek to continually assess the alignment of the technology with the educational objectives of programmes, the local learning environment and the needs of staff and students:

> We show them, we give them examples, we talk to them, we thrash it out with them … so we're not just saying 'this is pod cast and here's how you do it.' We actually explain … where you could use it, and where it would be beneficial …. So we're always giving them examples ….
>
> (Focus Group 4)

Participants in this study recognise the importance of staff training and their approach reflects Oliver's assertion that ongoing support is a critical success factor in any innovations within higher education (Oliver, 2002). They noted the challenge of ensuring that training programmes and technology support were presented in a manner that would not alienate an academic or undermine their efforts. Oliver (2002) noted similar insights:

> It is important to note that the process is a two way one; in order to teach the collaborator, the learning technologist must first understand their context. This requires the learning technologist to organise their activity and expertise around the needs of the collaborator – a fundamentally learner centred model of professional development (p.247).

The hidden voice

Finding one's voice is key to asserting one's role. In the focus group sessions, Reflection Four (see Figure 1), involved participants selecting a pictogram they felt that would best identify their 'voice'. However, the groups were informed that the selection was purely representative and that they could describe their voice in whatever way, or through whichever medium, they were most comfortable with.

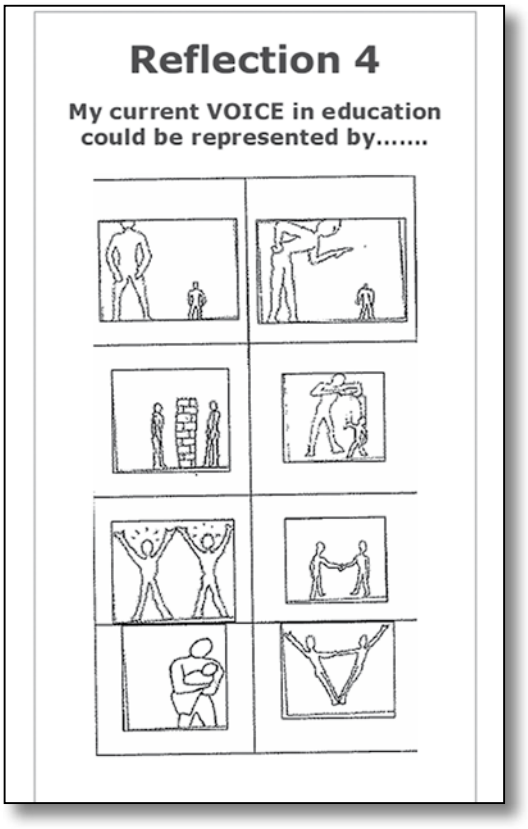


Figure 1: Perceptions of Educational Technologists

Only one participant declared an inability to identify with the pictograms:

> I'm not sure whether I could identify with any of those pictures there. (Focus Group 1)

This process led to some thought provoking observations on the changing role of academics and the emerging role of educational technologists, and to feelings of isolation:

> You can operate within an organisation like this very much on your own. (Focus Group 1)

of one's place in the organization:

> I think we're too low down and we're too small, we're just really, really small fish in a very big pond… (Focus Group 3)

and of being silenced:

> But as far as communicating our views to management I think I have indicated before it seems to be a one way channel of communication, they're not listening to us but we have to listen to them … so that is that… muzzled. (Focus Group 1)

Frequently these feelings lead to frustration:

> There are things we report upwards, they go through the formal channels, they're reported to the funders, they're reported to the groups internally. But the full meaning of what we're saying, I think, is very hard to get across. (Focus Group 5)

The idea of possessing a 'voice' was met with surprise by the participants. Voiceless educational technologists supporting the work of voiceless academics is the residue of addressing many of the challenges, conflicts and contradictions identified earlier. The sense of frustration, isolation, insignificance and of being 'muzzled' which was strongly expressed by the participants, is often exacerbated by a hierarchical structure that reinforces their perceptions of the situation.

Reasons for the often marginal existence of this role within higher education, which leads to dissatisfaction, has been ascribed to the level at which the roles are appointed and the associated lack of prestige and gravitas (Conole, White & Oliver, 2007); in addition, these roles do not fit neatly into existing organizational structures (Oliver, 2002). The sense of frustration at not being listened to or not being valued, and not being able to bring a project to fruition poses a major challenge for the future development of this role. These positions and groups are also frequently re-organised in an attempt to make them better fit the institution but this process routinely reinforces a sense of marginalisation: the continued threat of re-organisation tends to create a sense of marginalisation and demoralisation among EDU staff (Gosling, 2008:2).

Participants in this study noted that any re-structuring that does not improve the lines of communication is counterproductive. The communication breakdown and the hidden voice of educational technologists bears a remarkable resemblance to the commentary by Riel & Becker (2000:2) in referring to Smyth (1989), who remark that that the isolation and silence of teachers in the discourse of teaching and learning can be seen as a 'protective response to subordination'. If silenced, either deliberately or by default, important messages addressing the issues and concerns facing higher education from educational technologists will fail to reach the necessary quarters; equally they may be drowned out by competing voices As one participant noted:

> there were things that we were doing that could be mapped across the whole institution which would be of benefit to so many and it's worth having a listen. But then there are so many other voices, so many other agendas in the institution…
>
> (Focus Group 6)

Personal Beliefs and Motivations

Motivation was a recurrent theme underlying much of the discussion in the focus groups and the initial comments made in the groups on motivation were often revised as the discussion progressed. It would seem from the data that participants' personal motivations was very much learner centred:

> I suppose it was a curiosity to experiment with a new method of getting things across. (Focus Group 1)

> I think it's the match and that you use technology based on what you think the learner gets out of it. (Focus Group 2)

> It would be the learner I would be most focused on. (Focus Group 3)

> For me it's the learner. Otherwise the technology does nothing. The learner has to be the starting point. (Focus Group 4)

The participants in this study, in general, also offered a positive appraisal of their own educational journey and asserted their belief in the value of education. The data gathered illustrates an inherent contradiction in the role of educational technologists who may well believe in the benefits of a 'learner centred' approach but in order to encourage the adoption of technology by academic staff must promote initially its benefits to the teachers. But, as Foley & Ojeda (2008) report:

> …many faculty are reluctant to use technology in their classrooms. This reluctance may stem from different assumptions about teaching and learning that are held by technology specialists and faculty (p.1).

Figure 2 captures four possible scenarios reflecting the potential 'clash' between this study's participants' own beliefs and views and those of the staff they are attempting to influence. The Learner Centric - Pedagogic Centric (LP) quadrant represents a scenario where the underlying beliefs and motives place the learner's needs at the centre and the most appropriate pedagogic approach is adopted without the use of technology. An example would be the use of project-based learning with a group of adult learners. The Teacher Centric – Technology Centric (TT) quadrant would reflect a technology solution that predominately benefits the teacher. For example, academics may convert their course material and assignments for distribution on a VLE which reduces the need to photocopy material and allows for an efficient means of tracking 'participation' and assignment completion. These two combinations represent various positions on a spectrum – the challenge as described in the data is to encourage the shift from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered approach initially and, in parallel, to demonstrate how technology can be deployed to support the learner. The difficulty of this task for educational technologists is compounded by a combination of (i) the sense of marginalisation and (ii) the requirement

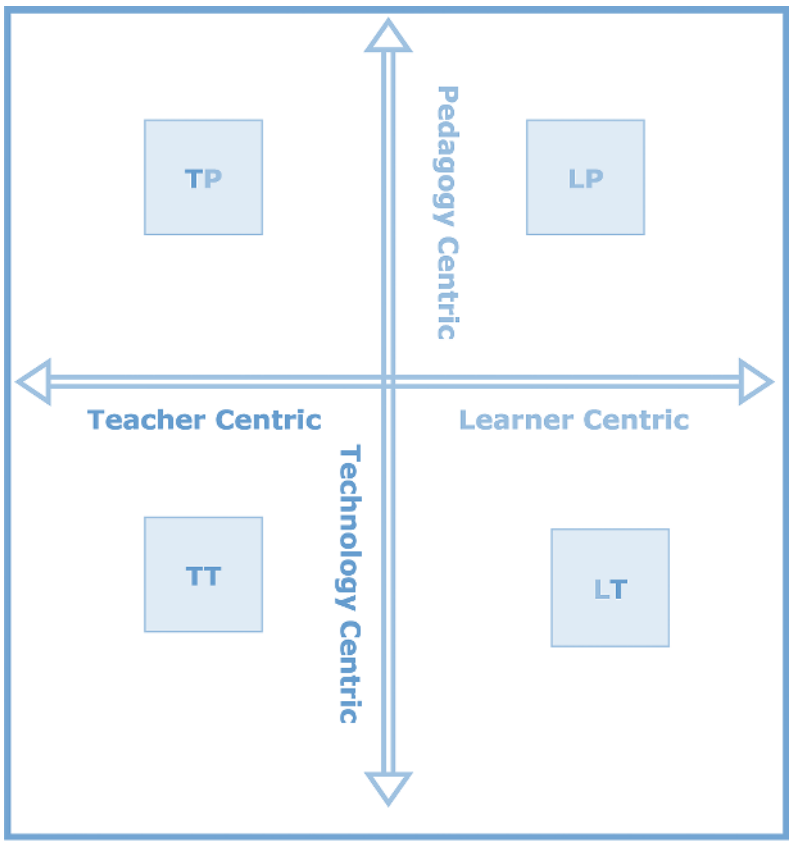


Figure 2: Values and Beliefs on Technology, Learners and Pedagogy

to follow policy dictates which may be seeking simply to achieve efficiency gains through the use of technology, independent of any improvement in pedagogy:

> Policymakers still tend to operate as if educational change is a unidirectional process. They assume teachers will accept and implement innovations such as ICT integration mandated from top down' (Tondeur et al., 2008: 2551).

Inadvertently, the risk of supporting a 'teacher-centred' approach, which results in efficiency gains (reduced photocopying, ease of administration of attendance and results) without the concomitant realignment of these 'gains' to support the learner, could well represent a colonisation of the educational technology agenda in higher education. Such an approach would be at odds with the intention of this study's participants where the predominant motivation was to support the needs of the learner. The group also demonstrated a comprehensive knowledge of the challenges facing higher education today and their intent to work to address theses. There was no sense of 'throwing in the towel' even though there is a strong undercurrent of criticism of current government policy. They accepted that this is the system we are faced with and that we must endeavour to deploy the resources at our disposal to maximum benefit.

In this study, as participants grappled with the complexity of the teaching/learning situation and their role in it, some earlier contentions on motivation and beliefs, which largely reflected their function as technologists, were amended. Initially, there was a tendency to deal in facts and knowledge which reflected their professional opinion; but as the participants became more at ease with each other, they were comfortable in discussing their own beliefs and values. Memories and influences were recalled and

personal statements emerged which captured 'submerged' beliefs on the importance of the learner and the transformative potential of technology. This secondary set of beliefs and values, that were not immediately visible on the surface, were of a more personal nature, perhaps because as the discussion unfolded, the sense of identity was becoming more apparent to the participants. The emergence and subsequent reassessment of the beliefs and motivations of the participants is represented by Figure 3 below.

Although a group consensus did not become evident in this study, there is certainly a level of commonality among the participants with regard to their belief that education is important and that their preferred approach would be learner centred. Similarly, on a

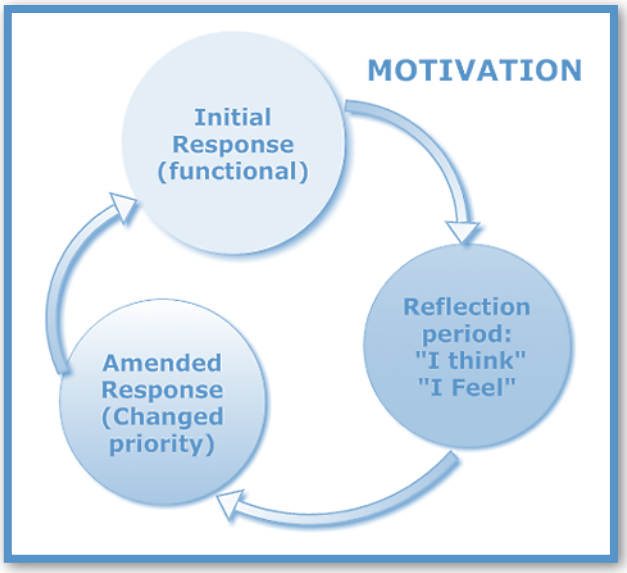


Figure 3: Beliefs and Motivations of Educational Technologists

professional level, participants highlighted that the benefits of educational technology for academic staff must take precedence over any personal views that educational technologists might have.

This may reflect a belief that the initial effort at adoption, albeit at times for gains that might be percieved as selfish, could sow the seeds to allow further discussion and reflection on the practice of teaching and learning by the academic staff. This outcome has been reported by Patterson & Norwood (2004) who state that:

> Teachers construct their own knowledge based on experiences they had as students and the experiences the have once they become teachers. When teachers have the opportunity to reflect about their pedagogy, they become more aware of their instructional practices and any challenges they experience. Teachers may become motivated to make changes in their constructions, either to accommodate to or assimilate the experience' (p.10).

This study commenced with an examination of the role of eduational technologists and with the desire to ask 'why we do what we do', before exploring the actions, characteristics, motivations and beliefs of this group who through their own expertise, energy and enthusiasm have been the enablers of change. The outcomes of these focus groups provide interesting insights into the beliefs and motivations that underpin the participants' current approaches to their respective roles as educational technologists.

Educational techologists, as relatively recently-established higher education professionals, believe in the potential of technology to transform education in a similar manner to the impact it has had in other domains, for example commerce, communications and entertainment. However, within the education sector, the resistance to change and the reluctance to adopt and adapt is quite prevalent. The role sits at a busy intersection with many opinions, views and stances creating a dynamic mix of debate and, at times, disquiet. Their dilemmas are captured in the data with regards the tensions between their personal motivations and the dictates of their function. In order to balance this tension and frustration, the participants are in constant negotiation with their own beliefs and assumptions regarding their function, which at times may require them to set aside their own beliefs and values in the short term.

Conclusions

In this chapter, educational technologists articulated their roles, values, beliefs and motivations; in so doing, they gave voice to their work and their thoughts around it. In the study participants were encouraged to draw on their personal stories of encounters and opinions, views and beliefs, assumptions and aspirations. I encountered enthusiasm and openness, tension and frustration, hope and expectation. The array of views, beliefs, values and assumptions of the participants were centred on the four main themes that emerged from the data. However, participants felt that their views and beliefs were constantly challenged within the field of educational technology or were at odds with their institutions or beyond (e.g. quality assurance, senior management, higher education sector and political system). Tension, compromise and balance were a shared and common attribute of their daily practices – the ability to negotiate within the field and interact with social agents in other fields was a pre-requisite for the role.

I commenced this chapter with reference to the changing landscape of Irish higher education. Many such organisations have been asked to review and reflect on their current position within the field of higher education. At the core of this review is recognition of the critical role of the practice of teaching and learning and the need to align all services to ensure that the learners' experience is optimal and engaging. This will necessitate many existing structures with their accompaniment of assorted roles and responsibilities to be recast and reshaped. All actors in the field of higher education strive to provide a professional service – the views of educational technologists captured in this study reflect their professionalism in all that the do and seek to do. The system needs to ensure that any new configuration of higher education supports and nurtures these individuals by addressing some of the issues raised in this study. Educational technologist should be a recognised professional career within higher education – one that sits in comfortably in the range of professional services designed to meet the needs of our diverse learner population.

References

Barber, T. (2002) 'A Special Duty of Care': exploring the narration and experience of teacher caring. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 23* (3), 383-395.

Bourdieu, P. (2000) *Pascalian Meditations.* Translated by R. Nice. Cambridge: Polity.

Bronfman, S. V. (2007) Beyond technocentrism and infocentrism: designing effective e-learning courses for professional education. *Int. J. of Continuing Engineering Education and Life-Long Learning.* 17 (6), 406 - 417

Conole, G. (2002) The evolving landscape of learning technology. *ALT-J, 10* (3), 4-18.

Conole, G., White, S., & Oliver, M. (2007) The impact of e-learning on organisational roles and structures. In G. Conole & M. Oliver (Eds.), *Contemporary Perspectives in e-Learning Research: Themes, Methods and Impact on Practice* Abingdon: Routledge. 69-81.

Conole, G. (2009) Policy/practice: an e-learning timeline. In *Blog created by Gráinne Conole.* Retrieved 28 January 2013, from http://e4innovation.com/?p=339

Department of Education and Skills (2011) *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*. Dublin: Government Publications Office, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2.

Department of Education and Skills, (2012) Minister *Quinn announces National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning at Third Level*, [online], 22 November. Retrieved 28 January 2013, from http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2012-Press-Releases/PR2012-11-22.html#sthash.m4deuvyv.dpuf.

Dey, I. (2004) Grounded Theory. In Seale, C., Gabo, G.J., Gubrium, F., and Silverman, D. eds. (2004) *Qualitative Research Practice.* London: Sage Publications Ltd. 80-94.

Dumais, S. A. (2002) Cultural Capital, Gender, and School Success: The Role of Habitus. *Sociology of Education, 75*(1), 44-68.

Foley, J. A., & Ojeda, C. (2007) How do teacher beliefs influence technology use in the classroom? In Carlsen, R., McFerrin, K., Price, J., Weber, R. and Willis D. A., eds. (2007) *Proceedings of Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education International Conference 2007: Chesapeake, VA: AACE* . 796-801. Retrieved 17 February 2013 from http://www.editlib.org/p/24647.

Gibbs, G. R., & Taylor, C. (2005) How and what to code. In *Online QDA*. Retrieved 17 February 2013 from School of Human and Health Sciences, University of Huddersfield website: http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/Intro_QDA/how_what_to_code.php.

Gornall, L. (1999) 'New professionals': change and occupational roles in higher education. *Perspectives, 3* (2), 44-49.

Gosling, D. (2008) *Educational Development in the UK*. Retrieved February 17th, 2013, from Heads of Educational Development Group (HEDG) website: http://www.hedg.ac.uk/documents/HEDG_Report_Final.pdf.

Higher Education Authority, (2011) *National Academy for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning: Consultation document*, [online], October. Retrieved 17 February 2013, from http://www.hea.ie/files/NationalAcademyConsultation.pdf.

Hulme, M. K. (n.d.) *Examining Inter-Space- A Working Paper Exploring Bourdieu's Concepts of 'Habitus' and 'Field' in Relations to Mobility Related Empirical Research*. Retrieved 17 February 2013 from www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/centres/cemore/pastevents/altmobs/hulme.doc.

Iedema, R., & Braithwaite, J. (2004) *Conducting a Focus Group: Briefing Note* (Centre for Clinical Governance Research in Health, University of New South Wales, Australia). Retrieved 17 February 2013 from http://www.med.unsw.edu.au/medweb.nsf/resources/Projects7/$file/Conducting+focus+groups.pdf

Kitzinger, J. (1995) Qualitative Research: Introducing Focus Groups. *BMJ, 311*, 299-302.

Mason, P. (2005) Visual data in applied qualitative research: lessons from experience. *Qualitative Research, 5*(3), 325-346.

Maton, K. (2008) Habitus. In Grenfell, M., ed. (2008) *Pierre Bourdieu Key Concepts*, Stocksfield, UK: Acumen Publishing Ltd. 49-66.

McCauley Jugovich, S., & Reeves, B. (2006) IT and Educational Technology; What's Pedagogy got to do with IT? *EDUCAUSE Quarterly, 29*(4), 58-60. Retrieved 17 February 2013 from http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/eqm0649.pdf

McNutt, L., (2008) '*An exploration of the habitus of educational technologists: What does the research tell us?*', Keynote presentation at the Ninth Annual Irish Educational Technology Users Conference, Dundalk Institute of Technology.

McNutt, L. (2010) Educational Technology, Innovation and Habitus: What is the Connection? In R. Donnelly, J. Harvey, & K. O'Rourke (Eds.) *Critical Design and Effective Tools for E-Learning in Higher Education: Theory into Practice*. Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference. 72-91

Seidensticker, M., Roberts, G., Beetham, H., Ingraham, B., Dyke, M., & Levy, P. (2007) Knowledge, society and perspectives on learning technology. In G. Conole & M. Oliver (Eds.), *Contemporary Perspectives in e-Learning Research: Themes, Methods and Impact on Practice*, Abingdon, Oxon, England: Routledge. 21-37.

Patterson, N. D., & Norwood, K. S. (2004) A Case Study of Teacher Beliefs on Students' Beliefs about Multiple Representations. *International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education 2*, 5-23.

Riel, M., & Becker, H. (2000) The Beliefs, Practices and Computer Use of Teacher Leaders. Presented at the *American Educational Research Association, New Orleans.* Retrieved 17 February 2013 from http://www.crito.uci.edu/tlc/findings/aera/aera_leaders.pdf

Roca, J. C., & Gagne, M. (2008) Understanding e-learning continuance intention in the workplace: A self-determination theory perspective. *Computers in Human Behavior, 24*(4), 1585-1604.

Silverman, D. (2010) *Interpreting Qualitative Data (3rd Edition)*. London: Sage Publications.

Tondeur, J., Hermans, R., van Braak, J., & Valcke, M. (2008) Exploring the link between teachers' educational belief profiles and different types of computer use in the classroom. *Computers in Human Behavior, 24*(6), 2541-2553.

Yi, M. Y., Jackson, J. D., Park, J. S., & Probst, J. C. (2006) Understanding information technology acceptance by individual professionals: Toward an integrative view. *Information and Management, 43*(3), 350-360.

Response to

A Critical Discourse on the Role, Motivations and Beliefs of the Educational Technologist in Irish Higher Education

by Bill Hunter, University of Ontario Institute of Technology.

'Ideas that inhabit(us)'

Through an examination of data gathered from practising educational technologists in focus groups, McNutt sought to explore the emerging role these professionals are playing in higher education as expressed in their own voices. It is important that readers understand that this role is a moving target or what Conole (2002) called the 'evolving landscape of learning technology'; therefore, what McNutt has found must be situated in place and time. That said, it is also worth noting that the skill set of educational technologists generally includes some of the following:

Task analysis	Graphic design
Instructional design	Interviewing and consultation skills
Message design	Report writing
Mangement of online environments	Advanced software skills
Materials preparation	Assessment

Much longer lists exist in the literature (e.g., Turner, 2005), some with detailed subsets of the above categories (e.g., flash programming or creating digital video). Interestingly, Turner's list describes what she believes the 21st century will require of *teachers,* not technology specialists—an example of the ways the target is moving. There would be merit in replicating McNutt's study in 2015 with samples of both teachers and educational technologists in different jurisdictions and at different levels of the educational system.

An important element of McNutt's analysis is his use of Bourdieu's concept of *habitus.* The *habitus* is not just a person's perceptions but is a complex network of ideas, ways of thinking and behaviours that are formed through the interplay of the person and the social environment (in this case, the work environment). This concept is often used in conjunction with another of Bourdieu's concepts, 'cultural capital,' to provide a way to examine power differences between groups (e.g., Dumais, 2002). While that has not been a part of McNutt's analysis, one can see an awareness of power differences in quotations from participants who say they perceive their work to be in service to the faculty, what universities often call a 'support role.' Of course, this is a recognition of the faculty member's responsibility for course design and delivery as well as their content expertise, but given the complex set of highly specialised skills in the educational technology 'tool kit,' it would also be interesting to learn more about how both faculty and educational technologists view the power relations in their interactions. There was ample opportunity for McNutt's participants to express concerns about power in response to the cartoon images for 'Characteristics of my Voice,' and it was in this area that power-related comments were most common.

It is clear, however, that the *habitus* of educational technologists in McNutt's sample includes an element we would expect to find in the *habitus* of the faculty members they work with: a commitment to creating a quality educational experience for the students. The work, therefore, suggests that students are another group whose perspective

requires study. In a study of Irish postsecondary students' attitudes toward an online learning experience, Concannon, Flynn & Campbell (2005) conclude, in part:

> Students saw e-learning as an expected and integral part of the learning process within higher education. Major benefits noted included the ease of access to resources, given the limited books in the library, and the provision of central area for students to access to find information or comprehensive resources pertaining to each module. Over 70% of the students in the end-of-semester survey commented that they were happy overall with the e-learning aspect of the module.
>
> (p. 511)

Concannon et al. also contrast this to some of the earlier findings in North America, a contrast that affirms the 'moving target' comments made above. Further to this point, Austin & Hunter (2012) examined the attitudes of online postsecondary students in a university in Northern Ireland and, while they found a great deal to suggest that the students enjoyed the experience, they also suggest that some of the cultural conditions of studying in a divided society result in 'cultural inhibitors' that present challenges to the formation of a learning community — a unique aspect of the habitus of learners in that jurisdiction.

In conclusion, it seems fair to say that McNutt's work is part of what Concannon et al. (2005) called for: 'We need to examine the role that educators expect ICT to play in the educational process. It is clear from this research that students consider it a valuable support (p. 512).' It is clear from McNutt's research that the educational technologists he interviewed also regard their work as a form of support for student learning even though their putative clients are faculty.

References

Austin, R. A. & Hunter, W. J. (2012). 'Whatever you say, say nothing': student perceptions of online learning and community in Northern Ireland. *Irish Educational Studies*. 31(4), 451-465.

Concannon, F., Flynn, A., & Campbell, M. (2005). What campus-based students think about the quality and benefits of e-learning. *British Journal of Educational Technology*. 36(3), 501–512. Retrieved from: http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8535.2005.00482.x/full

Conole, G. (2002). The evolving landscape of learning technology. *ALT-J, 10*(3), 4-18. doi:10.1080/0968776020100302

Dumais, S. (2002). Cultural capital, gender, and school success: The role of habitus. *Sociology of Education.* 75 (1) 44-68. Retrieved from the JSTOR database.

Turner, L. (2005). 20 Technology Skills Every Educator Should Have. *THE Journal.* Retrieved from: http://thejournal.com/Articles/2005/06/01/20-Technology-Skills-Every-Educator-Should-Have.aspx?Page=1