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“There’s Got to Be a Better Way to Do This”: A Qualitative Investigation of Informal Learning Among Instructional Designers

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(Editor’s note: See full text for reference citations.)

Studies of instructional design practice have, in recent years, begun to illuminate the complex nature of work in the field.... While prior research has offered insight into design expertise (versus novice practice) and topics pertaining to formal designer training, there has been no focused exploration of the in situ efforts of instructional designers and developers to learn “on the fly” as the contingencies of projects seem to demand. That is, there has been no in-depth examination of the meaning

and experiences associated with everyday, informal learning among instructional designers and developers, or the difference this kind of learning makes to their practice.... The overall purpose of this study, then, was to explore everyday, informal learning among instructional designers through a research strategy designed to be sensitive to the meaningfulness of those experiences.

Participants in our study were employees at an instructional design center at a major university. Our study included six participants—three women and three men—with varied degrees of experience as instructional designers and developers; however, all

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This article is excerpted from *Educational Technology Research and Design*, published online first, April 10, 2014. Read the full text by logging in at the AECT website, <http://aect.org/>, and clicking on Publications.

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Call for Proposals. Need funding to develop a research proposal? Consider applying for a Collaborative Research Grant. The purpose of the grant is to provide monetary support to enable association members to develop research project proposals that include active collaboration among researchers, research institutions, and AECT. Information at: <http://aect.org/>.

Call for Papers. The AECT flagship practitioner journal, *TechTrends*, is seeking manuscript submissions, including from international and newer authors. For more information, see the Instructions for Authors online by clicking on Publications on the AECT website: <http://aect.org>.

AECT’s premier research journal, *Educational Technology Research and Development (ETR&D)* also welcomes submissions on topics of interest from new and experienced researchers.

Call for Speakers/Writers. Looking for a keynote speaker or someone to write for your publication, or want to be that speaker or writer? Check out the new AECT Speakers/Writers Bureau on the homepage: <http://aect.org/>.

Call for Manuscripts. AECT, in collaboration with Springer, has announced a new series of books and monographs under the title, “Educational Communications and Technology: Issues and Innovations.”

The purpose of the series is to extend AECT’s ongoing publications with Springer and to offer the Springer Briefs innovative format to AECT authors and contributors. For more information potential authors are asked to see: <http://aect.org/>.

Call for Videos. “We Are AECT” is an opportunity to share how members define AECT. What’s your “elevator speech” description of AECT? Think of this project as making your “elevator video,” 3-5 minutes (or shorter, 15-60 seconds), something you might share on your smartphone with a new colleague who asks, “What’s AECT all about?” Complete directions can be found at: <http://aect.org/>.





On November 2, 1936, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), operating out of the Alexandra Palace in London, began transmitting the first regular, high-definition, public television service. It is estimated that about 500 television sets would have received the first broadcast.... On April 3, 2010, Apple revolutionized the portable computer world when the company launched the first-generation iPad. The slim, handheld computer featured a 9.7-in., full color, liquid crystal touch-screen display. Some 300,000 iPads were sold on the first day they became available.... Today tablet technology is as controversial as early television. Enthusiastic proponents see Digital Age education propelled by tablets as a door into a new dimension previously only hinted at.... Opponents, however, question whether the door to this new dimension in education ought to be opened more cautiously—or perhaps not at all.

Tablet computers at present represent a pinnacle in intuitive technology. Intensive instruction is not necessary for most users, at whatever age, to pick up a tablet device and quickly learn how to use it in basic ways.... Therein resides the power and learning potential of tablet computers. It takes little imagination to realize how much more powerful learning might become when engaged teach-

Tablet Technology as a Moving Target

Donovan R. Walling

Chapter 2 in

*Designing Learning for Tablet Classrooms:
Innovations in Instruction*

ers work with classrooms of students, whether kindergartners or coeds, with tablet computers in everyone's hands.... The potential power to transform teaching and learning is more likely to be realized if dedicated student tablets arrive in conjunction with tablets for teachers. A growing number of school districts are moving in this direction—in spite of the relatively high cost and some noteworthy policy ramifications—because the payoff in increased student learning is substantial.

Tablet computers are revolutionizing the notion of what a computer is, increasing technological capabilities while downsizing scale and price. The tablets that are on the market today and those new and improved versions that will arrive tomorrow can potentially level the education playing field for students of all socioeconomic backgrounds while simultaneously expanding what and how students learn. Tablet technology is a moving target, but it is one worth following.

Editor's note: *Designing Learning for Tablet Classrooms: Innovations in Instruction* offers K-12 educators, teacher educators, and prospective teachers philosophical and practical insights into designing and delivering instruction using iPads and other forms of tablet computer. Courtesy of Springer, AECT members have online access to this new book, published in February 2014. Read the full text at <http://aect.org/>. Click on Publications.

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AECT Mission

The mission of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology is to provide international leadership by promoting scholarship and best practices in the creation, use, and management of technologies for effective teaching and learning in a wide range of settings.

Goals:

- Define the disciplines and professional activities that comprise the field of educational communications and technology.
- Serve and represent professionals in the field and support professional growth.
- Advance scholarship and practice that contribute to and enlarge the knowledge base of the field.
- Promote policies that ensure the humane and ethical use of educational communications and technology at all levels, from the personal through the international.

“Better Way” ...continued from page 1

participants but one had been employed at this institution for at least several years.... We conducted two semi-structured interviews per participant, in order to become familiar with their regular work responsibilities and to see how informal learning may have been involved in their efforts to perform their duties competently. Two interviews allowed us to gain sufficient exposure to our phenomena of interest and delve into topics fairly intensively. Time between interviews varied, due to participants' schedules.... All interviews were transcribed according to a predetermined protocol.

Designers in our study reported learning topics such as technology (e.g., software, online resources, etc.), course content, people skills, design strategies, and details regarding specific projects in order to create effective learning experiences. This everyday, informal learning was not viewed as optional or as an occasional necessity; in more ways than one, it was described as integral to the work of designing in this field at virtually every level. Design and learning of the sort we have explored here are, in this sense, inseparable; design could not happen without such learning; and such learning—in all its breadth and variability—covers a large proportion of what designers do. For this reason we have suggested that instructional design might be best viewed as a multifaceted form of learning and that the results of design work might be viewed, most fundamentally, as an expression of what designers have learned, both in general and what they learned on that specific project. With regard to this important form of learning, we have observed in our sample that it is often implicit, innovative, continuous, and involves the formation of judgment and practical wisdom.

Viewing learning and design this way has several implications for practice in the field. One major implication is that...the work of instructional design should not be overly technologized and conceived as the application of a routine process. Projects entail unique circumstances and designers will need to make the necessary adjustments to those circumstances—that is, adjustments involving maintenance learning, innovative learning, or both. In this sense, the designer would be seen as making an important contribution to any design, as their efforts to learn in situ would be a primary force behind what is finally designed.

Call for Writers and Topics

AECT to Launch New Policy Brief Series

An AECT Strategic Plan goal is to increase the association's visibility by positioning AECT as an expert international resource on teaching and learning for policy makers and stakeholders. AECT is embarking on a series of policy briefs as one effort toward this goal. These succinct documents will be designed to inform readers—state and national legislators and education department officials, for example, both within the United States and abroad—about important policy issues and topics.



We are seeking our members' help in response to these questions:

- What are the key policy issues and topics in our field? As the AECT Policy Briefs are developed, your suggestions will help extend the series and keep the focus relevant and up to date.
- Who are the experts we might invite to draft a policy brief? Are you such an expert? AECT Policy Briefs will be written by articulate, well-informed members and colleagues. We are looking to you to help identify those potential writers.

If you wish to submit a Policy Brief for consideration, please review the *Policy Brief—Structure and Guidelines* and download the sample brief at <http://aect.org/>.

Please email your suggestions to Steve Harmon, AECT President, and Phillip Harris, AECT Executive Director, at PolicyBriefs@aect.org.

Member Access Publications

Educational Technology Research and Development (ETR&D)

Bimonthly
ISSN: 1042-1629 (print)
ISSN: 1556-6501 (electronic)
Journal no. 11423
Springer US

TechTrends

Bimonthly
ISSN: 8756-3894 (print)
ISSN: 1559-7075 (electronic)
Journal no. 11528
Springer US

Instructional Science

An International Journal of the Learning Sciences
Bimonthly
ISSN: 0020-4277 (print)
ISSN: 1573-1952 (electronic)
Journal no. 11251
Springer Netherlands

International Journal of Designs for Learning

Quarterly
ISSN: 2159-449X
(electronic)
AECT

Journal of Applied Instructional Design

Quarterly
ISSN: 2160-5289
(electronic)
AECT

Visit the AECT website <http://aect.org/>, log on, and click on Publications for instant access.

Issues in Focus

Drowning in the Digital Ocean

In February, Pearson, the testing giant that deems itself “the world’s leading learning company,” published a report, “Impacts of the Digital Ocean on Education.” The report speaks glowingly about moving from “items in isolation to activity in context,” from “assessment isolation to educational unification,” and from “individual paradigm to social paradigm”—all resulting from new capacities to collect and analyze data. Big Data.

The authors expound:

As technology facilitates movement toward collecting information from more natural interactions, the social nature of everyday lives will become apparent in the data collected. (p. iii)

In an ideal world this notion might sound benign. Coming from a corporate giant that already has its tentacles in the lives of students and educators to an unprecedented degree, it sounds more like a tsunami-grade invasion of privacy. Unless safeguards are instituted at all levels, critics aver, personal privacy rights are likely to drown in the Digital Ocean.

Big Data collection and use by corporations such as Pearson pose privacy risks that only lately have begun to be taken seriously.

In February as well, for example, the U.S. Department of Education increased pressure on schools and universities to review and reform their procedures for outsourcing student data. The department issued a 14-page advisory, “Protecting Student Privacy While Using Online Educational Services: Requirements and Best Practices,” through its Privacy Technical Assistance Center (PTAC at <http://ptac.ed.gov>).

The document provides advice conditioned by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the Protection of Pupil Rights

Amendment (PPRA), and other relevant data-security measures. It’s a valuable resource for school and university personnel and institutional policy makers.

Critic Diane Ravitch, in a recent blog post, framed the issue with acerbic pessimism:

We are about to take a dive into the Digital Ocean, whether we want to or not. Big data will tell Pearson and other vendors whatever they want to know. They will know more about our children and grandchildren than we do.

Elsewhere I’ve referred to the proliferation of standardized testing (and concomitant data collection) as Big Test. Big Data, Big Test—they’re analogous to Big Oil, which people associate with the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill of 1989 or the *Deep Horizon* spill of 2010. Big Test is creating a test spill that is doing similar environmental damage in schools, and the spillover will significantly affect universities over time as well. But the more insidious consequence may be the long-term damage to personal privacy of Big Data.

Schools and universities need to examine and take action on privacy issues before everyone drowns in the Digital Ocean.

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- DiCerbo, K.E., and J.T. Behrens. (2014, February). *Impacts of the Digital Ocean on Education*. London: Pearson.
- Protecting Student Privacy While Using Online Educational Services: Requirements and Best Practices*. (2014, February). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.
- Ravitch, Diane. (2014, April 4). “Pearson Want to Help You Swim in the Digital Ocean.” *Diane Ravitch’s Blog*. dianeravitch.net.
- Walling, D.R. (2014, March 11). “Big Test.” *Advancing Learning and Democracy*. advancinglearning.blogspot.com