Practice as a Concept in Educational Technology

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# Abstract

Educational technology is a vibrant field of research that brings together disciplines from the humanities, social science, and computer science. Its aim is to develop the theory and practice of design, development, implementation, use, and evaluation of technologies for teaching and learning. The field is currently characterized by a lack of consensus regarding research methods, theoretical approaches, and design orientations, but its development can be described in terms of four consecutive stages with concordant shifts in research foci (Winn 2002). The field has gone from being focused on the (1) content and (2) format that characterized instructional design and message design at the end of the 1960s towards a focus on (3) interaction and (4) learning environments that has dominated the research and design of technologies in education from the late 1970s onwards (Winn 2002). Throughout this progression, two specific modes of inquiry can be distinguished, namely, a mode of inquiry focused on interaction with technologies that has been prevalent since the inception of the field, and later also a mode of inquiry that is focused on practice. The latter mode of inquiry is at present slowly finding its way onto the educational technology field as a consequence of the everyday use of digital technologies in the educational sector. This article aims to examine the concept of practice in the field of educational technology. To this end, the article first describes how the concept of practice has been discussed in the social sciences (e.g., “practice theory”). In particular, six main scholarly traditions of practice are presented along with a set of common attributes that tie together the different approaches of practice. The concept of educational practice is then introduced together with the different types of arrangements that provide a vocabulary to unpack the study of practice in education. Based on these developments, a mode of inquiry that is focused on practice is distinguished from the more prevalent mode of inquiry that is focused on interaction with educational technology. Implications of applying a practice lens to the study of learning and teaching with digital technologies are finally delineated at the end of the article.

# Outcome

"A mode of inquiry that is focused on practice is distinguished from the more prevalent mode of inquiry that is focused on interaction with educational technology." (Author, abstract)