

Design-Based Research and Educational Technology: Rethinking Technology and the Research Agenda

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ABSTRACT

The role of educational technologies in improving educational practices and outcomes has been criticized as over-hyped and insignificant. With few exceptions, the state of education has changed less than expected as a result of tools such as computers and the Internet. To a considerable degree, this is due to the minor role educational technology research plays in transforming the use of technological tools in the classroom. This article presents an analysis of technology as a process and as a value-laden system, both of which have substantial consequences to our approach to research. It is argued in the article that design-based research can address some of the deficiencies of other research methods in investigating the role of tools and techniques in the classroom. Through more democratic research practices and recognizing technology as a system beyond its tools, researchers can increase their impact on educational practice.

Keywords

Educational technology, Design-based research, Values, Methodology, Critique

"It is one thing to state the chief aim of education ... it is quite another thing to pursue this aim in a world which denies the principles on which it rests" (Jeffreys, 1955, p. 13).

Introduction

New communication, media, and computing technologies have long tantalized educators, policy-makers, and educational technologists as to their prospects for enhancing educational outcomes (Saettler, 1990). Numerous tools ranging from Edison's film projector through Berners-Lee's World Wide Web were originally invented for purposes other than education, but they were quickly promoted by educational technologists and others as having enormous promise for enhancing the impact of teaching and learning. Devices now considered to be simple and omnipresent in educational settings were once considered revolutionary and capable of mending social inequity and changing the face of education. For example, in the 1970s, access to handheld calculators was considered to be crucial to raising test scores for underachieving math students, and accordingly math educators and educational technologists led efforts to get calculators into the hands of children learning mathematics. However, once the access gap was closed, the results were found to be much lower than promised (Loveless & Diperna, 2000).

Educational technologies are often viewed not only as solutions to real or perceived inadequacies of traditional instruction, but also as tools for reducing the inequities in educational opportunities around the world. Light (2001) described the rhetoric of social inclusion often associated with new technologies such as cable television. Cable was promoted as a technology to improve not only educational opportunities, but also general access to information. Inequitable access in terms of race and wealth prompted policy-makers and researchers to push for equitable distribution of cable access. Clearly, cable did not achieve educational equity nor increase access to reliable and valid information, but instead is primarily used as increased bandwidth for media outlets. Much of the excitement regarding student achievement that might have been derived from cable in the classroom and other new technologies has faded into disappointment. This trend is nowhere more prevalent than with respect to today's most heavily promoted technological solution to educational problems, the Internet.

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