

An exploration of teaching, learning, and
technology perspectives-in-practice:
An alternative view of e-learning adoption patterns in HE



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Organization of this presentation



1. E-learning adoption in Higher Education: Deficit Models & Another View
2. The e-learning singularity paradigm
3. A brief review of Kanuka's (2008) examination of teaching and technology philosophies-of-practice
4. Moving beyond modernism & determinisms
5. Unpacking the e-Learning Singularity Paradigm: Implications for e-learning adoption in HE

Typical Foci of Deficit Models e-Learning Adoption in HE

e-Learning has the potential to:

- **Transform pedagogy**
- **Lead to improved student satisfaction, retention and achievement** (HEFCE, 2009)
- **Expand access through flexible learning**
- **Support internationalisation**
- **Achieve long-term cost-efficiencies, etc.**

But deficits in implementation persist:

- **“Sustainable integration of e-learning into higher education establishments remain a major challenge.”** (Schneckenberg, 2009, p. 413)

Where are the deficits?

1. The perception of “technopositivist ideology” [as an institutionally sanctioned] compulsory enthusiasm” (Njenga & Fourie, 2008) can engender resistance
2. Practical concerns, such as **lack of**: (1) time, (2) technical and pedagogical knowledge, (3) start-up & maintenance money, (4) support staff, (5) recognition for career development, (6) staff development, (7) incentives, (8) recognition of existing institutional cultures (Browne & Jenkins, 2008). **Lack of** consideration for IP concerns & capacity to support a range of technological choices, such as Web 2.0 applications (Parchoma, 2008; Conole, 2010)

Problems with Not Defining e-Learning

If all forms of e-learning are homogenized, the result can be a collection of:

1. Conceptually inchoate and ill-defined technologies
2. Privileging centralised control
3. Promoting visual & functional consistency

Not defining e-learning leads to a singularity paradigm, which lacks regard for:

1. Disciplinary traditions of knowing, teaching and learning
2. Pedagogical coherence with content and purpose
3. Differing philosophies of teaching and of technology

Another view of e-Learning Adoption Patterns in HE



A Review and Critique of:

- Kanuka, H. (2008). Understanding e-learning technologies-in-practice through philosophies-in-practice. In T. Anderson (Ed.), *The theory and practice of online learning*. Athabasca, Canada: Athabasca University Press, 91-119.

Modernist Philosophical Perspectives on Teaching and Learning – What is “the project” of teaching about?

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Liberal / Perennial | "(1) search for truth, & (2) to develop good and moral people," via academic transmission and in-depth debate of liberal educational content |
| Progressive | orientation to "personal growth, maintenance, and promotion of a better society" via learner-centred, personalised, and problem-solving approaches |
| Behaviouralist | focus on "effective, observable, and measurable academic achievements and desired changes personal behaviour" |
| Humanist | support "individual growth and self-actualization" through establishing learning environments marked by "freedom and autonomy, trust, active participation, and self-directed learning" |
| Radical [or Critical] | "evoke change in the political, economic and social order in society through the intersection of education and political action" via "collective dialogue, ideal speech, and critical questioning in a risk-free environment" |
| Analytical | "transmission of neutral knowledge," discipline-based truths that are "morally, socially, and politically neutral" Students "temporarily give up their freedom and subject themselves to being guided, criticized, and tested according to the standards of a discipline" |

Elias & Merriam, 1980; Kanuka, 2008

Determinist Positions on the Philosophy of Technology



1. Uses determinism – all technologies are neutral tools or devices that simply extend human capacities
2. Social determinism – social structures influence who is involved/excluded in technological advancement
3. Technological determinism – all technologies are designed to sustain advantaged populations and hegemonic interests

Modernist-Determinist Perspectives on Teaching, Learning & Technology



| | <p>Progressive</p> <p>Focus on a practical and pragmatic orientation to "personal growth, maintenance, and promotion of a better society;" allows for a broader view of the usefulness of educational technologies, especially learner-centred, personalised, and problem-solving applications of e-learning technologies in well managed e-learning environments</p> | |
|--|---|---|
| | <p>Humanist</p> <p>The focus of the humanist school is "to support individual growth and self-actualization" through establishing learning environments marked by "freedom and autonomy, trust, active participation, and self-directed learning" As facilitators of "flexible, convenient" access to collaborative learning environments, designed for personal growth, humanists most closely align themselves to uses determinism</p> | |
| <p>+ Behaviouralist</p> <p>the use of e-learning technologies to meet specified, measurable learning outcomes will result in effective and efficient learning</p> | | <p>+ Radical-critical</p> <p>Seek to "evoke change in the political, economic and social order in society via the intersection of education and political action." The purpose of HE is closely tied with pedagogical approaches that include "problem identification," "collective dialogue, ideal speech, and critical questioning in a risk-free environment." As education is inherently value-laden and never neutral, power relations between teaching and learning are central and all forms of evaluation are problematic.</p> |
| Technological | Uses | Social |
| <p>- Liberal / Perennial</p> <p>e-learning is perceived as interfering with the philosophical aims of the school:- flexible and convenient access to standardized curricula "typically associated with online courses are viewed as subverting academic rigour and "robbing the student of a [rich] intellectual experience</p> | | <p>- Radical-critical</p> <p>Radical educators "align themselves most closely with social determinism," and avoid the use of surveillance-equipped, corporate learning management systems</p> |

Direct quotations taken from Kanuka, 2008, pp. 99-111

Part 2



Beyond modernism & determinisms:

An extension of Kanuka's work

Beyond modernist perspectives on teaching and learning



1. Revisionary modernism
 - requires criticality, values complexity & diversity
2. Postmodernism
 - challenges everything
3. Postmodernist teaching and learning orientations
 - Higher education is a site for the development and use of 'working knowledge' rather than transmitting 'approved' knowledge
 - Higher education must be open to diverse views, and "requires students to develop a reflexivity in their use of knowledge—the development of 'epistemic fluency'"

Elias & Merriam, 2005; Goodyear, 2002

“A Variety of Theory” approach to Philosophical Perspectives on Technologies

| Technology is: | Autonomous | Humanly Controlled |
|---|--|--|
| Neutral (complete separation of means and ends) | Determinism (uses, social, & technological) | Instrumentalism (liberal faith in progress) |
| Value-laden (means form a way of life that includes ends) | Substantivism (means and ends linked in systems) | Critical Theory (choice of alternative means-ends systems) |

Adapted from Feenburg, 1999

Instrumentalism: Neutral, but humanly controlled/ designed technologies

The design process for instrumentalisation
involves four sequential sub-processes:

- 1) Decontextualisation
- 2) Reductionism
- 3) Autonomisation
- 4) Positioning

Feenburg, 1999

Substantivism: Autonomous, but value-laden



Substantivism positions are occupied with:

- The pervasiveness of technologies in contemporary societies, and
- The ways those technologies shape our lifeworlds.

Feeburg, 1999; Carmichael, 2003

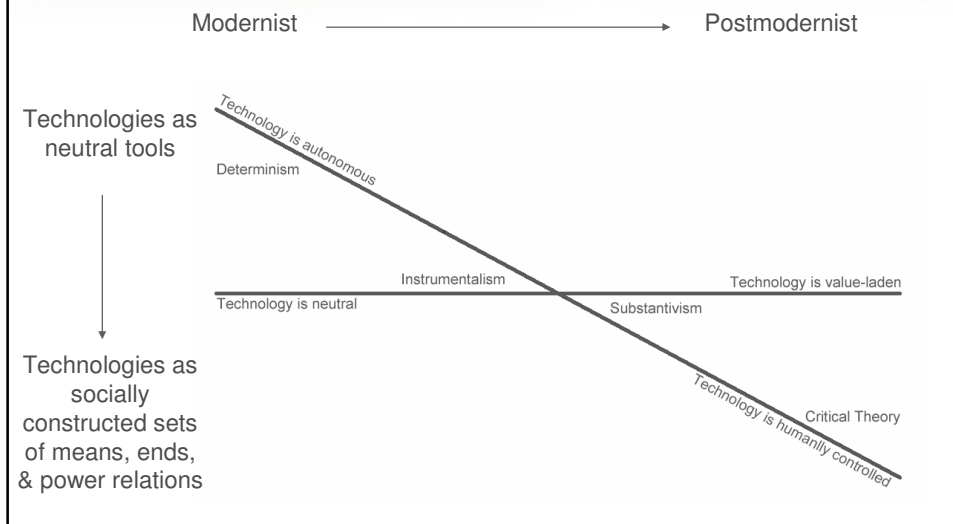
Critical Theory: Value-laden & humanly controlled



- Recognizes “the role of technical micropolitics in democratic technical change”
- Localized “knowledge and action” can affect contextualized technological choices, designs, and developments that fit well with local traditions in natural settings

Feeburg, 1999

Intersections of continua of philosophies of technology

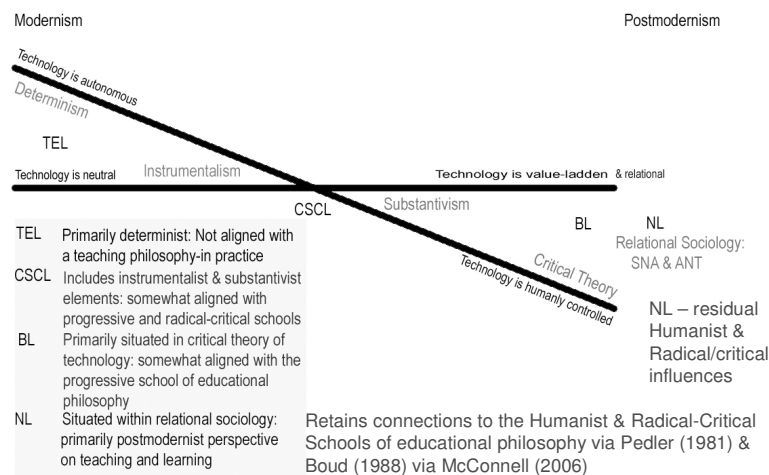


Part 3: Unpacking the e-Learning Singularity Paradigm

A Sample of 4 e-Learning Communities of Research & Practice

1. Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL)
 - **Predominantly a Determinist technology orientation – no associated educational philosophy**
 - Computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL)
 - **Some Instrumentalist, but primarily Substantivist orientations to technology: stronger ties to progressive and weaker ties to radical-critical schools of educational philosophy**
1. Blended Learning (BL)
 - **Predominantly an optimistic Substantivist orientation to technology, but some papers reference instrumentalist and critical perspectives: weak ties to progressive and stronger ties to radical-critical schools of educational philosophy**
2. Networked learning (NL)
 - **Critical Theory orientation to technology: Strong ties to Epistemic fluency and postmodernism; residual influences of humanist and radical-critical schools of educational philosophy**

A theorized sample of relative philosophies-in-practice positions of e-learning research and practice communities



Problematizing the singularity paradigm of e-learning

- The ethos of institutionally centralized, standardized control of e-learning in HE can be threatened by philosophical inquiries into the interplay between theories on the nature teaching & learning and the affordances of technologies.
- This ground can be contested through ongoing, local, national, and international research into evolving e-learning communities of research & practice

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Thank-you for your consideration of my presentation.

Questions?

A background paper on today's presentation is forthcoming in:

Parchoma, G. (in press). Toward diversity in researching teaching and technology philosophies-in-practice in e-learning communities. In B. Daniel (Ed.), *Handbook of research on methods and techniques for studying virtual communities: Paradigms and phenomena*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

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