Reflective comments on shifting to digital

J. Michael Spector¹ · Phil Harris²

Published online: 22 February 2021

© Association for Educational Communications and Technology 2021

What a remarkable academic journey the editors and contributors to this special issue on flexible learning have undertaken as they seek to understand the rapid development, deployment, and future of learning and instruction. The process was deliberate and well-reasoned. Rather than rushing to push out a special issue on responses to COVID-19, the editors and editorial boards wondered how prior published research might inform the best ways to respond to rapid shifts to digitally intensive learning. Many of these efforts around the world are being made without spending the time to properly prepare instructors or develop appropriate support structures for them or for learners when everyone is required to make this sudden shift to digitally-based learning and instruction. The scholars involved in this effort wondered to what extent the research published in ETR&D could help those required to make a sudden shift to digital. Their focus was not on COVID-19. Nor was it on a particular pedagogical or technological approach. Instead, their focus was on what has been established by prior research that can help in this situation and similar situations that might arise in the future.

The process involved identifying and examining recently published research from multiple perspectives and contexts that seemed somewhat applicable in helping educators make the shift to digitally-based learning. An effort was made to ensure that a representative collection of papers was gathered from multiple countries, cultures, perspectives, and situations. Once those papers were identified, the notion was to ask a group of scholars to examine those papers from various points of views to identify what might be applied in the current situation and what might inform future research.

In short, this has been a deeply reflective exercise in examining how what we as academic researchers are doing might inform practice and improve instruction when facing these challenging situations. The reflections and analyses of those who have reviewed these papers speaks volumes about the health of the discipline roughly called educational technology. My thanks to all of them for their efforts and to the authors of the selected papers for agreeing to have their work examined in this rigorous manner. I have no grand

✉ J. Michael Spector
Mike.Spector@unt.edu

Phil Harris
pharris@aect.org

¹ Department of Learning Technologies, University of North Texas, 3940 North Elm Street, Discovery Park, Denton, TX 76207, USA

² Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 320 W. 8th Street, Suite 101, Bloomington, IN 47404-3745, USA

summary to offer beyond expressing my deep gratitude for the collective effort that went into addressing a fundamental question that all of us need to consider, namely: What good will come from what we are now doing and are likely to do in the future?

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

J. Michael Spector Professor at UNT, was previously Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Georgia, Associate Director of the Learning Systems Institute at Florida State University, Chair of Instructional Design, Development and Evaluation at Syracuse University, and Director of the Educational Information Science and Technology Research Program at the University of Bergen. He earned a Ph.D. from The University of Texas. He is a visiting research professor at Beijing Normal University, at East China Normal University, and the Indian Institute of Technology-Kharagpur. His research focuses on assessing learning in complex domains, inquiry and critical thinking skills, and program evaluation. He was Executive Director of the International Board of Standards for Training, Performance and Instruction and a Past-president of the Association for Educational and Communications Technology. He is Editor Emeritus of Educational Technology Research & Development; he edited two editions of the Handbook of Research on Educational Communications and Technology and the SAGE Encyclopedia of Educational Technology and more than 150 publications to his credit.

Phil Harris is currently the Executive Director of the Association for Educational Communications & Technology. He has been an active scholar in the field of Learning and Instructional Design. Prior to assuming the duties of Executive Director of AECT, he was the Director of the Center for Professional Development at Phi Delta Kappa, a position he held for 15 years. His research interest has been in the field of Learning and most recently has written about the need for a new definition of learning.