Response to “Current Trends (and Missing Links) in Educational Technology Research and Practice” by Royce Kimmons

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As one of the educational technology researchers cited for having “argued for decades that our field should be more situated and socially aware” in Royce Kimmons’ excellent editorial, it is refreshing to see how Kimmons has backed up with fascinating data the critical perspective that I and others have long held. Of course, I am not at all surprised that Kimmons’ analysis shows that our research literature is marred by the absence of a focus on the issues of most interest to practitioners, much less on their real-world problems.

Two paramount questions arise. First, why does this disconnect exist? Second, what can be done to change this situation? With respect to the first question, the answer rests squarely in how academe reviews people for promotion and tenure. Refereed journal publications are still the “gold standard” for promotion and continuing employment decisions in most universities. Schimanski and Alperin (2019) identify the problem writing that most academics agree promotion and tenure reviewers “should encourage peer-reviewed works of high quality, but in practice, the value of publications is often assessed using shortcuts such as the prestige of the publication venue, rather than on the quality and rigor of peer review of each individual item.” Every summer for many years, I have been invited to write external review letters for candidates for tenure and promotion. There is an increasing tendency of dossiers to include citation rates of papers as well as the impact factors of the journals. Instead of evaluating the merits of scholars for their impact on real-world problems, we continue to focus on assessing them based on what is easy to count such as citation frequencies and impact factors.

With respect to the second question, what can be done to change this lamentable situation? The irony of the academic tenure and promotion process is that we have set this process up ourselves; it has not been mandated from above. We have the

power to change it. Imagine if an organization like AECT along with 25 of the top educational technology programs in the world collaborated in a bold new initiative to increase the rigor and relevance of our research. For starters, such a collaborative could:

- Establish an evolving repository of meaningful problems on which the educational technology community could focus their research agendas in collaboration with practitioners in schools, universities, industry, and other sectors.
- Establish consortia of collaborating researchers, practitioners, and funding agencies focused on the most salient problems facing education.
- Revise journal structures so that through a combination of traditional print and online open access policies, the existing artificial limits on the length and number of articles are eliminated.
- Revise the criteria for peer review in educational technology research journals to include a focus on trying to make a difference in teaching and learning with technology.
- Abandon ill-considered schemes for judging the value of research publications, e.g., impact factors of the journals in which articles are published (Reeves and Reeves 2015).

If I was younger, I would leap at the chance to lead this initiative. It will be up to younger scholars to do so. Just let me know how I can help.

References

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