

The Vocabulary of Learning Technologies

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### The Vocabulary of Learning Technologies

Learning Technologies (also variously known as Educational Technology, Instructional Technology, etc.) is a relatively new field that none the less has many unique aspects. It derives its vocabulary from various sources in the domains of education, curriculum and instruction, computer and internet technology, video and artistic production and design.

#### The Informants

The Informants I have used for this exercise are: Myself (Earl J. Heinrich), who graduated this Spring 2015 with an MEd degree in Learning Technologies with certificates in Online Distance Learning and Technology Enhanced Learning: Multimedia Design and Development; Andre Koen (MA from St. Thomas in Educational Technology), small business consultant and faculty member at Adler Graduate School (where I work and interviewed him for a class in 2014); and Aaron Doering, Professor and Director of the LTMedia Lab at the University of Minnesota (and developer of Adventure Learning).

#### What Brought You to Learning Technologies?

**Earl J. Heinrich.** Two topics I have always been passionate about are technology (I worked in the computer lab in high school) and the past (some of the earliest books I can remember reading are children's biographies of famous people (i.e. Sacagawea, Theodore Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, etc.). My undergraduate work in History and Ancient Mediterranean Studies was accompanied by coursework at Minneapolis Community College in computer technology. Finding a graduate program where I could attempt to utilize both was ideal and I found this in Learning Technologies.

**Andre Koen.** Andre began his work with technology while a high school teacher due to the need to have technology in the classroom and the expense of paying others to develop

webpages and applications. He began taking classes in HTML and design and eventually earned a degree in Educational Technology from the University of St. Thomas (A. Koen, Personal communication, November, 2014).

**Aaron Doering.** Aaron is passionate about the environment and education. He worked as a middle school geography teacher while completing his doctorate in Learning Technologies at the University of Minnesota, where he has continued to develop his ideas about combining his interests in education and the environment (Wikipedia, 2014).

### **Vocabulary of Learning Technologies**

The field has developed a whole array of terms and vocabulary which may sound like so much nonsense to people not “in the know” so to speak. Here follows a list of terms:

- **Adventure Learning:** The use of exploration and adventure to promote inquiry and learning, whether through participation in remote expeditions to far off places such as the Arctic, central Africa, the Himalayas, etc., or through local adventure projects. Where else are these two words paired and not regarded as possibly being opposites (i.e. Adventure=Fun; Learning=Chore).
- **TED Talk:** Talks by education professionals which are available online after the fact at ted.com and other places (such as YouTube). Outside the world of technology and education, what is TED Talk, the speech of a giant Teddy Bear?
- **Asynchronous vs. Synchronous:** Does everyone have to be participating at once or not? Asynchronous means participation on your own schedule, Synchronous is everyone together, similar to an in-person class or meeting. What are these long and fancy words? Is it time to synchronize our watches or something?

- Learning Platform: A means (such as Moodle) to deliver content to an online audience for a class. What does a platform have to do with learning?
- Online Learning: Delivery of instruction via the Internet (typically utilizing a Learning Platform). What is there to learn online? It's all a bunch of porn and opinion!
- e-learning: i.e. electronic learning or the use of electronic devices to deliver instruction. What could this mean outside the domain of Learning Technology?
- m-learning: i.e. mobile learning; similar to e-learning but utilizing cell phones and tablets as primary means of instruction. What could this mean outside the domain of Learning Technology?
- Gamification: Adding aspects of game play (especially online game play) to classroom or online instructional activities. Why would I want to make something FUN!?
- Multimedia Design and Development: the design and development of various forms of media (text, video, pictures, illustrations, charts, graphs, maps, etc.) for use in instruction, typically online. More long and fancy words, but what do they mean?
- Technology Integration: the integration of the use of technology both in the classroom (projectors, sound systems, computers) and in online instruction (various technologies and media).
- Embedded Video: Video that is inserted directly into a webpage or presentation instead of being linked to, so that it plays within the webpage or presentation rather than sending the user to an outside source. Is this similar to an embedded reporter?
- Learning Community: A group of people with similar interests who connect to share and learn about their common interests, whether in-person or online. How can a community learn anything?

- Blended Learning: the use of in-person and online instruction together. What are we doing, putting a bunch of stuff in a blender and seeing what comes out?

Many of these terms are either meaningless or can have other meanings outside of the study of Learning Technology (as is reflected by the sarcastic remarks after the definitions). Without being part of the community which uses these terms their meaning is different, obscure or absent.

### **Sapir-Whorf Connection**

In his 1942 paper to the Theosophical Society, Whorf discusses the increasing specialization of language use in various fields which leads to the same words having vastly different meanings and leading toward unintelligibility between people in different disciplines or between specialists and non-specialist. This is to some extent true of the field of Learning Technologies, as is shown from the above vocabulary list. A speaker or author who just used terms such as Adventure Learning, Gamification, or Blended Learning without explanation would not be understood by an audience that were not also cognizant of their meanings by being part of the same general community of users of technology in education (hence the varying names for the field, Learning Technologies, Instructional Technology, Educational Technology, depending on which school the program is located in, and where it is located, both geographically and within the structure of the institution).

### **Conclusion**

As an emerging field which derives its vocabulary from a variety of disciplines (similar to situations where words are borrowed from other languages), Learning Technologies utilizes many words and phrases in its vocabulary which are technical in nature and can have multiple meanings outside of its own frame of reference, making it difficult for an “outsider” from another discipline or the general public to grasp the full meaning of a discussion without having

knowledge of the internal frame of reference. Hence a discussion entitled m-learning Utilizing Gamification and Adventure Learning Concepts in a Blended Learning Environment would leave potential listeners wondering what it could possibly be about.

## References

Whorf, B. L., & Carrol, J. B. (Ed.). (2011). *Language, thought & reality: Selected writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*. Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing. Original work published 1956.

Wikipedia. (2014). *Aaron Doering*. Retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aaron\\_Doering](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aaron_Doering)