Reflections on the Difference between Educational Technologies and Learning Technologies

Jeff Grabill is a Professor of Rhetoric and Professional Writing. His research focuses on how digital writing is associated with citizenship and learning, and that work has been located in community contexts, in museums, and in the work that they do. In this talk, I draw a conceptual distinction between learning technologies and education technologies, outlining why issues of access, equity, and learner autonomy matter to the ways schools adopt, use, and support technologies.

We must understand the ways in which educational technologies, especially the ones that are designed to be embedded deeply by teachers. We will consider below the case of smartphones and what sorts of educational choices are sometimes made in education. Some kinds of choices lead us to a landscape where principles of affordability and accessibility inform the design of new technologies, while other choices seem to promote a relentless pursuit of innovation. In this talk, I will lay out an argument that we are at an important moment in our history as educators. We are provided with compelling opportunities to provide students with more personalized learning, better feedback, and improved outcomes. This moment will continue to be shaped deeply by technologies. We will continue to be invited to see these technologies as magic.

There are a number of technologies that have impacted and promise to transform how we learn, construct relationships, and understand how a university meets its educational mission. Educators, administrators, and policymakers are increasingly turning to technologies to enrich, facilitate, and automate teaching, learning, and support technologies. What sorts of choices should we make? What sorts of choices are we making as educators? What sorts of choices should we make? I will walk through a couple of examples that illustrate the basic dynamics implied by these questions: Michigan State University’s approach to student success with compelling opportunities to provide students with more personalized learning, better feedback, and improved outcomes. This moment will continue to be shaped deeply by technologies. We will continue to be invited to see these technologies as magic.