

'It's a Faustian pact we make'. A critical analysis of metaphors used in institutional discourses surrounding educational technology innovation and in the spoken accounts of academic teaching staff

Richard Bailey. School of Education and Psychology. University of Bolton.

r.bailey@bolton.ac.uk or bails_rich@hotmail.com

Abstract

Technological innovations, under the aegis of 'technology-enhanced learning' (TEL), are high on policy agenda in higher education. Komljenovic makes it clear in her Think Piece, that we should expect 'substantial and fast expansion of EdTech innovations' as the sector vies to increase its competitive advantage in the global market. Universities are in the process of developing their digital policies in particular ways that comprise the integration of external digital solutions with possible internal ones. For those who teach in the sector, it is a time of change and upheaval. As Komljenovic's piece implies, the socio-cultural dimension - the impact of technological change on working communities and their practices and beliefs on the ground - appears under-researched, in close-up, empirical work.

This presentation reports on a close up, case study project that attempted to address that gap. The study adopted a qualitative, ethnographic style approach. Its aims were three-fold: to understand better the way that users of digital devices and applications deploy them to support pedagogy; to explore teachers' lived experiences and beliefs about technology and pedagogy; and finally, how they feel roles and identities as teachers are changing in the 'digital age'. Staff were interviewed from across the institution's main faculties and, for triangulation, linguistic analyses of relevant documentary sources, where available, were made.

The interview data formed a spoken corpus of naturally occurring language. A prevalent feature was the range of metaphors that respondents engaged in using: some of these explicit and familiar metaphors but others less consciously used. The presentation will, firstly, focus on a critical take on dominant metaphors that permeate and shape thinking and ideologies around educational technology innovation in education policy. Secondly, as it was anticipated that documentary sources would promote the TEL ideology, a critical language lens which draws on both critical discourse analysis (CDA) and critical metaphor analysis (CMA) was applied and an example will be presented. Thirdly, there will be an examination of metaphors that frequently appeared in the spoken data and instantiations will be presented as illustrative examples. While respondents were often given to use metaphors that demonstrated new influences on their thinking about learning and teaching and their professional roles and identities, an interesting feature was the extent to which these were mixed with more familiar metaphors.

Keywords

Educational technology; higher education teaching and learning; metaphor; case study; lived experience