

Critical for whom? Reflecting on supervision experiences of educational technology research.

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Abstract

In the last two decades, educational technology research has morphed from a focus on tips and tools using various technological models to deeper engagement through the use of social theories and methodologies. This shift has been fuelled by multiple calls for an overhaul of our approaches to, and assumptions about, educational technology research and practice. Additionally, especially for educational technology researchers focusing on the African context, there needs to be an acknowledgement of a different layer of constraints, including a rich cultural diversity, a colonialist past and widespread economic and academic inequities. There also needs to be a recognition that the majority of technologies used for teaching and learning in this context are sourced from the global North – and consequently embedded with assumptions about teaching and learning, as well as access and knowledge, which more often than not are Western-focused.

Doctoral candidates, as highlighted by Prof MacFarlane in his thinkpiece, often mechanically draw on critical close-up language and terms without authentically engaging in critical practices in their research studies. Hence, criticality becomes a tick-box exercise to meet the university's ethics requirements, the supervisor's demands as well as theoretical or methodological requirements. However, the way that this criticality plays out in the field is, according to MacFarlane, inauthentic and ultimately a form of strategic deception. We argue in our presentation that while there is a lack of resources to guide doctoral candidates in developing their criticality and they may need to 'fake it until they make it', criticality should actually be a default lens for educational technology researchers, particularly in the African context. Because of their personal experience of the constraints mentioned earlier, they often start out with a keen desire to not only explore but transform their contexts through their studies.

Through the lens of Paulo Freire's (2005) critical consciousness, our presentation reflects on how critical approaches to educational technology research are communicated, learnt and applied through the supervision relationship. The purpose of our presentation is to reflect on our experiences as supervisor and doctoral candidate in terms of incorporating a critical approach to researching educational technology – and whose purpose this critically is meant to serve.

Keywords

Educational technology, criticality, doctoral supervision, critical consciousness.