



Doing staff development: Practices, dilemmas and technologies

John Hannon
University of South Australia

Online learning technologies now pervade higher education institutions, and the convergence of teaching and learning onto technological systems has created new work practices and a demand for staff development. Educational developers are located at a nexus between the institutional and pragmatic imperatives, from which tensions and incongruencies emerge and need to be resolved in daily practice. In this paper, this nexus is explored by analysing accounts of educational development practice from one institution, based on interviews with educational developers. This paper considers staff development practices in higher education in response to the processes of change associated with learning technology, and the strategies used to resolve incongruencies and conflicts that emerged from these practices were analysed. The discourse analytic method of "interpretative repertoires" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) is used to explore the resolution of dilemmas in practice. In this case study, two contrasting repertoires are used to account for staff development: one that 'enables' academic staff in their use of learning technologies, and another which 'guides' staff in their online teaching towards specified technologies. The intersection of the two repertoires in the institution presented dilemmas for educational developers. The responses to these contexts and the implications for educational development are explored.

Introduction

Educational developers, variously known as academic, professional, or staff developers, advisors or consultants, occupy a position between the structural and pragmatic, at the nexus of institutional strategy for teaching and learning and its practice. Since the work of educational development is closely aligned with institutional strategies in teaching and learning, educational developers are positioned within a confluence of factors which are institutional, technological and pedagogical. A "careful balancing act" is required (Wozniak, Scott & Atkinson, 2005, p. 741) between organisational project outcomes and the need to support and engage academic teaching staff in a productive way. As learning technologies pervade educational organisations, they have become a critical factor in the process which is reshaping and transforming higher education teaching and learning. This change process is not confined to the teacher-student learning environment, and Goodfellow (2004) states "there is an inexorable process of penetration of technical processes into all aspects of course development, production, delivery, quality assurance, assessment, validation, etc." With this reconfiguration of learning, professional or staff development is an outcome of this institutional strategy and is increasingly in demand (O'Connell, Benson & Samarawickrema, 2006; Shephard, 2004, p. 76; Bird, 2004). Learning technologies, however, are not neutral, and open up teaching and learning to many

stakeholders and participants, and therefore to a new politics (Roberts, 2004). The practices of educational developers will necessarily play a part in this politics.

This study is concerned with educational developers who perform this “balancing act”, and how they work with the tensions and ambiguities that arise in their practice. Educational development in universities is constituted in various forms: it may vary in its constituent staff depending on an institution’s history and orientation, perhaps comprising “an ill-defined professional group” (Bird, 2004, p. 123); there may be “blurring” of work roles between academic and non-academic staff (Wozniak et al, 2005, p. 735). In this paper I am using the term to refer to academics in teaching and learning, who work in an educational development team or context which may include managers, technical staff, advisors, consultants, instructional designers, managerial and technical roles, and occasionally a mix of these roles.

The literature around educational development confirms the presence of an undercurrent of uncertainty and ambiguity in the status of educational development which periodically erupts. Some examples: issues concerning legitimacy of the role of educational developers in their own institutions (Brew, 2006, p. 73); perceptions that the role is a remedial one involving academic teaching staff (McAlpine, 2006, p. 4), concerns about the proximity of academic developers to a managerial ethos (Andresen, 2000, p. 7), and tensions in the implicit colonisation in the relationship between developers and their client “Others” (Manathunga, 2007). Brew highlights the hybridity of academic development practice, which is not fixed and its context is complex and uncertain, while academic developers “occupy the middle ground” between academics and academic managers (2006, p. 77). It is within this fluidity of contexts in organisational cultures that Ray Land (2001) identified “twelve distinct orientations to practice” (p. 4) to characterise the variability of the “strategic conduct” (p. 1) of academic developers in their work. While this complexity extends to academic work in general as it is subject to re-evaluation in the pressures of institutional imperatives (Greenbank, 2006; Marginson, 2000; McShane, 2004), the politics of academic work is also present in this “middle ground” in the practice of educational developers. However, there is little research on how educational developers themselves appraise their practice as a “careful balancing act”, as learning technologies reconfigure their work and the work of their teaching and learning colleagues. One example of this discussion was by Campbell, Schwier and Kenny (2005) concerning instructional design, where the agency of practice was positioned in conflict between a notion of instructional design as a “rational, technical process”, and a dialogic “moral relationship” of the practitioner and client. Is there a consistent view among other educational developers on the process of change, their positions and role in the organisation, and the implications of learning technologies? Do they share common discourses and strategies, or do they differ among themselves and with other stakeholders?

Educational developers are likely to be closely involved with flexible learning as both strategy and implementation. Willems (2005) considers “flexibility” in institutional discourse and in its local manifestations. She finds disenfranchisement and competing agendas between multiple stakeholders in flexible learning, in which she includes “politicians, managers, administrators, marketers, program and product developers, teachers, support staff, and students” (p. 434). There exists a gap between principles and actual teaching and learning effects in practice: the “rationales to support the implementation of the spectrum of activities associated with flexible learning” (p. 434).

Pollock and Cornford (2002) describe this gap as one between the potential of the “virtual” university and its realisation. They find that “less has been said about the actual ‘work’ involved” (p. 359). In their discussion of three failed online learning projects, they identified issues of the complex “work” of reconfiguration, where the issues were not with technology, nor with staff resistance, rather “the underlying problem is the sheer volume and complexity of the work required to configure people, machines, objects, texts, and money” (p. 371). The implication is that the configuration of learning technologies and the work of educational developers to support this configuration is far more complex, volatile and uncertain than is generally assumed. There are “challenges of supercomplexity” in the curriculum of the future, according to Barnett (2004; 2000), which arise where there is “unpredictability and uncertainty in a global and pluralist world” (Barnett, 2004, p. 257). Barnett posits educational transformation as an alternative to educational development, and calls for a new set of dispositions and practices for a “curriculum for supercomplexity” (Barnett, 2004, p. 257).

It is this “actual work” which is the focus of this study: the work of reconfiguration which occurs between the principles or potential of teaching and learning, and the practice. In this paper I analyse the accounts of educational developers of the issues of concern in their work, explore the variations in educational development practice in relation to learning technologies, and discuss the dilemmas and responses encountered by educational developers that have relevance for staff development across the higher education sector.

Methodology

The research setting and participants

The setting for this study is an educational development organisational unit in one university, and comprises some preliminary findings from a larger research inquiry on learning technologies in higher education spanning three Australian universities. This larger inquiry is part of a PhD thesis in which 25 individuals working with learning technologies were selected for interview, encompassing educational developers, teaching academics, academic managers, and technical online support staff. Interviews were conducted in late 2004 and 2005, with follow up contact in 2006.

In this paper, analysis is limited to an educational development unit in one institution. The data for analysis is drawn from interviews with three individuals in the university’s teaching and learning support unit, referred to under the pseudonym the Educational Development Unit (EDU). The unit was located structurally outside of faculties, and its function was to build and support online learning and teaching for the university, mainly through *WebCT*. It comprised academic developers, instructional designers and online education support (non-academic) who worked with teaching staff on their online courses within their faculty contexts, for both on campus and off campus courses. While the small number of participants placed limitations for this study, it also provided an opportunity to explore the tensions and issues emerging *within* one educational development context within one university. The interviews were conducted in the workplace setting of participants, and were based on a list of semi-structured questions used to elicit issues of concern to educational developers about their practice and their use of related online technologies. The interview questions that were used as trigger questions are listed in Figure 1.

- The interview is semi-structured. These are some key questions, which focus, for convenience, on e-learning. We do not need to 'cover' all questions.
1. Your role as educator: Can you describe your role - it may be multiple - your area of expertise, your teaching and research areas?
 2. First use: Describe your first use(s) of e-learning technologies. What was it, when, was it successful and so on. How did you discover it?
 3. Changes in use: Have you discarded or shifted away from any uses of e-learning approaches or technologies? Why?
 4. A specific current use: Can you describe a current use of e-learning technologies or computer mediated communication that is significant for you? Briefly, how did this project arise, and what do you hope to achieve?
 5. How does this project fit in with the organisation framework and IT system.
 6. What has worked well in this project or related areas? What has been opened up by this engagement for you or others?
 7. What hasn't or doesn't work well in this project or related areas? Has anything or anyone been constrained, excluded or foreclosed?
 8. Can you describe any unexpected consequences of your use of networked communication technologies in this project?
 9. Can you describe any innovative uses, adaptations, or workarounds involving technologies for this project that you have discovered or used with some success?
Innovative uses include 'official' uses, which are supported and presented by your organisation, and 'unofficial' uses, which are those discovered through your own research and contacts.
 10. What concerns you about where e-learning is heading? Can you comment on the direction of your work with e-learning.

Figure 1: Semi-structured interview questions

Method: Interpretative repertoires

The research methodology used was a discourse analysis approach, which was applied to the experiential accounts of educational developers based on interview transcripts. Silverman stated that "interview subjects construct not just narratives, but social worlds" (Miller & Glassner, 1997, p. 126). Rather than attempting to reconstruct the social worlds of interviewee participants arising from the contexts of practice, the discourse analysis approach seeks to understand how selected educational developers resolve multiple demands and institutional agendas, make decisions and responses, and construct a set of activities which constitute their practice.

In this single institution setting, the variation in participants' accounts of their practice offered an opportunity to gain insight into how individuals configured their staff development practice. At the initial stage of analysis, elements of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2006) were used to identify issues of concern to participants in a systematic way, and identify emergent categories of concern to participants.

A discourse analytical technique, “interpretative repertoires”, developed by Potter and Wetherell (1987), was used to explore the emerging issues and incongruities that arise from the meanings and interpretations expressed by participants. Interpretative repertoires consist of “relatively internally consistent, bounded language units” (Wetherell & Potter, 1988, p. 172) which are used for sense making and to achieve certain ends. As an example, the discourse around “communities of practice” can be identified as an interpretative repertoire, or a resource which an analyst can identify in various phrases and terms that recur in certain contexts. As a type of discourse analysis, repertoires can be used as an analytical tool to identify how individuals resolve contextual dilemmas and achieve particular ends, and the specific rhetorical devices they deploy to do this (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p.155). Applied to interview data, they provide a way to understand how participants give meaning to issues in their practice, and account for inconsistencies and dilemmas which arise.

Analysis

Four significant categories around staff development were produced using the grounded theory coding process to identify the concerns of participants. The three interview participants from the EDU were: Vicki, female, a lecturer, and Wayne, male, a *WebCT* trainer, who were both present at the one interview occasion; and Paul, male, Acting Manager (these identify actual positions, but not their real names). The categories are expressed in terms that attempt to capture the activity of participants according to their own description of the issues shaping their practice within the EDU. Following this analysis, discourse analysis is used to explore how practice is organised by participants.

Category 1: Developing staff or developing courses

All participants, at some point in the interview, stated a position or a model for their practice in educational development. Vicki presented a model of “professional development” in which teaching staff are encouraged by educational developers to design and manage their own online courses:

We encourage people to have the skills to be *able* to. That it’s the same as knowing how to use *Word*. That you actually need to be able to develop your own materials for *WebCT* (Vicki).

The model proposed by Wayne, as a (non-academic) trainer, was also skills based:

We’ve got a professional development model towards online teaching and learning so that we are there to train people, get their skills up and assist where necessary, but not to, not in the main to develop content (Wayne).

With this reference to content, Wayne expressed concern at an existing implementation of the institution’s teaching and learning strategy in which projects were funded to produce instructionally designed exemplar online courses. Vicki echoed this concern, that awarding grants for online course design which the teacher cannot later modify, “is not really the model that we encourage”. This, she felt, was a model which did not support teaching staff, but was “disabling people”:

We’ve had people who have been successful with a grant. They have a subject, sort of, built for them, with their input around content and assessment tasks. So if there is a typo, they don’t even know how to get in and fix it. So that’s just sort of disabling people through the technology (Vicki).

Vicki's preferred model was to enable staff to apply the online learning system to their own learning design. She described how she attempted to achieve this model of practice by aligning herself closely to one group (teaching staff), and distancing herself from another:

We actually need to infiltrate departments, we need to make friends with people, we really need to look like we are not just the handmaidens of whoever has decided that we're all going to use it (Vicki).

Vicki disavowed herself from "whoever has decided" that learning management systems be used by "all", despite her role in supporting the use of learning technologies that follows from the decisions referred to in her description. In this alignment, she located a practice for herself and Wayne in the "middle ground" (Brew, 2006, p. 77) between policy and staff needs, and between two institutional viewpoints.

Paul's model of staff development focussed on supporting the design of online courses, and implied a separation of course design and content from teaching. He elaborated a preferred course of action in educational development:

If I had unlimited budget, what I would be doing would be employing a very strong team of instructional design specialists who would work in a team environment with subject matter specialists, and the instructional design specialists would be very conversant with the LMS [learning management system] (Paul).

Paul described his model of practice as placing "emphasis on the design of courses" and supporting innovators as exemplars who would, where possible, work in specialist teams. "You pick up the people who are willing early on then you use those as models" (Paul). For Paul, online course development was a key component of his role, particularly through the teaching and learning grants he coordinated, and he indicated a preference for the production of online courses by teams comprising teaching academics with instructional designers as mentors. The downstream effects of instructionally designed courses was commented on sharply by both Vicki and Wayne. Vicki described the consequences of such courses as "disabling people", by leaving developed courses unsupported once their funding was completed, and Wayne commented that their construction failed to develop the skill base of teaching staff to create and maintain their own online courses, and that the performance of this task defaulted to him.

Category 2: Implementing or adapting institutional strategy

The institutional strategy of establishing a web presence in all courses was described in a university teaching and learning policy document, to support "the use of accessible technologies and flexible delivery in all courses" (*Teaching and Learning Plan 2005*). All three participants acknowledged this policy by expressing concern with the low level of adoption of online learning by academic staff. The particular strategy, however, that learning technologies be supported for all courses, was given only oblique reference by Vicki and Wayne. Vicki acknowledged this policy but downplayed its significance, responding to an interviewer query whether it was mandatory for all courses to be online, stated, "I don't know that anyone's ever policed that, I think it's sort of an idea at this point" (Vicki). Vicki and Wayne both identified staff uptake of online teaching as a primary concern, and observed that the extent of use of *WebCT* as "patchy". Vicki expressed concern with the difficulties of reaching teaching staff, who she described as time poor and "overworked, overwhelmed", and the high proportion of sessional

teaching staff. She stated a limit to her engagement, “if there’s any resistance at all, we can’t do anything, we can’t *make* people take it up”. (emphasis from audio tape)

Wayne was also ambiguous when asked if staff attendance in training sessions was a requirement for *WebCT* use:

Wayne: If that’s right then I would have to look at policy I think, if you look at the formal literature that we put out

Vicki: I think technically you’re supposed to

Wayne: Yes that may still be true (Vicki, Wayne).

Wayne took responsibility for the policy, “the formal literature that we put out”, but distanced his own practice from it, “technically you’re supposed to”, and finally reconfigured it: Wayne did not insist that teaching academics attend a mandatory *WebCT* training session, “because I administer the workshops myself”, but provided a more informal, one to one, type of support.

In this section of their spoken account, both Vicki and Wayne performed a tactical manoeuvre, in which they can be observed to place the mandatory requirement in the background, while they adapted the implementation of the online teaching and learning policy document to their own practice of “enabling” teaching staff. Their adaptation, nevertheless, supported the objective described in the original policy, in this case the increased uptake of learning technologies through *WebCT*.

Paul described a “gap” between the full use of learning technologies and the lack of training among teaching staff, “the institution is able to do what individual academic staff are able to do, and you don’t get much above that”. His gap has the characteristics of an impasse in relation to teaching and learning policy goals. His strategy to address this gap was to support innovators as models for online education, reasoning that there was less risk of expending resources with reluctant adopters for little result. “You pick up the people who are willing early on then you use those as models to the people who are a bit more resistant” (Paul). These resisters included not only those reluctant to engage with learning technologies, but those eager to experiment with them. Paul set clear bounds to innovation, and he stated the university’s position: “the University takes the view that it’s supporting *WebCT*, so it allows there to be systems but it doesn’t fund the other system”. Paul took a step further, and identified one such system as *Moodle*, an open source learning management system. He described as one of his roles to persuade or challenge individuals on their approach:

Why you get lots of different systems is because people aren’t aware of what existing systems can do. And so we can have a very significant influence in terms of supporting *WebCT*. Not because it’s *WebCT* but because it’s our supporting system (Paul).

Significantly, Paul made the case for *WebCT* over other systems or web communication software not on the merits of one or other software tool, but on the basis of the question, “how do you interface it into the infrastructure of the institution?” The innovator, who by definition does something new, becomes highly constrained by this approach.

Paul proposed a discourse strategy to contain innovation:

Guide people in certain directions that are defensible and when they raise issues, seriously engage with the issues, but if they are spurious issues, then, work with them to develop their awareness of why they are spurious issues (Paul, p. 13).

Paul's discourse strategy ascribed a false consciousness to people who promoted non-compliant types of innovation, and he proposed an awareness raising dialogue to support innovators in effective teaching and learning, under guidance, and *within* existing systems.

Category 3: Drawing together – systems or community

All participants described practices for drawing together, of people, of systems, or integrating the use of learning technologies, however their accounts reflected different trajectories. Vicki indicated a concern with using networked technologies as an interaction space for online learning. Wayne was concerned with bringing people up to a particular skill level in using learning technologies, and Paul aimed to increase the use of existing learning technology systems among teaching staff across the university.

Paul saw his responsibility to ensure that all online systems were interoperable and to justify the university's investment in networked learning infrastructure. He indicated a strategic direction for the institution in the use of its resources:

See our focus is right at the moment is on the learning content management system, and there's a limit to how far you can spread yourself at one point in time (Paul).

Paul narrowed his field of concern for that part of the institutional strategy he was responsible for as Acting Manager to the foreshadowed learning content management system (LCMS), which he defined not in its usual description as a repository of digital objects, but in the sense of "developing once and using in several places", and "resources that can be used by multiple people". He gives the example of a subject which may have "20 or 30 people delivering it". From Paul's perspective, reuse offered economies of scale, and "having a system like that, just makes that so much simpler".

Wayne also described his role in terms in which staff are brought to the use of learning technology: his support role was directed at training staff in online skills. However, Wayne's view differed from Paul's above, implying that content development is how his role is sometimes wrongly perceived (quoted under Category 1). This implies conflicting roles for his position, at least in his perception, within the EDU.

Vicki's perspective was different from Wayne and Paul: the achievement of online learning for her was creating a shared communication space for learning. An indicator of this achievement was her reports of identity formation and a sense of community online that was not possible in a face to face setting. For Vicki the affordances of online learning spaces for text based communication provided opportunities for deep and salient learning experiences. She reported several transformative encounters for both staff and students in online spaces, and identified online literacy as a key focus, enabling students to reflect on online identity through writing in genres using online discussion. She linked the literacies of developing ICT skills with the university's graduate attribute associated with communication, "the online learning environment can help you develop *other* literacies," and framed the use of online communication into building a sense of community. Vicki recounted an encounter with a teacher who was a reluctant technology user:

She was pleasantly surprised at how personalities are conveyed online. Whereas there's a perception that the technology is impersonal and that you don't get a sense of community or of individuals. And she was certainly going into it with that expectation (Vicki).

For Vicki, the perception of a sense of community was a significant indicator of the effectiveness in online teaching and learning. In Vicki's accounts of her encounters with staff as an educational developer, she repeatedly drew them to the potential of online discussion as a text based space of shared communication. She and Wayne were concerned that learning technologies were used as a 'default' or technology led pedagogy (Goodyear & Jones, 2003, p. 40), in which providing access to course content afforded in the online space was seen to constitute an online learning environment, obviating the need for a deliberate pedagogical approach. Her practice was to engage academic teachers with approaches to reflective, deeper learning, and shift staff in their use of *WebCT* away from its use as a repository of information, to using it for the construction of shared experiences and meanings, and the formation of a community of learners.

In these approaches to practice, all participants were adapting existing learning technologies to institutional strategy for teaching and learning. However, while the accounts of Paul and Wayne were concerned with a macro-view of increasing capability of learning technology use, Vicki's account was focussed beyond the goal of skills for technology use, and specified uses for the technology for creating learning communities and deep learning.

Category 4: Reframing technology or reframing the user

The university's learning technologies were central to the accounts or practice for all three participants, and they shared a concern with engaging teaching academics and supporting effective online learning environments.

Vicki's account described numerous encounters between herself as an academic developer and teaching staff in which their use of learning technology presented an obstacle or an opportunity for a transformative experience. These included dramatic changes in teaching practice involving pedagogical use of *WebCT*: for example, a reluctant user who became an enthusiastic user of online discussion; an undertaking by an academic teacher to "refigure" a lecture consisting of "about 90 *PowerPoints*". On other occasions the technology seemed to act as a barrier to an effective learning environment: the emphasis on content inherent in the LMS promoted a pedagogy of "access"; the limitations of *WebCT* functions such as displaying webpages; the "clunky" process of working with student groups online; the reluctance of many staff to attend *WebCT* workshops or adopt *WebCT* at all. Vicki reported outright refusal to use *WebCT* by an ICT based program at her university.

Recurring factors in the accounts of all three participants were related to the low uptake of online learning among teaching staff: the time required to train in the learning management system and to set up an online course, poor pedagogy associated with online teaching, and the limitations with the functionality of online learning systems. Vicki and Wayne responded to these factors and shaped a practice around one to one interaction with staff, based on the use of learning technologies for sound pedagogical principles.

Paul described limits to implementing the institutional teaching and learning strategy in terms of staff capability, "the institution is able to do what individual academic staff are able to do", hence the steeper the learning curve, the longer it would take to raise that capability. He also suggested the lack of enthusiasm in the adoption of *WebCT* could be understood as a moment in the evolution of learning management systems:

Well they're moving ahead, but compared with what they will be like in 10 years time, they're still (at an early phase) in their evolution so, you take that on board, and then look for the ways of alleviating frustration as far as possible. That's part of the job. And recognising that innovators, if you think of the innovation period, innovators are quite able to handle those frustrations' (Paul).

Paul located "innovators" as the key to dealing with these frustrations with online learning systems, and these would lead and provide a good practice model for the "followers". For Paul, the learning management system *per se* was not important: "what people do online is much more to do with how they're designing the course than what LMS they're using." Paul's educational development strategy for online learning was based on dissemination of online content, both through course teams of designers and those teaching, and with innovators and followers. These innovators, however, were circumscribed within the university's "institutional strategy". Hence the strategy for teaching and learning for the institution converged onto the technology, and became embedded or consolidated in the learning management system, after which it could modify or reframe the practice of the innovator/teacher.

Discussion

The four categories described above, which emerged from participants' accounts of their work in the EDU, comprise a set of staff development practices which can be grouped around two perspectives or interpretations of teaching and learning strategy. These interpretations reflect a duality of strategies in the EDU for integrating policy, learning technologies and the needs of teaching staff. Despite responding to a common policy and technological environment, the educational developers in the Unit constructed their practice in distinctive and sometimes incongruent ways. How is the emergence of different accounts of practice in the same setting to be understood, and how did the educational developers resolve these differences between each other?

In this study, a discourse analytic approach is used to consider various accounts of practice: how they are constructed and organised, and what different accounts achieve (Denzin, 1978, p. 149). The particular discourse analysis approach of interpretative repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) provides a means of understanding variation in accounts of practice, "the notion of repertoires has enabled us to distinguish contrasting sets of terms used in different ways" (p. 153). Interpretative repertoires are ways of organising an account, they "perform different sorts of accounting tasks" (1987, p. 156).

The two perspectives on teaching and learning that emerge as each educational developer provided an account of their own practice, can be identified as contrasting repertoires that were used by participants to support their claims and activities, and make sense of the particular contexts in which their practice was located. The participants in the EDU draw on repertoires in their accounts of practice that are "action oriented" (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 183), that is, oriented towards specific goals and ends. In fact, the accounts reflect two distinct sets of practices in staff

development. These repertoires can be identified and phrased in terms used by participants themselves: an *enabling* repertoire was deployed primarily by Vicki, whereby she endeavoured to enable teaching staff to adapt learning technologies for their local needs, while Paul used a *guiding* repertoire, where teaching staff were guided or encouraged to adapt their online teaching to the learning management system, and were also discouraged and not supported in the uptake of non-compliant technologies. Wayne drew on both repertoires, supporting Vicki's enabling approach, but also had the goal to train staff and "get their skills up" (Wayne, p. 19), therefore guiding them towards technological capability.

Each repertoire provided a means for educational developers to resolve conflicts and dilemmas in their staff development practice which arose from the requirement to implement the teaching and learning policy of the adoption of online teaching in all courses, and the lack of take up by teaching staff. In order to build and maintain a repertoire, participants use a tactic which Potter and Wetherell refer to as a "rhetorical device" (1987, p. 155). Such rhetorical devices are drawn on as needed in order to resolve conflicts in talk and a speaker's own interpretative repertoire restored and maintained. For Vicki and Wayne their dilemma arose from the need to increase adoption of *WebCT* among staff, and tensions expressed in stories of staff resistance to using online learning systems, and the token adoption of *WebCT* which reflected poor pedagogy.

The response of Vicki and Wayne was to construct their practice around the enabling repertoire, by endeavouring to establish good relationships with teaching staff as clients. To maintain the enabling repertoire, policy was accommodated by the use of the rhetorical device of *foregrounding*, in which the local needs of teaching staff framed staff development practice, and policy requirements placed in the background. Both Vicki and Wayne distanced themselves from aspects of policy, by, for example, not knowing exactly what it stated at the time, or observing it in as being in flux and indefinite (Vicki, Wayne). This use of the foregrounding device included: expressions of vagueness on certain policy directives where they may draw a negative response from teaching staff; demonstration of dialogic capabilities of learning technologies; and deployment of workarounds (Pollock 2005), in the technology is adapted for uses other than originally intended so that problematic features of online systems are avoided.

The dilemma that arose for Paul was to reconcile his support for good teaching practice and innovation, while keeping faith with the institutional commitment to technological systems. Consequently, he formed a practice which constrained staff development within existing learning technologies, particularly *WebCT*, despite significant problems in its takeup and adoption. By constructing his practice around the guiding repertoire, Paul took the view that all online teaching and learning needs, including innovative approaches, could be achieved through the institution's learning management system, and declared his willingness to challenge individuals who proposed alternative approaches. The learning management system functioned as a "black box". Blackboxing can be described as an arrangement where "machines and skills and statements can be turned into packages" (Law, 2004, p. 33), which function as "routinised" entities that are embedded into their environments. Bruno Latour identifies "blackboxing" as a process which refers to the way "technical work is made invisible by its own success" (1999, p. 304). Paul deployed *blackboxing* by drawing on it as a rhetorical device, to encourage the use of a learning technology despite problems

arising from the lack of user friendliness, the time it took staff to learn, and the response indicating that it was not embraced by staff. The repertoires are detailed in Figure 2.

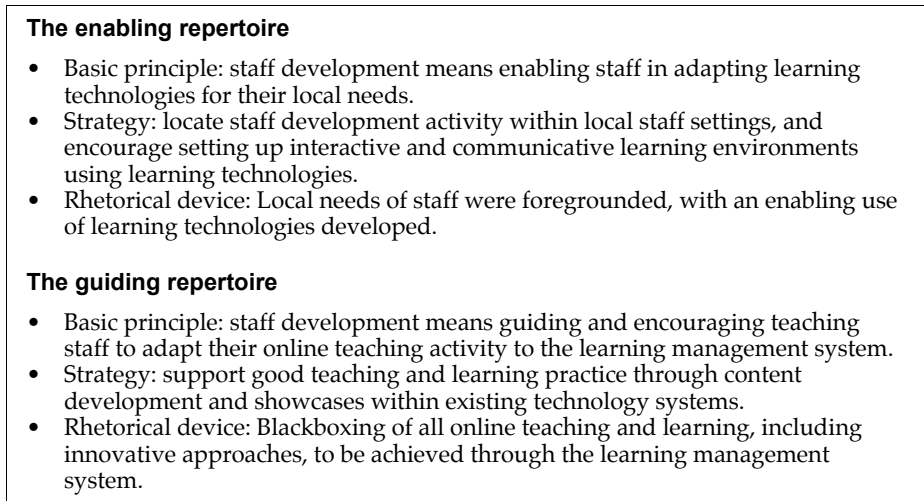


Figure 2: Educational developers' interpretative repertoires

Blackboxing provided Paul a means to disseminate his own strategic model for educational development based on the guiding repertoire: not only was online teaching blackboxed into the learning management system, but also strategic approaches to teaching and learning. To use an expression of Andrew Feenberg (1999, p. 113), institutional strategy became "concretised" in the technological system, a process whereby a statement or object is taken as external to the social world. As the policy requirement of supporting learning technologies in all courses was implemented via a "packaged" system.

Paul's strategic approach to educational development reflected the institutional investment in technological infrastructure, comprising online learning systems with high levels of interoperability with reporting and student database systems. This strategy overshadowed and marginalised innovative online options in pedagogy. Approaches involving the open source course management system *Moodle*, or the adoption of blogs in teaching were declared unsupported, or possibly "spurious".

However, the two repertoires can be seen to follow from the functional roles of the participants, and the divergence of their corresponding action orientation is not unexpected. What this divergence indicates, however, is the potential for the "concretisation" of divergent practices in an institution, the explicit or tacit embedding of practices may be at odds, despite sharing the same strategic goal. In the case of the EDU, the guiding repertoire drew on institutional teaching and learning strategy to place technology centre stage. Consequently, the practices of educational developers were under pressure to submit to a technological system, so that pedagogy and innovation were directed towards the use of learning technology, rather than the use of technologies for effective teaching and learning.

Conclusion

This study brought the discourse analysis method of interpretative repertoires to the accounts of staff development practice of three educational developers, in order to explore how practices are constructed to accommodate the imperatives of institutional strategy and learning technologies into a model of everyday practice. The study was limited to one institution in order to explore the variations and incongruencies in practice arising from one educational development context.

Around the two repertoires of *enabling* and *guiding* are organised distinct accounts of practice, and distinct accounts of action and effects involving technology use and engagement with teaching staff. In this sense, "talk is both *about* things and actions, and also *part of things*" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 182, authors' italics). The talk of the participants was part of their practice, and part of the reality that was enacted in staff development.

All participants in the EDU defined a practice shaped by the imperatives of their work context, however, the two repertoires expressed incongruencies in educational development practice. The enabling repertoire allowed developers to innovate and adapt online technologies to the local settings that arose in developer-staff consultations: enabling staff to adapt and use the technologies themselves, working around technological limitations, and building learning online communities. At the same time, the enabling repertoire allowed educational developers to place mandated official requirements in the background. In contrast, the guiding repertoire interpreted the institutional strategy in a way that positioned staff development within the learning management system, by adapting and accommodating staff *to* those systems via the rhetorical device of "blackboxing". As a consequence, possible innovative approaches to learning technologies were constrained by a technology centred repertoire which framed a nexus between learning technologies and institutional strategy.

Educational development is shaped in the middle ground between institutional teaching and learning strategy and the needs of day to day practice, and politics enters this middle ground when institutional strategy is implemented to foreclose the agency of educational development. The case of the EDU shows that it is neither institutional strategy nor learning technologies that impose these constraints, rather, the discourse or repertoires associated with their operationalisation. Staff development practices that are framed by a repertoire which serves the implementation of a technological system will see many innovative online pedagogical approaches as non-compliant. The implications for educational development are in challenging the repertoires around technological infrastructure that capture teaching and learning strategy, and create repertoires for staff development which are distinctive, but flexible and congruent, placing responsive and innovative teaching and learning at the foreground in the process of change.

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<p>John Hannon, Flexible Learning Centre, University of South Australia, GPO Box 2471, Adelaide SA 5001, Australia. Email: john.hannon@unisa.edu.au Web: http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/staff/Homepage.asp?Name=john.hannon</p>
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