

Roles for Educational Technologists by the Year 2000

Barry Bratton

Instructional Design and Technology

Program

University of Iowa

Iowa City, IA 52242

Trying to gaze into the future of the educational technology field is risky business; it is particularly so when the time is twelve years hence and the field has historically been unpredictable. For instance, who foresaw the effect of World War II on education and training, the rise and fall of programmed instruction, the fascination with educational broadcasting, the emergence of instructional systems thinking, and the current preoccupation with computers? Who would have predicted ten years ago that the educational technology academic programs today would be preparing more women than men to enter the field and that the majority of graduates would be taking employment outside formal educational institutions?

With these sobering thoughts in mind, I venture to speculate on some likely scenarios and trends in our field for the remainder of this century. Because no one can foresee the impact of intellectual and scientific breakthroughs, political-social meanders or catastrophic events, I assume the conservative position that the best predictors of the future are present activities and emerging trends.

In the area of employment settings for educational technologists, I foresee little change ahead. Qualified persons will find jobs in every sector of society where education and training are

valued, for example, business, industry, military, government, social services, education, and health care. A specific area for high employment may be in continuing professional education, where certification and recertification requirements will demand countless hours of validated instruction. Higher education, however, will continue to resist the application of educational technology principles of course design and program development; there will be few new employment openings in colleges and universities (Gustafson, 1978).

In terms of the sub-specialties within the educational technology field, I see the following trends:

Film/Video. There will be decreasing numbers of jobs in the film industry; on the other hand, persons with up-to-date video skills coupled with a knowledge about computer-based training will have more job choices.

Computers. There will be good news and bad news in the area of computer-based training. The bad news is that the current level of fascination with computers in education and training will begin to wane, with the net result being a decline in the job market. Individuals who specialize only in programming skills will be at greatest risk, while those with a combination of computer skills, research/evaluation skills, and instructional design expertise will be more likely to secure positions. I base this prediction on the historical fact that each time new technologies emerged (for example, film, video, and programmed instruction), they were initially greeted with great enthusiasm only to fade from prominence and quietly take their rightful place in relation to previous inventions.

Instructional Design. Individuals with training and experience in designing and evaluating instruction will be in the

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best position for the next decade. Those with a firm foundation in the sixteen competency areas outlined by the Joint AECT-NSPI Certification Task Force will be sought by employers, regardless of current hardware and software fads (Task Force on Instructional Development Certification, 1981).

Interactive Instruction. The one area where there may be some promise for extended success is interactive instruction. However, two difficult technical problems must be overcome before this area becomes a viable job market: production expense and production methodology. Only persons with a penchant for modest risk-taking will aim their career exclusively toward this area.

Individuals wanting employment at the K-12 level will find the job requirements becoming more rigorous and work expectations more challenging. There is no doubt in my mind that changes will occur in the substance and quality of preservice teacher preparation programs as well as in the inservice programs demanded by practicing teachers. As classroom teachers become increasingly sophisticated about the use of computers and instructional design, they will expect support personnel, such as library/media staff, to be more proactive. A firm grasp of instructional design and consultation skills, coupled with the basics in library/media center management, will be the keys to success for practitioners (Turner, 1985).

There will be a noticeable increase in opportunities for persons to work in

foreign countries. The growth of all technologies is exploding worldwide, and many nations are seeking skilled planners and developers to help them be competitive in a global system (Thomas & Kobayashi, 1987).

The concept of professional certification looms on the near horizon. Professional certification is not to be confused with teacher education certification or media specialist certification. For example, the International Board of Standards for Training, Performance and Instruction, recently formed out of collaborative efforts by educational technologists representing the Association for Educational Communications and Technology and the National Society for Performance and Instruction, has published competency standards for instructional designers. The Board will soon release its competencies for trainers, and slated for later development are competencies for evaluators, media developers, and training managers. One of the goals of the Board of

Standards is to develop a competency-based certification process (Gilley, Geis & Seyfer, 1987). A recent study of trainers reported that over 75% of them believed professionals should be required to demonstrate mastery of knowledge and skills, and over 60% felt certification would improve their image (Bell, 1986).

The Board of Standards advocates professional certification, and if it is successful in creating a valid, reliable, and acceptable certifying process, all of us—academics, graduate students, practitioners, etc.—will be affected. There will be a need for educational technologists to develop, administer, and coordinate the certifying process. Entrepreneurs with an educational technology background may find new roles in helping their colleagues prepare for the certification examination.

More educational technologists may, in the not too distant future, find themselves in court. It is possible that trainees who complete a "validated" training program but later are unable to meet the job entry requirements will seek recompense from the creator of the training. We may have to enter into contracts with our clients to protect us from litigation by end users of our products. Some of us may earn a living working as legal consultants and expert witnesses in disputes where training is an issue.

As educational technologists make career commitments to their employers, particularly in the for-profit sector, it will be interesting to see how far they are able to climb the corporate ladder. It has been about ten years since they began moving in significant numbers into the corporate sector; many have risen to supervisory roles, and a few have advanced to middle manage-

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ment. How far these individuals advance in the next decade will be a signal to those who come behind them.

On the other hand, I doubt that we will see many persons in our field rising to leadership roles in public education, say, as principals and superintendents of school systems or as college deans and presidents. If this prediction is accurate, it will further discourage the more capable and talented people in our field from pursuing careers in public education, where they are needed most (Bratton & Silber, 1984).

The academic community that trains educational technologists will not escape change. I foresee reductions in staff and some closures of programs as institutions reevaluate their costs and priorities. Those programs that survive will become increasingly differentiated on the research-practice dimension. With increased specialization of practice, a few programs will experiment with postdoctoral training, thus creating new roles for faculty and students. Faculty in all programs will face the conundrum of whether to offer a generalist or a specialist orientation to their training. There is some preliminary evidence to suggest that in the near future a merging of educational

technology and educational psychology programs may take place at some institutions (House & Bratton, 1986). These changes will affect every member of the academic community, as well as future students.

I predict that before the end of this millennium, professors will have to deal with such issues as academic program accreditation, certification, and licensure. How they choose to respond to these opportunities may well have a more profound effect on the future of our field than any external force.

One important role that has yet to be mentioned is neither job specific nor limited to a single sector, yet it may be the most influential as we move toward the next century. It is called leadership. While there are many people who have made significant contributions in terms of research, scholarly efforts, and professional association service, a leadership vacuum still exists in the educational technology field. Perhaps the role all of us can play today that will most positively affect the future of our field is encouraging bright, insightful, articulate individuals to join us in preparing for the challenges ahead of us in the twenty-first century.

In this article I have described the

influences I think will likely affect our practice and field in the near future. In some instances, our roles will be affected whether we attempt to intervene or not. In most cases, we can strongly influence our own destiny.

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