Article type

Commentary, review by editor.

Publication history

Received: 24 August 2020. Revised: 26 August 2020.
Accepted: 26 August 2020. Published: 26 August 2020.

Cover image

jbom411
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Special issue Debating the status of ‘theory’ in technology enhanced learning research | **More at** <https://doi.org/10.21428/8c225f6e.dc494046>

Reflecting on meaning and legitimacy: A comment on Lee and Lee

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Keywords

commentary

Citation

Lei, Y. (2020). Reflecting on meaning and legitimacy: A comment on Lee and Lee. **Studies in Technology Enhanced Learning**, 1(1), 279-281.

<https://doi.org/10.21428/8c225f6e.d3880553>

It was a good experience for me to undertake the peer-reviewing for the article written by Lee and Lee (2020), and I am delighted to provide commentary on this excellent critical literature review project. Reading this paper made me reflect differently on my own experience and thoughts as a PhD student in the field of technology-enhanced learning. This study is trying to examine the common assumption of an educational role of technology having been taken for granted by dominant theories in the TEL field, and I think this topic is important and essential for researchers, especially for PhD students like me who have just started their study. Therefore, I would like to share how this paper makes me reflect on my own experience as a very early-career researcher.

First of all, my perspective of ‘theory’ has been changed by reading this paper. It may seem that I am trying to exaggerate the effect of my reading, but the truth is I did realize that my mind is controlled by so-called theory to some extent, especially as a first-year PhD student. When I started my research, I always thought highly of theory and lacked some ability of deep thinking and criticality in relation to it. When I was doing my literature review work, for example, I spent much time on summarizing what theories researchers are using in my research area, what are research results, which theories are well-accepted, which theories are popular in recent years, and so on. My attention was drawn by different research results provided by various theories. Importantly, I forgot to ask myself, what is the meaning of the theory, what

the function of the theory, how might I select theory suitable for different projects, are the published theories developed very well, can I trust the theory, what are the advantages and drawbacks of each theory? Looking back, I just took for granted every theory I read about. Therefore, I think the work done by Lee and Lee (2020) can remind new PhD students about the role and function of ‘theory’ very well, especially in the section of ‘theoretical framework’, which provides readers with a general and comprehensive understanding of what ‘theory’ is taken to mean. This section reminds me of notions like ‘knowledge’ or ‘truth’ or ‘education’, which are widely and easily used every day. Most people think these notions are common sense and assume that others may share similar or even the same understanding. Still, the truth is it’s never easy to describe them accurately or define them precisely (Dewey, 1997).

Moreover, in the section ‘theory is building its legitimacy’, Lee and Lee (2020) discuss the presentation of theories, interactions between theory and backup statements, and the inclusion of oppositional theory in a detailed way, with examples. By reading this section, I started thinking of my own writing, about whether I am sure I always do the same

when I am building my argument. To some extent, when I am doing academic writing, I focus too much on the structure of argumentation and the presentation of my argument, rather than thinking of the rationality and systematic nature of the argument. Here, I suggest the authors maybe can consider developing this section into a new paper, to discuss the building of theory in the TEL field specifically, which will bring researchers, especially PhD students towards a better understanding of how to build and engage with the legitimacy of theory in a more appropriate way.

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About the author

Yuhong Lei is a PhD student with interests in the fields of technology-enhanced learning and the design of educational products and places. Her current research focuses on identifying what elements contribute to university students' academic procrastination in mobile learning. Due to the development of technology and the Internet, mobile devices have become an essential part of our life, and mobile learning allows students to access education anywhere and anytime. However, studies also indicate that a large number of university students have procrastinative behaviours in the mobile learning environment. Yuhong wants to explore the reasons behind this phenomenon.

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