

"leaping to the cloud," as follows:

1. Data and even hardware security are delegated to specialists whose very existence depends on offering efficient and secure services and who may be situated anywhere in the world—therefore, by project design, in countries that do not suffer the organizational/political problems that may exist in the educational institution's country,

2. Rather than investing in its internal technology infrastructure (which tends to be out of date as soon as the investment is made) the institution rents state-of-the-art cloud-based services, paying on a pro-rata, per-megabit, or per-student, basis.

3. Rather than investing in a network of learning centers equipped with dozens of desktop computers (never enough for peak demand and useless during a power cut), the institution delegates the responsibility for access to the online courses to the students themselves—although the institutions suffer from technical resources starvation, the majority of their (adult professional) students already possess top-end smartphones—the cell-phone networks are the most ubiquitous and robust technologies available and their use is largely independent of local power cuts.

This approach delegates all course hosting, course maintenance, course backup, and technical maintenance and support (including student technical support) to the cloud services provider. The institution does not have to invest in a technology infrastructure "up-front" to cope with projected demand, only to discover that the demand grows slower than predicted, so that by the time the demand has grown the infrastructure is no longer state-of-the-art. It does not have to invest in its own learning management system (LMS) or the license fees to use an existing one. It does not have to employ technical staff for maintenance of the LMS, for updating the course files, or even for supporting and resolving the technical difficulties of the end-users. The institution is left only with the academic and pedagogical parts of the whole job—these are the parts for which both the institution and its academic staff are, by definition, both qualified and prepared.

Conclusion—Evaluating and managing the risks

The above-mentioned report from CBS Interactive closes by stating:

"In the infancy of online banking, people thought it was risky—today, we know there's far less risk of fraud or identity theft with online banking than there is with manual mailing of checks and statements. Cloud computing has a different set of risk factors than an on-premises data center—you are exchanging internal technology management risk—for vendor risk—by offloading the former, you have to be confident in the latter's capabilities."

This is, of course, very true. But in many situations in the educational arena, especially in contexts like the ones described in my developing-country scenarios, we already have prior experience of the insecurity of the internal management processes. Leaping to the cloud, especially if the leap is in a well-researched direction, will almost certainly offer benefits and will most probably much reduce the current levels of in-house risk. □

Conference Reports

PIDT: The "Unconference" for Discussion of Ideas and Professional Networking

Richard E. West

The Professors of Instructional Design and Technology (PIDT) conference has been successful since 1985 at providing an opportunity for professors and their advanced doctoral students to learn and grow in ways not possible at traditional conferences. This article reports on the 2012 annual meeting and summarizes the history of PIDT, as gleaned by the author through interviews with several participants.

Introduction

Forty professors and advanced doctoral students met May 20–23 this year in Estes Park, Colorado, for the annual meeting of the Professors of Instructional Design and Technology (PIDT). This "unconference" has become a favorite for many faculty to discuss issues related to curriculum, doctoral student advising and teaching, research, professional service, and emerging theories and technologies. This year's meeting was again successful, but before reviewing some of the highlights, it may be helpful to review the history of this unique annual conclave.

PIDT History

In 2004, Wineburg* poetically lamented the state of presentations at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference. He described his first AERA conference in 1985, and his excitement to attend a session where four "luminaries" in his field would be presenting. Enthusiastically, he squeezed into the packed room, only to hear one esteemed professor read her notes

* Wineburg, S. (2004). Must it be this way? Ten rules for keeping your audience awake during conferences. *Educational Researcher*, 33(4), 13–14.

Richard E. West is a faculty member in the Instructional Psychology and Technology department at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, where he researches the design of learning environments that foster collaborative innovation, as well as online collaborative learning. He has attended PIDT four times, and cherishes the relationships developed there (e-mail: rickwest@byu.edu). He writes at <http://richardwest.com>; @richardwest (Twitter); or <http://www.mendeley.com/profiles/richard-west1/> (Mendeley).

verbatim. The second speaker did have visuals, but after "firing slides like an Uzi fires rounds," Wineburg realized few were actually paying attention or learning from the presentation. He asked, "Must it be this way?" (p. 13).

That same year, 1985, a group of instructional systems technology professors quietly answered "No!" and formed a unique, new conference, which was really more of a professional meeting than a conference. This "unconference" emphasized everything traditional conferences did not, including a priority on discussion, interaction, networking, mentoring, and action. "The main focus was primarily social and professional interaction on an individual/small group basis. The remote, rural settings provided opportunities for much more conversation and interaction than would be available at a larger, more structured conference," Mike Moore of Virginia Tech said.

A focus on balancing structure with informal conversations is a tradition that lives on in the PIDT meetings, which have been held annually except for a break in 1997; so 26 meetings have taken place. The group originally called themselves Professors of Instructional Systems Technology, which reflected the direction of the field at the time, but which formed an awkward acronym that only persisted for a few years before becoming PIDT. Sleeping in cabins that for the first few years did not have indoor plumbing or heating, and meeting at a rustic retreat at Shawnee Bluffs in Indiana, on the banks of Lake Monroe, the original group (led by Tom Schwen of Indiana University, along with others, including Bob Morgan of Florida State) met to discuss curriculum, research, and the emerging directions of the field.

"We were a new enough field that maybe people wanted to share information," Rhonda Robinson of Northern Illinois said. Robinson added that PIDT especially provided a way for female professors, who were fewer at the time, to associate and mentor each other.

The meeting was so successful that they continued meeting annually in Indiana. Eventually, the conference was moved to a rotation system, typically held at either Estes Park, Colorado, or Smith Mountain Lake, Virginia, while occasionally being held at other locations. Wherever the meeting is held, the emphasis has always been on locations where recreation merges with business, allowing participants to begin conversations in meeting rooms and continue them on, say, a hike or in a canoe.

After a few years, the group decided to expand and allow faculty attendees to bring one advanced doctoral student each, as a way to introduce the students to additional faculty mentors. "Many of us were graduating and did not know how to get into the professoriate. I had three courses and no ideas what to do!" Sharon Smaldino of Northern Illinois commented. "We were finding that a lot of the "newbies" were getting lost. They weren't understanding the big picture.... We tried to make a way to ensure their success. That's something unique about this meeting. It's very nurturing." Eventually attending PIDT became an honor for many graduate students lucky enough to be chosen to attend with their faculty adviser.

Professional Development

Despite an emphasis on informality and recreation, PIDT has a tradition of providing key opportunities for pro-

fessional development, where participants can explore new technologies, develop new theories and ideas, receive feedback on new initiatives, and collaborate on new publishing opportunities. Many PIDT attendees remember learning about emerging technologies for the first time at PIDT, such as Twitter, Second Life, and even the World Wide Web when it was still a radically new innovation. "I get to listen to what the doc students are talking about these days and check what I'm teaching," Rob Branch of the University of Georgia said. "I first heard about Twitter here, and OER (Open Educational Resources). Things that I could not 'not know.'"

In addition to strands about new technologies, PIDT typically has a curriculum strand, where participants bring syllabi and teaching materials to share. In years past this has included sessions on classes common to most departments (such as a preservice educational technology course) to new courses being developed (such as a course on ethics and instructional technology) to other, larger proposed changes within academic departments. "The established faculty have a forum if they need it. When we moved to LDT (Learning, Design, and Technology) as a new name for our academic program, it was here we tried it out," Branch said.

Other topics commonly discussed at PIDT are:

- strategies for mentoring and advising of graduate students;
- "big new ideas that are being developed for publication, but which need a venue for preliminary exploration;
- writing projects needing collaboration;
- advice for students who are job hunting, or for new faculty seeking tenure; these sessions have often been very practical, with students bringing vitas/cover letters for critique or senior faculty providing mock job interviews; and
- sessions more relevant to the needs of mid-career or late-career faculty.

Typically, only about half of these sessions are scheduled ahead of time, with the rest emerging at the conference as attendees discuss topics of interest to them. However, most participants feel the greatest value of PIDT is the professional development that occurs in-between sessions. "I learned a lot from watching the senior people in the field," Smaldino remembered. "Think...people like to get together to have these informal conversations that you can't have inside your program (where you can) sit-down and talk about how you do I.T."

These opportunities for networking in a relaxed atmosphere also are beneficial for graduate students. "It's a lot of fun. We get so serious as professors and forget to have fun. It's important for students," Robinson said, before adding that "A theory in parenting is that it's important for kids to see parents play," and doctoral students get the same benefit from networking with professors in a relaxed, recreational event.

Where Publications Are Born

Traditionally, PIDT has been a place where collaborators could meet and discuss ideas for publications. Perhaps most well known was when David Jonassen was selected

to edit the first edition of the *Handbook of Research for Educational Communications and Technology* and used PIDT to brainstorm the list of chapters/topics and to recruit many of the authors. Numerous other articles and book chapters have similarly emerged from PIDT collaborations, including at least one edition of the AECT definitions and terminology book, with many of the definitions hotly discussed at PIDT sessions.

PIDT 2012

This year, PIDT was held at Estes Park, Colorado, at the YMCA of the Rockies, for the eighth time, with 40 attendees. Brigham Young University and the University of Wyoming hosted the meeting, while Pat Hardré of the University of Oklahoma served as the program planner. The conference began Sunday evening with the traditional icebreaker activity; in this case, it was "academic karaoke," where participants enjoyed watching each other struggle to make up interesting presentations from unknown PowerPoint slide decks prepared ahead of time on topics as random as instructional design principles, diffusion of innovations theory, social network analysis, and poodles.

On Monday and Tuesday, the regular sessions were held. Highlights included:

1. A draft of the new standards from the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) was shared, and attendees gave feedback. After making the revisions, the standards will be presented at the 2012 AECT conference this autumn.
2. A popular session focused on advice for graduate students seeking employment. Points of emphasis were how to: make a cover letter focused, emphasize the skills you bring that match a job description, balance "selling" without overselling yourself, and preparing for the questions and activities surrounding an academic interview.
3. Rick West (Brigham Young University) moderated a discussion on the benefits and challenges of alternative dissertation formats, such as the option of allowing doctoral students to write journal articles in lieu of a traditional dissertation. Benefits discussed included the ability to teach students to do the kind of writing they will use the rest of their careers, while also improving the potential impact from their dissertation work; challenges were brought up, such as how to negotiate the co-authorship of committee members and the appropriate scope and requirements for students.
4. Rhonda Robinson and Kristin Brynteson (Northern Illinois) discussed strategies for mentoring graduate students through co-teaching graduate level courses with advisers.
5. Chuck Hodges (Georgia Southern) and Ross Perkins (Boise State) shared lessons learned from their respective online educational technology programs, including the types of final portfolios their students complete, the funding models they

use, and their strategies for recruiting students.

6. Several sessions were held related to accreditation issues and discussions about how to justify the importance of educational technology faculty to administrators not in our field.
7. Margie Massey (University of Colorado–Pueblo) led a discussion on strategies for teaching a preservice educational technology course.
8. Andy Gibbons (Brigham Young University) led two popular sessions on "multiple views of design and their implications for training" and the "economies of instruction and the economy of learning." The latter discussed how in the past instructional designers have used economies possible through technology as a major selling point, but instead we should be thinking about the learner as a system with an economy that trades time and attention for what we perceive to be value.
9. John Cowan (Northern Illinois) and Mike Menchaca (Hawaii) shared the basic principles of social network analysis and initial data from a large study they have completed comparing the social networks among civic, governmental, and other support agencies in New Orleans both before and after the Hurricane Katrina crisis.
10. Ross Perkins (Boise State) discussed tips for getting started with seeking and acquiring grants.
11. Peter Rich (Brigham Young University) proposed the need for more awareness and participation in award competitions for instructional design projects, and a proposal for developing a large competition for exemplary instructional designs that could benefit students and faculty.

PIDT 2013

PIDT 2013 will be organized by Anne Ottenbreit-Leftwich of Indiana University and T.J. Kopcha of the University of Georgia. It is expected to be held in Indiana in May, although the arrangements are still being finalized. Information about this and future PIDT conferences will come through the following PIDT social media outlets:

- The official PIDT Website: <http://pidtconference.org>.
- The PIDT Facebook Group: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/pidt.fb/>.
- PIDT listserv, managed by Barbara Lockee at Virginia Tech.

Consider attending, and experience what Sharon Smaldino described as "the place I go to center myself... I come away energized to start something or do something." Another long-time attendee, Mike Moore, said, "PIDT has been one of my best professional experiences and memories. It is so much more than just a professional meeting. I met so many good folks that I probably would not have had the opportunity to meet in other venues. I have made many great friends and colleagues as a result." □