Event Synthesis:
EdLab Seminar with Tony Cline

C. Epting
Teachers College, Columbia University

EdLab, The Gottesman Libraries
Teachers College, Columbia University
525 W. 120th Street
New York, NY 10027

<u>Overview</u>
Tony Cline, Fmr. Research Director at ETS, Professor of Sociology of Education at TC

<u>Presentation</u>
Professor Cline has collected information about how information technology (IT) is being used in society, has read in sociology and other social sciences, and has come to the conclusion that people are not dealing with the fundamental theoretical issues of sociology, and that they might provide a good perspective for looking at IT.

The five theoretical perspectives discussed in his forthcoming book are: social capital, the division of labor, normative order, temporality, and societal evolution. Professor Cline's book will look to answer the question of how IT creates, maintains, and modifies each of these elements.

<u>Discussion</u>

Theoretical Frameworks and the Final Chapter
LL: It's really important, this pull between the traditional social structures, I'd like to see more close ties between the elements.

TC: You've given me a really nice idea of tying them together, wouldn't it be nice in chapter 15 I could have a graphic with 5 nodes representing these perspectives and then have the linkages between and among them with phrases form chapter 3-14? One idea is talking about the interrelationships of the five perspectives. The other one, so far, is being a commentator. The more I'm here at TC and I'm impressed with the quality of some of the faculty and some of the students, and then I think about, "Shouldn't TC be having a big impact on the teaching profession?" and I don't see that happening.

HO: I don't think it should be about arguing. I think you should start with the diagram of the interconnectedness. You don't need complete arguments right now, and at the same time, what's interesting for me is the temporality. What's important at the individual, family, school, institutional levels so if you have this matrix you know certain ideas that have more to do with the institution have no relevance to the student…trying to detect where these different factors have an influence on something.

Moving from old technologies to IT
HO: Are we just trying to reproduce what we do manually in IT instead of using IT for innovative purposes?

CH: When printing first emerged, there was an attempt to reproduce manuscript culture in print. Is our current digital technology just trying to preserve the old culture?

TC: When banks first started using computers, they used the machines to do the same processes that clerks were doing manually.

HC: It seems like institutions have a longer learning curve to be able to do that. They have to do the bad use of technology for a very long time in order to imagine better uses.

Are we in the midst of an IT revolution?
CR: While we're in the midst of the change, we're also watching and observing and commenting on the change. It seems now the people who are commenting on this process have a lot of power to influence the process.

GN: You're skeptical about whether we're in a revolution. What I want to suggest is that doing social science in 2005 seems like studying the monocle in the midst of the French Revolution. People within the academy are remarkably unconcerned. In a period of slow change it's ok to be historicist, but in a period of rapid change the disutility of that approach seems unavoidable. So I'm wondering your thoughts on that, or do you say the revolution isn't here, social science methods are still fine. You're not using them, but you're not abandoning them.

TC: There is the potential for an enormous upheaval and I think it's an intellectual revolution as opposed to the under classes overthrowing the upper classes. I think where I have the potential of making a contribution is getting people to look at this potential oncoming revolution in a broader perspective. The kinds of questions I'm asking here I don't think are amenable to the anthropological approach. I'm doing the kind of work that some of the early theorists did where they used some available data, their intuition, and their perspective to see if there were patterns that they hadn't noticed before. I wouldn't count on a sociologist to sound the call of the revolution; we wouldn't recognize it till it was almost over. We can get people to think differently, and I think that's the role I'd like to play.

Misalignment of authority and expertise in education with IT
JF: Do you see that normative authority will be the attempt to realign the misalignment of authority and expertise?

TC: You see some people changing and innovating, and you see some still digging in their heels. In part, we have to be patient till the old people move on. There are a huge number of people who have a vested interest in not changing. IT gives us the capability to serve as an instructor and evaluator. We know enough about some subjects that we could devise such a system. I don't understand why somebody doesn't put up the money, and let's design a high school biology curriculum. Don't get rid of the teacher, but let's have an individualized teacher. We can prove that it can be done, but who's going to use it? Kids know more about technology than their teachers, and that undermines the traditional role of the teacher as the authority.

HC: It goes back to what you said earlier about moving toward a service economy. You're saying in this new economy, what will heirachize society is knowledge and expertise. What knowledge and expertise will it be based on? With all these new technologies, it's dispersing social capital so everyone can have access to it. What knowledge and expertise does education serve up? You said teachers play a different role, do people here have thoughts about what teachers do in this new education system? Are you opposed to this idea of a networked school where kids are learning more from each other than from the teachers?

TC: I would argue that I see us going the direction of more individualized learning, we'll have to keep a lock step of grades, but what goes on inside the classroom with the use of machines for tutorial purposes and mediation, I think teachers need to have an entirely different set of skills to function in that environment. The phrase 'cognitive empathy' gets at some of it. I'm talking about a teacher who can quickly diagnose a student, and can provide the student with the nudge. We need teacher training courses that can teach teachers to be able to do that.

IT as removing social interaction
MD: There's so many ways that we have of interacting with people, where we're going through these interfaces. Maybe one day there will be interfaces that will be as satisfying as interacting face to face. I'd rather interact on a face-to-face level. There's something missing when you strip away the interaction.

GN: There's a new calculation that causes people to value customer service based on friction. People are likely to go to the interaction that has the least friction involved. People have started paying attention to that. You might say it's gonna be easier for me to use the self-checkout machine because it's a less friction-filled interaction than going to the service desk. What I see in service delivery models is banks: I can interact with an ATM or a person. People have to become your friend or the interface is more pleasant. There's high touch low tech but no middle.

HO: It's more serving the student. Each individual has different expectations about what they want. If I want to interact, I go to the teller. That happens to the students, there's some students who just want to get their work done, and there's others that need the interaction and the care. I think we're at a transitional moment where we need to deal with technologies that allow the co-existing that the teacher does not or should not have only one role.