1. The maturity of a field, as some suggest, may be gauged by the robustness of its theory base. If this is so, how would you characterize the maturity of the field of instructional technology?

Although I see that a connection between the robustness of the theory base and the maturity of the field can be made. I feel like the two may be mutually exclusive if viewed in another light. Humor me as I draw this parallel.

Most children go through a “why and where” stage. This is where they ask: “Why is the sky blue? Where do babies come from? Where does Santa live?” And so, the barrage of questions begin.

Did the question come out of nowhere? Probably not. Regardless of the child’s age, some thought went into asking the question. The child, by querying the parent, is doing a form of “research”. He/she may have already formulated a “theory”. This theory could have been formulated from observation, some experience in the classroom, the playground, aftercare, some other likely venue, or some combination of these.

So, as an individual, the parent answers as many as they possibly can, while trying to concentrate on other things like cooking, cleaning, driving, reading, etc. Sometimes the child may ask the question more than once (to see if they get the same response or if no “solid” answer is forthcoming). Sometimes they ask another person (maybe not a parent) for a different perspective, or to verify the “validity” of what you have said to them. Most often what they will do, is ask another question that builds on the previous one.

It is the responses to the combination of those three “procedures” that allow the child learn more and subsequently, mature. If the child were to simply ask questions (to test it’s theory) and not receive responses, the impetus to ask additional questions would be stifled. No matter how many times asked, or who asked, there would be no growth in that area; no maturity. The theory would remain just that; an unconfirmed theory.

I believe that perhaps it is not the robustness of the theory base, but the robustness of the answers produced through research generated by the theories, is what will allow the field of instructional technology to continue to mature.

After all, we could have millions of theories, but the ones that are valuable are those that provoke thought and return answers for others to build new theories that also provoke new thought and allow this cycle to continue.

2. Is it possible to conduct high-quality research without the use of theory? Why or why not?
Research is usually driven by a need to know, do, or have. By nature of that fact: would one not be asking a question of which they are seeking a response? Or perhaps they have an assumption, idea, or position that they must test? I believe that theory must come in to play at some point during research in order to conduct high quality research.