

## BOOK REVIEW

### ***Critical digital pedagogy in higher education***

EDITED BY SUZAN KÖSEOĞLU, GEORGE VELETSIANOS AND CHRIS ROWELL

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The book *Critical digital pedagogy in higher education*, edited by Suzan Köseoğlu, George Veletsianos, and Chris Rowell, is predicated on the notion that higher education contractions, issues and oppressive systems beg for a deeper link to and meaning in students' socio-cultural context. Moreover, the book provides a consistent thread and calls for a critical yet creative turn to bring about that more enduring and meaningful engagement. I enjoyed this book since it presents a well-crafted contemporary discourse and contribution to the wider field of critical digital pedagogy. Critical digital pedagogy is about flipping the power systems by granting agency to learner-centred pedagogy but rooted in the digital realm. The book, therefore, provides an important narrative to question the status quo and meaning of higher education even as technology integration into higher education teaching and learning becomes an area of much discussion in the post-Covid-19 context.

Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the oppressed* emerges as a foundation from which the complexities and nuances are deconstructed in this volume. This book presents a contemplative and progressive framework that appeals to a diverse readership, encompassing higher education faculty, researchers, instructional designers, faculty development specialists, and administrative leaders.

The editors have skilfully woven a tapestry of critical dialogue throughout the chapters, fostering a consistent reflective discourse. This dialogue challenges the status quo in education and underscores the need for a pedagogical approach that is situated in the digital landscape.

One of the book's strengths is in its use of multiple voices collaboratively bringing together experts from the field to construct a diverse perspective of digital pedagogy. It is good to see the structure around several key themes, which helped put the call for critical digital pedagogy into common themes. The key themes of cultivation of critical consciousness, fostering of shared learning experiences, and nurturing of hope and care in online settings made for a logical flow but allowed for the common thread of underlying topics such as care ethics, Indigenous knowledge, reflectivity, social justice and the panoptic nature of digital tools in education. This makes the volume noteworthy in allowing readers the opportunity to translate theory into practice, especially in the modern realm of teaching and learning.

In Part I: "Shared Learning and Trust", four chapters are presented to value the theme of shared learning as a way of building trust.

Chapter 1: "Talking about Nothing to Talk about Something" provides a good context to operationalise the meaning of critical digital pedagogy as used in the book. The authors compare their pedagogical approach to teaching a Master of Contemporary Education that flips the model of interaction in the course — adopting the Talanoa Framework. The Pacific cultural Talanoa Framework, accordingly (Vaioleti, 2006), is a framework that promotes four values: *ofa* (love), *mafana* (warmth), *malie* (humour), and *faka'apa'apa* (respect) as a way of building online *experiences* and relationships in online or in-person settings. The authors of this chapter lay this as a good foundation for translating theory into critical digital pedagogy practice. A similar



approach is used in Chapter 2: “Critical Pedagogy and Care Ethics: Feedback as Care”, which calls for the use of care ethics in shaping open and flexible feedback strategies against the background of care education in the digital setting.

Chapter 3: “The Panoptic Gaze and the Discourse of Academic Integrity”, is a most critical stance on academic integrity. The author argues for a critical outlook and redefinition of academic integrity, and this is against present and growing concerns about academic integrity in the post-Covid-19 and artificial intelligence (AI) era. The author argues that virtual proctoring recreates the panopticon — an architectural design for prison premised on distrust and surveillance. He advances the idea that the present notion of academic dishonesty unfairly “responsibilizes” “students to act in ways expected by the institution — to exhibit obedience to authority, particularly in the assessment of learning” (p. 51). The author instead advocates for an approach grounded in critical pedagogy that pushes learning instead of focusing on grades. While the author does not call for generalisation into other faculty-specific contexts, it seems sensible, given faculty-specific characteristics, that a most critical approach would be for a call to other faculty to translate this thinking and practice into their specific context.

Chapter 4: “‘Too Many Man’? Using Digital Technology to Develop Critical Media Literacy and Foster Classroom Discourse on Gender and Sexuality”, presents Alex de Lacey’s account of using digital technology to develop critical media literacy and foster classroom discourse on gender and sexuality. Here de Lacey advocates for the co-creation of content to encourage classroom discourse using local musical forms as a critical lens. In essence, the chapter calls for a pedagogical shift towards practices that are inclusive, engaging, and relevant to students’ cultural contexts, thereby enhancing the overall educational experience.

Part II: “Critical Consciousness”, presents three chapters that accentuate social justice, challenge the banking model of pedagogy, and explore digital redlining.

Chapter 5: “Hacking the Law Social Justice Education through Lawtech”, elucidates an interdisciplinary methodology that merges law and computer science, enhancing student autonomy and engagement with social justice issues. The author, Kim Silver, posits that this fusion not only augments academic proficiency but also cultivates students’ civic responsibilities and community involvement.

In Chapter 6: “When Being Online Hinders the Act of Challenging Banking Model Pedagogy: Neo-Liberalism in Digital Higher Education”, Frederic Fovet delineates the experiential process of converting a critical pedagogy course from a traditional classroom setting to a digital platform. The critique centres on Freire’s (1996) ‘banking’ model of pedagogy, where knowledge is perceived as a commodity passively transferred from instructor to student. At first, I questioned this methodology but after going through the chapter, it seemed logical such an approach was adopted, given that this paradigm gave the researcher the freedom to share his lived experience and reflection. The chapter advocates for a paradigm shift that empowers learners and fosters a more profound investment in the curriculum design as one that provides increased opportunities for student engagement.

In Chapter 7: “Digital Redlining, Minimal Computing, and Equity”, Lee Skallerup Bessette advocates for a comprehensive approach to student well-being, emphasising the need to adapt the minimal computing framework to the realities of the digital divide exacerbated by the pandemic. Access and accessibility form the foundation of the author’s argument here, and it would be interesting to note the extended dialogue on the learning design process given the current proliferation of AI.

Part III: “Change”, is used to contextualise three chapters that call for strong persistent change.

In Chapter 8: “Critical Digital Pedagogy and Indigenous Knowledges: Harnessing Technologies for Decoloniality in Higher Education Institutions of the Global South”, for example, Gonye and Moyo (2023) present a compelling critique of digital hegemony within the context of the wider decolonisation discourse in higher education, particularly within the Global South. They advocate for the disruption and overhaul of the present higher education system to value Indigenous perspectives in their specific digital Zimbabwean higher education context. The chapter seeks to expose the ongoing marginalisation of African Indigenous Knowledge systems, which perpetuates a form of digital oppression, hindering the transformative potential of such knowledge. The authors challenge the dominance of Global North digital technologies and pedagogies, which often dismiss Indigenous knowledge as archaic or unscientific. The authors, through this chapter, therefore, seek to unmask the marginalisation of the African Indigenous Knowledge systems that continue to keep African higher education stakeholders “digitally oppressed”, thereby missing the opportunity to benefit from its transformative nature. The authors, reflecting on their university teaching in the Zimbabwean setting, interrogate the digitisation of pedagogy and knowledge at the expense of Indigenous knowledge as critical to their discourse. Reading through the chapter conjured up critical discourse previously raised by Spivak (2023) in *Can the subaltern speak?* Given this postcolonial positionality, the authors are rightly positioned to call for the deployment of digitally conscious decolonial pedagogy. They argue for a decolonial pedagogy that is digitally aware and inclusive of the diverse knowledge, cultures, histories, and languages of postcolonial societies. The inclusion of the author’s positionality statements in the first-person account made for a most striking yet critical-reflective element of the chapter (from p. 136 onwards), and this served as a naturally flowing dialogue that added value and context. The authors should be commended for sharing their application of how they reimagined critical digital pedagogy that valued Indigenous knowledge and perspectives using a range of online tools.

In Chapter 9: “*La Clave: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in Digital Praxis*”, Maria Luna-Thomas and Enilda Romero-Hall, through their transatlantic collaborative account (United Kingdom and United States) collaboration, call for more emancipatory digital pedagogy. The educators, while in different contexts, both attest to the misalignment of traditional and digital pedagogy that undermines cultural relevance in designing digital environments. The authors propose “la clave” as a framework to mitigate the achievement gap by employing culturally relevant pedagogy, which aims to create inclusive and democratic online learning spaces. They challenge the “deficit paradigms” in teaching, which label students as lacking and in need of correction. Here, again, the use of first-person narrative finds its place as a genre noteworthy of highlighting. This approach provides a unique opportunity for the authors while working collaboratively, allowing them to respectively capture and share their voice and experience. The narrative emphasises the importance of context and culture in designing and implementing culturally responsive online environments while offering practical recommendations for educators. I find, for example, the use of “Conversation Café” as well as the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) that considers empathy and care for BAME (Black, Asian, and minority ethnic) students and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of colour) learners most striking, and this echoes the need for educators as learning designers to be intentional in valuing the context and culture of learners as a way to dismantle plurality in thinking and practice in shaping the student learning experience.

Chapter 10: “Not Just a Hashtag: Using Black Twitter to Engage in Critical Visual Pedagogy”, by Mia Knowles-Davis and Robert Moore, contextualises the need to deconstruct global and mainstream perpetuated narratives and call for what is dubbed as Black Twitter (Hill, 2018). They argue that Black Twitter is a vital digital Twitter sub-community where educators can practice critical pedagogy, leading to more ethical self-reflection and a deeper understanding of diverse lived experiences.

In Part IV: “Hope”, the editors curate three chapters in the final theme.

In Chapter 11: “To Exist Is to Resist: A Reflective Account of Developing a Paradigm Shift in Palestinian Teaching and Learning Practice”, Howard Scott and Samah Jarrad discuss how educators are encouraged to work collaboratively to advance a paradigm shift in the use of digital technologies that can be utilised to implement theories that resonate with critical and progressive pedagogical principles. Central to their framework is the adoption of the critical digital project-based model, which is seen as an important framework in allowing learners to be critical and provides opportunities to express their personal experiences and perspectives even in the collaborative and international context.

Jonathan Lynch continues in Chapter 12: “Critical Digital Pedagogy for the Anthropocene”, on the design for learning that values digital wayfaring. The chapter begins with a call for readers to connect the early days of mobile learning with current concerns about environmental degradation and climate change and highlighting the relevance of digital pedagogy in addressing global challenges. Learners in this setting are encouraged to use video as a tool to explore their local environments as ‘Wayfarers’. Lynch contends that “wayfaring [is] a practical way to understand how we might develop knowledge through practical engagement with the world in ways that do not see us as separate from the Earth” (p. 210). This approach, as in previous chapters, challenges the teacher as the primary source of knowledge, encouraging greater student agency through the critical digital video approach, which values multiple perspectives through the diversity of student responses.

In the concluding chapter of the volume, Chapter 13: “Critical Digital Pedagogy Across Learning Ecologies: Studios as Sites of Partnership for Strategic Change”, Amy Collier and Sarah Lohnes Watulak offer insights into a comprehensive project that underscores the role of critical pedagogy in cultivating lasting collaborative relationships. These partnerships are instrumental in enhancing critical digital fluency among students and faculty within diverse learning environments. The authors highlight the importance of student agency as a pivotal element in the development of a critical pedagogical framework. This approach advocates for the integration of informal, student-driven learning experiences with traditional academic settings, paving the way for novel opportunities that promote significant growth in critical digital fluency for students.

The editors end the book with a reappraisal to allow readers to critically reflect on how the various chapters spoke to the wider themes — providing hope for the ‘power of the possible’ in the student, facilitator, researcher or administrator context. *Critical digital pedagogy in higher education* is a cohesive anthology that critically examines pedagogical practices within digital learning spaces, challenging readers to reflect on their socio-cultural, ethical, and political implications. It presents an intricate blend of critical theory with digital pedagogy and technology, advocating for emancipatory, student-centred learning. The book draws inspiration from Freire’s advocacy for transformative engagement and emphasises student agency and the need for continuous discourse in challenging educational norms. What I like particularly about the volume is that the editors regard this work as unfinished business, signalling the call for

others to be part of the reflective process regardless of their positionality. This, therefore, is a powerful metaphor and application of its universal call to operationalise the potential to humanise technology in education.

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### Reviewer Notes

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