

BOOK REVIEW

Risks and Opportunities in Using Educational Technologies

WRITTEN BY **Walter Barbieri and Edward Palmer**

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Introduction

Walter Barbieri and Edward Palmer's *Risks and opportunities in using educational technologies* (2025) is a timely contribution to educational technology scholarship. Appearing after the rapid normalisation of online learning and amid the disruptive expansion of generative artificial intelligence (AI), the book offers a measured account of technology as neither a universal solution nor an inherent threat. Its central value lies in showing that educational technologies become meaningful only when aligned with pedagogy, institutional readiness, ethical governance, and learner wellbeing. This position resonates with recent global guidance that urges institutions to judge technology by evidence, equity, scalability, and appropriateness rather than novelty alone (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2023; UNESCO, 2025).

Structure and Contribution

The book is organised into three thematic parts that move from conceptual framing to empirical analysis and then to emerging technologies. This progression makes the text accessible to practitioners, researchers, and policy actors who require both theoretical clarity and practical direction. Part I establishes the analytical architecture of the book by combining risk assessment, change management, technology acceptance, and historical perspectives on pedagogy. Chapter 1's adaptation of project management risk matrices and change models is especially useful because it treats technological change as a human and institutional process rather than a merely technical event.

Chapter 2's Extended Educational Technology Acceptance Model (EETAM), contributed by Andrew Kemp, strengthens this orientation by foregrounding perceived usefulness, ease of use, comfort, and wellbeing. The inclusion of learner- and teacher-facing variables is important in light of current research showing that digital transformation can expand opportunity while also intensifying exclusion and emotional strain if implementation is poorly supported (Crompton & Burke, 2023; Williamson & Hogan, 2021). Chapter 3 adds historical depth by showing how educational technologies often begin as instruments of transmission before being reimagined for more constructivist, interactive, and learner-centred purposes.

Current Technologies: Empirical Insights

Part II provides the book's strongest empirical grounding. Chapter 4's analysis of Learning Management System use at the University of Adelaide during Covid-19 campus closures challenges simplified claims that emergency online learning necessarily reduced engagement or achievement. Its finding that students spent more time in the LMS and achieved higher grades during enforced online learning invites more nuanced discussion of context, infrastructure, and



instructional design. This is consistent with post-pandemic analyses showing that remote learning outcomes depended less on modality itself than on preparation, access, teacher support, and system resilience (World Bank, 2022).

Chapter 5's examination of smartphone screen time and ATAR scores is similarly valuable because it resists moral panic around student device use. Rather than endorsing blanket bans, the chapter shows that device use must be interpreted through purpose, context, and learner behaviour. Chapter 6's comparison of multiple-choice tests with linear and branched scenarios presents a persuasive account of the trade-off between assessment efficiency and pedagogical richness. Chapter 7 extends the discussion through narrative, arguing that digital and immersive environments require educators to think carefully about presence, interactivity, contingency, and meaning-making.

Future Technologies: Emerging Frontiers

Part III addresses the most rapidly evolving educational technologies. Chapter 8's systematic review of immersive virtual reality (IVR), led by Isabella Flaschenberger Gower with Daniel Lee and Edward Palmer, is particularly useful because it balances pedagogical promise with risk. The chapter identifies immersion, purpose, and interaction as dominant themes while noting that assessment and haptics remain underexplored. This gap matters because IVR's educational value depends not simply on sensory intensity but on carefully designed learning tasks, safety protocols, accessibility, and evidence of transfer.

Chapter 9, on generative AI, is the book's most contemporary and policy-relevant chapter. Palmer and Barbieri rightly reject detection-and-punishment models as inadequate responses to AI-mediated learning. Their taxonomy of institutional responses and their assessment design framework, built around efficiency, authenticity, and integrity, offer practical tools for educators facing immediate decisions. The chapter is strengthened by its recognition of hallucination, bias, data privacy, and academic integrity concerns. Recent literature supports this balanced approach: large language models can support feedback, tutoring, writing, and accessibility, but they also raise substantial risks around misinformation, overreliance, surveillance, and uneven access (Kasneci et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2023, 2025).

A Critical Appraisal and Suggestions for Future Editions

Despite these strengths, future editions would benefit from deeper engagement with socio-cultural and geopolitical contexts. The book's examples are largely drawn from Western and Australian settings, yet technology adoption is shaped by language, culture, infrastructure, institutional history, and local pedagogical norms. The 2023 *Global education monitoring report* argues that technology should be adopted on terms that protect equity, inclusion, and public educational purposes (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2023). Comparative examples from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and small island states would therefore broaden the book's relevance.

The discussion of digital inclusion could also be expanded. Access is not only a matter of devices and connectivity; it involves gender, disability, affordability, data costs, linguistic justice, teacher capability, and platform governance. UNESCO's recent work on AI warns that advanced systems may deepen inequality when access depends on subscriptions, infrastructure, dominant languages, and proprietary ecosystems (UNESCO, 2025). A stronger treatment of these issues would make the book more useful for educators and policymakers in resource-constrained environments.

The book's change management models are conceptually helpful, but readers would benefit from more implementation tools, such as digital readiness audits, staff development templates, stakeholder engagement plans, and AI-use policy checklists. Similarly, the book could more fully address educator agency and wellbeing. Technological change is often framed as innovation, yet for teachers it may also involve workload intensification, surveillance, loss of professional autonomy, and emotional fatigue (Williamson & Hogan, 2021). A more sustained account of these lived experiences would complement the authors' attention to learner wellbeing.

Finally, the governance implications of educational technology deserve more explicit treatment. Generative AI has made questions of data protection, procurement, transparency, bias, intellectual property, and accountability central to educational leadership. UNESCO's guidance on generative AI calls for institutional validation of tools, protection of human agency, and regulation that safeguards privacy and inclusion (UNESCO, 2023). Bringing these governance dimensions into future editions would strengthen the book's appeal to administrators and policymakers as well as classroom practitioners.

Conclusion

Overall, *Risks and opportunities in using educational technologies* is a concise, balanced, and practically oriented contribution. Its greatest strength is its refusal of technological determinism: the authors show that technology's educational value depends on design, context, ethics, and human relationships. For scholars and practitioners in open, distance, blended, and digitally mediated education, the book provides a clear framework for assessing innovation critically and constructively. With expanded attention to global diversity, inclusion, educator wellbeing, and governance, future editions could become even more influential in guiding responsible educational technology adoption.

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Reviewer Notes

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