*Journal of Learning for Development, 2026, 13(4), 780-783.*

# BOOK REVIEW

## *Teaching in a Digital Age: Guidelines for Designing Teaching and Learning (Third Edition)*

WRITTEN BY ANTHONY WILLIAM (TONY) BATES

Tony Bates Associates Ltd., Vancouver, BC, 2022, 1,045 pp., ISBN: 978-0-9952692-7-9

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### Introduction

The swift adoption of digital technologies in education has revolutionised not only the processes of teaching and learning but also the very process of knowledge production, especially in the context of open and distance learning (ODL). In the context of ODL, digital technologies have improved accessibility but, at the same time, they have revealed certain inherent problems associated with the issues of equity, the digital divide, infrastructure, and the quality of instruction. The spread of the coronavirus outbreak exacerbated the issue, forcing educational institutions across the world to embrace online and blended learning. In such a situation, there was an urgent need for pedagogically sound applications of technology rather than simply transferring classroom practices into digital environments. In such a context, Tony Bates's third edition of *Teaching in a digital age: Guidelines for designing teaching and learning,* provides a valuable addition in that it offers a comprehensive analysis of a pedagogically grounded approach in the context of digital education. As a result, the book is based on theories of learning, instructional design, new technologies, open educational resources (OER), and institution-based strategies, making a significant contribution to discussions on learning for development.

Although the third edition dates from 2022 and therefore does not fit the two-year period usually considered appropriate for book reviews, its continued relevance calls for a new analysis. The book deals with many issues of relevance at the intersection between pedagogy and technologies, such as the design of blended and online learning, choice of media, open education, learners' support, and institutional change—topics which are, in the post-pandemic era, becoming increasingly relevant instead of decreasing in their importance. Being itself an openly licensed digital textbook, *Teaching in a digital age* stands out from other types of literature because it allows for updating the online edition after its publication due to the emergence of new technologies. Hence, reviewing the book in 2026 provides an opportunity not merely to revisit a four-year-old publication but to assess the continuing relevance and durability of its pedagogical framework amid rapidly evolving technologies and educational practices.

### The Digital Transformation and Knowledge Society

The digital transformation is the rethinking of the concept of education, which needs a profound change in order to adapt to the shift from an economy based on manufacturing and physical production to the knowledge society. Digital transformation involves the idea that today the aim of education should be focused on not only imparting knowledge but on fostering the skills of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, problem-solving, digital literacy, knowledge


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management, and lifelong learning required to succeed in the highly dynamic and technologised environment. Bates emphasises that digital transformation in education must be based on the use of modern theories of education and changes that are taking place in the labour market. In addition, he claims that the rapid growth of online and blended learning that was stimulated by the Covid-19 pandemic increases the importance of changing pedagogical practices, accommodating diversity in learners, and creating educational systems that will be able to cope with new technological and social changes.

## Learner-Centred Pedagogy and Instructional Design

The successful incorporation of technologies into digital education involves the application of learner-centred pedagogical approaches facilitated by the use of well-planned and thoughtful instructional design instead of the mere use of technologies for educational purposes. In his analysis of traditional on-campus and digital education approaches, Bates considers those pedagogical approaches that foster active learning, collaboration, authentic assessment, and engaging learners in learning through methods like experiential learning, online collaborative learning, competency-based education, communities of practice, and agile course design. The author suggests that models of instructional design, such as ADDIE and others, should be used in a way that learning outcomes, instructional approaches, assessment, and technology would be properly coordinated to serve different kinds of students in increasingly flexible modes of delivery. This book demonstrates that good digital education is all about pedagogical design, which promotes participation, feedback, and the creation of competencies rather than just transferring information.

## Educational Technologies and Digital Learning Ecosystems

Technologies in education are enablers of instruction and should thus be chosen for their ability to facilitate learning and not be based on just how new and technologically advanced they are. The author critically analyses a wide range of different technologies including MOOCs, social media, multimedia, artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality, serious games, and many more. These different technologies are analysed for their pedagogical strengths, weaknesses, and contexts of application for technology-enhanced learning. Rather than prescribing one technology or a one-size-fits-all solution, Bates provides some evidence-based frameworks, such as SECTIONS and the SAMR framework, which can be used by educators to evaluate different technologies based on different aspects including learners' characteristics, learning objectives, interactivity, access, cost, organisational readiness, and security. In his conclusion, Bates suggests that engaging, flexible, and accessible digital learning environments can be created by the intentional use of technologies in combination with pedagogy and instructional design, thereby strengthening effective and accessible ODL provision through contemporary digital modalities.

## Open Education, Flexibility and Educational Equity

Open education is a transformative model for achieving the goals of enhancing access, flexibility, and equity in education in the digital era by supporting OER, open textbooks, open pedagogy, and flexible teaching and learning models, including blended and fully online education. Bates believes that it does not just involve making educational resources affordable but also encourages lifelong learning, knowledge sharing and enables learners from all backgrounds, including working professionals, remote learners and disadvantaged groups, to

benefit from quality education irrespective of time and geographical locations. Through a critical analysis of the opportunities and challenges posed by MOOCs and other open learning programmes, he argues that technology-induced openness should be complemented by sound pedagogical practices and learner support to ensure productive participation and successful learning experiences. In this regard, the book considers open education as an important strategy for improving ODL, mitigating inequalities and moving toward more inclusive and sustainable learning for development.

## Quality Assurance and Institutional Transformation

For sustainable digital transformation, educators need to adopt innovative pedagogical practices and organisations must create well-developed structures to ensure quality teaching, professional development and strategic support. Bates puts forward a detailed framework for quality assurance based on evidence-based design of instruction, clearly articulated learning outcomes, assessment, evaluation, faculty development, collaborative course design and institutional leadership that encourages innovation and constant improvement. Bates stresses that technological change alone cannot contribute to educational improvement, and digital education should be based on integrated approaches to investments in learning technology support, a favourable working environment, institutional policy and strategic planning. The book thus concludes that institutional transformation should be one of the key components of equitable, flexible and quality technology-supported education, which will enable institutions to build resilient learning ecosystems and overcome potential educational challenges in the future, while maintaining excellence in ODL.

## Evaluation of Strengths and Limitations

One of the major strengths of this volume is the consistent rejection of technology-based views of educational innovation. Bates consistently considers the pedagogical affordances of technologies, and whether they match learner needs, their costs, interactivity, organisational prerequisites, accessibility, security and privacy issues, and not just the newness of technology itself as an indicator of educational potential. This is why frameworks like SECTIONS are still relevant despite evolving technologies, which gives the book great longevity in a very dynamic area. Moreover, the openly licensed and constantly updatable format of the book helps make the case for open knowledge even stronger since the book is capable of evolving with educational practice. At the same time, the wide range of topics covered by one volume is both a strength and a limitation, since it is not possible to cover all topics at the same level of detail. In addition, Bates addresses some of the realities that exist in developing nations, like connectivity expenses in Africa and the need for MOOCs that are adapted locally, but many of the concrete examples depend upon the resources available in Canada and similar contexts. This means that assumptions about the availability of infrastructure, instructional design skills, and institutional supports need to be adjusted when dealing with less well-endowed situations. The initial 2022 chapter on artificial intelligence was written before the advent of generative AI, but later revisions to the online third edition consider issues related to generative large language models and programmes like ChatGPT and DALL-E. These limitations do not diminish the book's broader contribution; rather, they underscore why its enduring value lies in its pedagogically grounded principles for educational decision-making, rather than in its treatment of any particular technology.

## Recommendation for Intended Readership

*Teaching in a digital age* is very much recommended for a large readership that includes teachers, instructional designers, educational leaders, policymakers, researchers, and graduate students working in the areas of digital, open and distance education. The well-balanced approach adopted by the author in terms of weaving together education theories, pedagogy, instructional design and technology-supported learning makes this book even more relevant for university teachers who are shifting their practices into online/blended learning, teacher educators who design professional learning programmes, and educational administrators developing digital transformation strategies. Scholars of educational technology, ODL, and learning for development will find the extensive review of literature and frameworks provided in this book very useful. Policymakers and practitioners will be able to learn about the practical strategies proposed in this book that help promote quality, inclusive and equitable education using open educational practices and institutional innovations. As an openly licensed book, the book is especially useful for educators and institutions in the developing world.

## Reference

Bates, A.W. (2022). *Teaching in a digital age: Guidelines for designing teaching and learning* (3rd ed.). Tony Bates Associates Ltd., Vancouver, B.C., 2022, 1,045 pp., ISBN: 978-0-9952692-7-9. https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/teachinginadigitalagev3m/

### Reviewer Notes

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Cite as: Rodriguez, J.M.P. (2022). BOOK REVIEW. *Teaching in a digital age: Guidelines for designing teaching and learning* (3rd ed.). *Journal of Learning for Development, 13*(3), 780-783.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.56059/cpyq1385