Using Technology to Support Learning and Teaching

Fisher, Andy; Exley, Kate; and Ciobanu, Dragos
Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014

Book Review

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Using Technology to Support Learning and Teaching provides an overview of the key ways in which teachers and course designers are using technology to support teaching, learning, and assessment. As with the other books in the *Key Guides for Effective Teaching in Higher Education Series*, this text combines practical examples of techniques and methods with educational theory and research. The book thus contributes to a more general conversation about the effective pedagogical use of technology in a way that does not focus solely on describing the technological tools, but also takes seriously how "they might be best implemented" (2). For example, the first chapter outlines several influential theories (such as behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism, humanistic theories, and connectivism), in order to provide a framework to underpin later considerations of various technologies for practitioners.

Beyond presenting the technology, the book stimulates further thinking and discussion about how technology relates to teaching and learning. Each chapter includes "Pauses for Thought" sections, "Case Example(s)," "Useful Resources (many of which are URLs)," screenshots and QR codes, as well as discussion questions in the conclusion. At the outset, the authors tell their readers: "This book isn't meant to be read from cover to cover. We expect and would encourage you to dip in and out of it. To pick it up when you are considering various developments in your, or your colleagues', teaching" (ix). Each chapter stands on its own; the chapters do not directly flow from one another, nor is there a comprehensive introduction or conclusion to the book.

Using Technology to Support Learning and Teaching comprises ten chapters, of which the first two respectively discuss learning theory and inclusive practice (disability and diversity); the next eight chapters cover the wide range of technology available for higher education,

including a specific chapter on each of the following: the use of social media for collaboration and networking; technology for interaction; technology for assessment and feedback; podcasting and vodcasting; virtual learning environments; open source software; immersive online 3D environments; and future developments. What might otherwise be a daunting and time-consuming task, these latter eight chapters give teachers a comprehensive and jargon-free overview of the expansive array of technological tools now available, with many concrete examples, hints, and tips for how they may be used in teaching and learning. For instance, the chapter on assessment provides rubrics for evaluating student blogs and wikis. It also includes "how to" sections and tips for using multimodal feedback (such as video and screencapture).

In describing each technology, the authors present what technology has to offer educators. They note specific cautions and considerations (such as copyright laws), but their focus is positive. For example, the authors note how Virtual Learning Environments "have been criticised heavily for being inflexible, unintuitive, difficult to navigate. . . and even 'boxy'", but they continue to say that nevertheless, "we would like to emphasise that VLEs still have significant benefits for learning and teaching" (155).

The book is not limited to one context, but is directed toward teachers in any discipline, in any format of teaching (including traditional face-to-face classes, online settings, and hybrid-format courses). It will be of interest to anyone who seeks to utilize technology in higher education, or who is more broadly interested in critical reflection on the relationship between educational research and technology in practice.