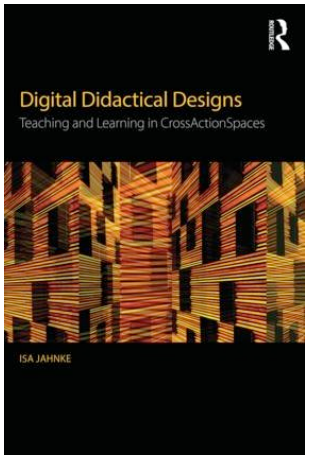

Digital Didactical Designs: Teaching and Learning in CrossActionSpaces

Jahnke, Isa
Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016

Book Review

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Digital Didactical Design is neither a step-by-step guide for developing educational curriculum, nor a compendium of creative teaching methodologies tweaked by the latest digital technologies. It is, however, a thought-provoking treatise aimed at educational institutions, teachers, and decision-makers in need of a better understanding of learning in a digital world. Readers are reminded that "instead of focusing too much on new technology-driven designs or content design" (13) attention should be placed on developing Digital Didactical Design that facilitates meaningful and deep learning.

Equipped with research gathered in varied cultural and educational settings, Jahnke challenges educators to develop teaching methods that appeal to a variety of learning preferences that fall "outside-the-lines." The author claims that many educational institutions remain fixated on a hierarchical, trickle down, teacher-student relationship that does not take into full consideration the varieties of learners in any classroom context. She also believes there has been an over reliance on the written text as a means of disseminating information. To facilitate greater surface and deep learning, Jahnke calls for a transformation of the language and mindset shaping didactical design and teaching at all levels – from early primary to tertiary.

The book proposes certain key concepts as departure points for shaping a pro-active educational design that merges digital media and learning into new communication spaces called "CrossActionSpaces." These space are seen as "dynamic, overlayered, expanded… where the boundaries of physical buildings and walls are somewhat irrelevant" (18).

Learning communities, Jahnke believes, exist as much in cyber space as within the classroom, taking place across several boundaries to thousands of humans who are online, in different settings. In such a milieu, human communication becomes a catalyst for shrinking the distance between people, culture, and knowledge, and acts as a new form of social action (73).

Another key concept put forward by Jahnke is the idea of "learning expeditions rather than that of learning experiences which are seen as more open ended" (99). In such an environment, formal structures and processes for teaching and learning combine to create communities where students and teacher are co-collaborators and sojourners of learning content.

Additionally, readers are asked to consider learning as a social process constructed within an inclusive offline and online community. Instead of arranging learning around lectures and workshops, Jahnke contends that learning should be more open ended, student centric, and should emphasize social action and active learning, rather than information consumption (186).

Digital Didactical Design is a reminder that the traditional teaching space is no longer the central metaphor (197). In its place has come a greater need for peer reflective learning, group activities, and collaborative unbounded reflection.This book affirms that in a digital world interactive technology and didactical design are to be wedded and used in proactive and progressive ways so as to advance student learning.

Since new forms of learning are evolving, Jahnke has effectively placed her energies on helping readers better understand digital didactical design, rather than on supplying packaged solutions in all situations. She makes no claim to have all the answers, but she does provide countless opportunities for reflecting on the best way forward in shaping effective digital didactical design and learning strategies for today's hyper-connected world.

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