

# Digital Education

## Palgrave Macmillan's Digital Education and Learning

Much has been written during the first decade of the new millennium about the potential of digital technologies to produce a transformation of education. Digital technologies are portrayed as tools that will enhance learner collaboration and motivation and develop new multimodal literacy skills. Accompanying this has been the move from understanding literacy on the cognitive level to an appreciation of the sociocultural forces shaping learner development. Responding to these claims, the **Digital Education and Learning Series** explores the pedagogical potential and realities of digital technologies in a wide range of disciplinary contexts across the educational spectrum both in and outside of class. Focusing on local and global perspectives, the series responds to the shifting landscape of education, the way digital technologies are being used in different educational and cultural contexts, and examines the differences that lie behind the generalizations of the digital age. Incorporating cutting-edge volumes with theoretical perspectives and case studies (single authored and edited collections), the series provides an accessible and valuable resource for academic researchers, teacher trainers, administrators and students interested in interdisciplinary studies of education and new and emerging technologies.

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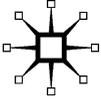
*Digital Education*

Edited by Michael Thomas

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Collaboration

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DIGITAL EDUCATION

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*Task-Based Language Learning and Teaching with Technology* (with Hayo Reinders)

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## Foreword

In the 1980s and 1990s, many scholars were noting the revolutionary potential of new information and communication technologies for transforming human communication and production of knowledge. Yet, even by the turn of the millennium, only a fraction of the world's population had access to the Internet and fewer still were able to publish material online. One decade later, though, Internet access has quadrupled to reach more than a quarter of the world's people, and hundreds of millions around the world are using new Web 2.0 tools, such as wikis, blogs, microblogs, and social network sites, to connect, create, remix, and share. The “read-write” vision of Internet pioneers (i.e., that the Web would be a site not only for information retrieval but also for mass creativity and participation) is starting to come to fruition.

What then is the role of Web 2.0 in education? Much discussion of technology in education *understates* its potential by only considering how its use may or may not accelerate the achievement of extant learning goals. As Seth Godin wisely warns on *Seth's Blog*, “A car is not merely a faster horse. And email is not a faster fax . . . And Facebook is not an electronic rolodex.” We need to “play a new game, not the older game but faster.” At the same time, we are also in danger of *overstating* the potential of technology, by getting swept up in its ability to enthrall our students whether or not any positive results are achieved.

*Digital Education* introduces a healthy corrective to exaggerated techno-optimism or techno-pessimism. The thought-provoking edited collection represents one of the first serious attempts to examine how Web 2.0 may not only improve but also help transform education. Contributors to the book bring a wide range of social theory to the task, from realms of education, communication, cultural studies, and media studies. And they apply this theory to examining incipient efforts to deploy Web 2.0 tools in a broad range of formal educational settings, especially at the tertiary and adult level. Chapters from and about

Australia, Canada, Germany, Indonesia, South Africa, Spain, the UK, the United States, and Venezuela result in a diverse international discussion that is not common in educational research, and this breadth helps us to better understand the relationship of theory to practice.

Speaking from diverse countries and contexts, the authors challenge the simplistic notion that all twenty-first century students are “digital natives” who effortlessly learn with new technology, and instead illuminate the complexities of promoting digital literacies among today’s learners. They show how students’ access to, participation with, and fluency in the use of new technologies do not in themselves guarantee that any serious learning is taking place. Rather, as pointed out throughout and emphasized in the conclusion, the latter also requires educators or mentors to provide expert scaffolding, expert modeling, and expert critique. Examples abound in the book of how we might begin to do so.

Finally, although the contrasts between today’s Web 2.0 and the first-generation Web are great, from a broad historical perspective they represent a continuation of older trends from plain text to multimedia, from static to dynamic content, from authorship by an educated elite to mass authorship, and from high costs of entry into the public sphere to low ones. The long trajectory of these changes and their significance for human development make it even more important that we critically evaluate their relationship to education. The contributions in this book represent an especially broad and thoughtful overview of where we have come on these issues and where we stand today.

MARK WARSCHAUER