

# The Politics of Education and Technology

## 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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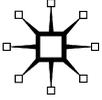
# The Politics of Education and Technology

Conflicts, Controversies, and  
Connections

Edited by

*Neil Selwyn and  
Keri Facer*

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## Series Foreword

Much has been written during the first decade of the new millennium about the potential of digital technologies to radically transform education and learning. Typically such calls for change spring from the argument that traditional education no longer engages learners or teaches them the skills required for the twenty-first century. Digital technologies are often described as tools that will enhance collaboration and motivate learners to reengage with education and enable them to develop the new multimodal literacy skills required for today's knowledge economy. Using digital technologies is a creative experience in which learners actively engage with solving problems in authentic environments that underline their productive skills rather than merely passively consuming knowledge. Accompanying this argument has been the move from understanding literacy on the cognitive level to an appreciation of the sociocultural forces shaping learner development and the role communities play in supporting the acquisition of knowledge.

Emerging from this context the Digital Education and Learning series was founded to explore the pedagogical potential and realities of digital technologies in a wide range of disciplinary contexts across the educational spectrum around the world. Focusing on local and global perspectives, the series responds to the shifting demands and expectations of educational stakeholders, the ways new technologies are actually being used in different educational and cultural contexts, and examines the opportunities and challenges that lie behind the myths and rhetoric of digital age education. The series encourages the development of evidence-based research that is rooted in an understanding of the history of technology, as well as open to the potential of new innovation, and adopts critical perspectives on technological determinism as well as techno-skepticism.

While the potential for changing the way we learn in the digital age is significant, and new sources of information and forms of interaction have

developed, many educational institutions and learning environments have changed little from those that existed over one hundred years ago. Whether in the form of smartphones, laptops, or tablets, digital technologies may be increasingly ubiquitous in a person's social life but marginal in their daily educational experience once they enter a classroom. Although many people increasingly invest more and more time on their favorite social media site, integrating these technologies into curricula or formal learning environments remains a significant challenge, if indeed it is a worthwhile aim in the first place. History tells us that change in educational contexts, if it happens at all in ways that were intended, is typically more "incremental" and rarely "revolutionary." Understanding the development of learning technologies in the context of a historically informed approach therefore is one of the core aspects of the series, as is the need to understand the increasing internationalization of education and the way learning technologies are culturally mediated. While the digital world appears to be increasingly "flat," significant challenges continue to exist, and the series will problematize terms that have sought to erase cultural, pedagogical, and theoretical differences rather than understand them. "Digital natives," "digital literacy," "digital divide," "digital media"—these and such mantras as "twenty-first-century learning"—are phrases that continue to be used in ways that require further clarification and critical engagement rather than unquestioning and uncritical acceptance.

The series aims to examine the complex discourse of digital technologies and to understand the implications for teaching, learning, and professional development. By mixing volumes with theoretical perspectives with case studies detailing actual teaching approaches, whether on or off campus, in face-to-face, fully online, or blended-learning contexts, the series will examine the emergence of digital technologies from a range of new international and interdisciplinary perspectives. Incorporating original and innovative volumes with theoretical perspectives and case studies (single authored and edited collections), the series aims to provide an accessible and valuable resource for academic researchers, teacher trainers, administrators, policymakers, and learners interested in cutting-edge research on new and emerging technologies in education.

This new collection of 11 chapters edited by Neil Selwyn and Keri Facer entitled, *The Politics of Educational Technology*, is both timely and significant, and provides a much-needed critical analysis of the wider social, political, and economic contexts in which digital technologies are used today. The collection attempts to raise important issues about the future direction of research in the field and to reposition educational technology beyond its merely local concern with classroom practices and providing "new tips" about how to enhance teaching and learning. Moving beyond a predominantly psychological approach to education and raising important concerns about

the widespread acceptance of social constructivism, the book calls for a more sociological perspective on educational technology. Such an approach is evident across the book's 11 chapters, which collectively unravel the assumption that the use of digital technologies in education is an apolitical narrative based on the absence of ideology or contested values. Discussing a variety of themes from one-to-one laptop programs to e-safety and mobile learning, each of the chapters underline how many of these microissues are in fact "proxy battles for much wider controversies and conflicts surrounding the nature, form and function of education in the twenty-first century—i.e. tensions between market and state; private interests and public good; and the primacy of individuals as opposed to the collective."

The book deconstructs the overarching "means-end" and "deterministic" thinking that has dominated the integration of educational technology in schools in many parts of the world. It asks a series of key questions about the potential integration of digital technologies in the future, outlining the need for a new research approach based on a "thick description" of the cultural context. This multilayered and critical approach establishes the need to look beneath the apparently value-neutral claims made in the name of digital technologies and to identify the inequalities of access, power, and skills that influence and mediate their use. It concludes by outlining a pathway between the polarized alternatives of overblown hope and disengaged skepticism, and focuses on ways to produce "engaged critical research" that is sensitively attuned to the politics of education and technology and the interests that lie behind them.

*The Politics of Educational Technology* is a much-needed and worthy addition to the Digital Education and Learning series, and we welcome its intervention and efforts to reposition research in the field over the next decade. The volume will be valuable for international educators, researchers, and policymakers and contribute to opening up new spaces for discussion about the myths and realities of educational technology in the digital age.

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