

Critical Digital Pedagogy in Higher Education, edited by Suzan Köseoğlu, George Veletsianos, and Chris Rowell (AU Press, 2023)

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Book Review: Critical Digital Pedagogy in Higher Education

Editors: Suzan Köseoğlu, George Veletsianos, and Chris Rowell (AU Press, Athabasca, AB, 2023, 256 pages), ISBN: 9781771993647. <https://doi.org/10.15215/aupress/9781778290015.01>

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Published by Athabasca University Press, *Critical Digital Pedagogy in Higher Education* has contributions from the United States, Saudi Arabia, England, Canada, New Zealand, Zimbabwe, and Palestine. The editors are established teachers and researchers in higher education.

We have used two approaches and methodologies to review the book. In the first step, based on a descriptive approach, we provide essential information about the content and structure of the book. The key features are then described with an analytical and critical perspective.

The book covers four parts and thirteen chapters. In Part I, Chapter 1 demonstrates how to develop relational trust in teaching by embracing Pacific Indigenous values and ways of knowing. Chapter 2 describes an ethics-of-care approach to online course design, including active listening, dialog, trust, and openness without judgment as core values in online teaching. Chapter 3 argues that an academic culture of distrust is incongruent with creating learning environments that promote “creativity, expression, synthesis, and dissent” (p. 58). Chapter 4 shows the careful pedagogical work required to “break down patterns of domination in the classroom” (p. 74) and essential for students to develop their critical media literacy and “interrogate normative representations of gender, sexuality, and race” (p. 72).

In Part II, Chapter 5 describes an interdisciplinary law and technology module driven by the ideals of social justice. Chapter 6 argues that critical digital pedagogy must include a reflective analysis of how learners perceive online learning within a neoliberal context. Chapter 7 critiques unequal access to technology and stresses the need to understand students’ cultural and material contexts to inform institutional decisions about technology.

In Part III, Chapter 8 covers Indigenous knowledge systems, imagining, and putting into practice a liberatory pedagogy that disrupts digital hegemony. Chapter 9 discusses the demographic attainment gaps in higher education and provides practical suggestions for educators to use culturally relevant pedagogy. Chapter 10 presents “Black Twitter” as a site for engaging in critical visual pedagogy and the creation of ethical educational spaces that challenge “social stereotypes, hierarchies, and oppressive structures” (p. 93).

In Part IV, Chapter 11 states that “critical pedagogy needs to have hope, idealism, and inspiration” (p. 199). Chapter 12 states how technology can be used to form and sustain “interconnectedness with the more than human” (p. 209)

Part I (Chapters 1 to 4) describes the *talanoa* model, which includes four important values: *ofa* (love), *mafana* (warmth), *malie* (humour), and *faka’apa’apa* (respect). The model has evolved to take into account the differences of individual learners and provides cultural values to improve online learning experiences, build relationships, and enhance learning. It also emphasizes the necessity of the ethics-of-care approach to create the foundations of critical pedagogy for designing and providing online courses. The authors believe that feedback has two types—passive transmission and dialogic—and state that dialogic feedback provides a higher level of care in online courses, and digital technologies play a very important role in supporting critical pedagogy. In addition, in this part, academic integrity is criticized and a new frame for this term is proposed that presents students not as perpetrators of crime but as victims of high-risk environments.

Part II (Chapters 5 to 7) examines the interdisciplinary law and technology module, which takes a critical approach to inequalities in access to the legal system and argues that digital technology has the potential to resolve these inequalities and achieve social justice. It also claims that, with the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become clear that technology can exacerbate existing inequalities. Therefore, the critical awareness of students, which means the ability of students to evaluate the law, existing technologies, and their effects on people, should be developed.

The relationship between critical and online education and the important role of technology and interaction in the development of online critical education are also discussed in Part II. The authors believe that, despite the possibility of developing critical pedagogy through the Internet, critical pedagogy still has a pessimistic view of the virtual world, and this dichotomy has led to the emergence of critical digital pedagogy. This pedagogy should be avoided, as it is incompatible with online education methods. The authors state that communities with digital redlining have experienced higher levels of surveillance, and investigate minimal calculations in online education as an answer to digital redlining. A minimal computational approach helps teachers and learners develop a deeper understanding of the tools used, a greater acceptance of the learning opportunities, and a critical perspective on the use of technology. Since technology plays a role in the colonization of power and knowledge, the need to establish a conscious anticolonial digital education is essential, and critical digital pedagogy is better if it is adapted from Indigenous knowledge systems. Social media, such as Twitter, provides opportunities for marginalized communities to make their voices heard around the world. The authors discuss the Black Twitter subcommunity, an open platform interested in issues such as social injustices and economic disparities, and view it as an educational tool to bring the voices and perspectives of people in marginalized communities into the classroom, promoting critical conversations and critical visual pedagogy.

In Part III (Chapters 8 to 10), the authors explain how the TEFL-ePal project provides Indigenous teaching and learning through technology to create a flexible curriculum that is available to all learners in the form of face-to-face and online courses without restrictions. These chapters state that the link between education and technology is an opportunity and can be used directly to implement critical pedagogy in the online environment.

In Part IV (Chapters 11 to 13), project-based learning is explored as a critical digital approach, and the authors claim that there is an alignment between project-based learning and critical pedagogy. They also argue that critical digital pedagogy can provide educational responses to concerns related to climate change and environmental degradation, and challenge the concept of human exceptionalism through critical thinking from a posthumanist perspective. The contributors emphasize that critical digital pedagogy is a new field and a pragmatic approach closely related to education in outdoor settings, and that it cannot be done in the mind. They argue that it is more about creativity in using digital tools and expanding education in new directions, and that critical pedagogy can help recognize the confusion and complexity in learning that exists in the context and within the institution.

Critical education is rooted in the Frankfurt School of Education, which deals with social reform. Based on critical education, schools and universities should be places to cultivate critical thinking and teach students how to change their surroundings and treat each other. As Jesse Stommel says in his definition, “We’re looking for solutions, what we most need to change is our thinking and not our tools” but critical digital pedagogy is more defined by its questions and the problems it poses than by its answers. Generally, in online learning environments, learning must be allowed to grow and applied in the real world.

Critical Digital Pedagogy in Higher Education provides the essential principles for critical pedagogy and is a unique book on the subject of critical pedagogy practice in higher education. If we want to make a final summary of all the chapters of this book, we must explain and analyze four concepts: shared learning and trust, critical consciousness, change, and hope.

The issue of trust includes the organizational structures of schools and universities in higher education, and building trust is of great importance for the initiation of critical educational practices. Students should know other students, and their teachers should feel comfortable in the classroom, communicate with them, and provide teaching and learning activities successfully in face-to-face and online classroom environments. A relaxed atmosphere in an online environment can foster constructive communication between learners and teachers and improve critical pedagogical practices. In online education, both teachers and students need critical awareness to deal with educational misunderstandings.

From the neoliberalist point of view, online education and emerging technology in the digital age, such as performance tracking or automation, should be redesigned in a broader framework, and learners should not be considered as customers, nor the courses as paid products. Instead, courses should be flexible, convenient, cost-effective, time-efficient, and self-driven components of educational design. Teachers and learners should learn how to be responsible and active citizens in their communities through activities in digital projects, and to increase critical awareness in online environments, more space should be provided for self-awareness, self-interrogation, and dialog for individuals to learn from one another.

One of the salient points of the book is the presentation of different teaching methods in critical education; critical education is considered a methodological orientation that guides educators in choosing appropriate learning methods and activities. From the perspective of the authors, the goal of critical education is to help educators and students become “critical, self-reflective, knowledgeable, and willing to make moral judgments and act in a socially responsible way” (p. 238). Hope and change are key concepts. From the authors’ point of view, change is a complex concept that may not be immediately visible. It can be slow,

small, and intermittent, and it may take a long time for people to change their thoughts, beliefs, or the way they do things. In some cases, change begins simply as a glimmer of hope; hope is a precursor to change.

In the end, it must be said that this is a valuable open-access collection for both the public and those interested in the fields of online learning and critical pedagogy. The text is comprehensive, covers all areas of the subject appropriately, and reflects on all of the components and concepts of critical pedagogy—from the past to the present—in the fields of higher education and online learning. The topics in the text have been expressed in a rational, clear manner, and throughout the book, the authors have used fixed terminology. The content and sections of the book are very relevant and have a regular sequence, and there were no noted grammatical or spelling errors. The language of the book is pleasant and impressive, and interesting metaphors and examples are presented. References are provided at the end of each chapter with an access link, and each chapter is divided into subsections to create a concept map in the reader's mind. The book makes several theoretically important points and offers good examples of critical digital pedagogy without discrimination or prejudice in matters of culture, gender, ethnicity, national character, age, disability, or education.

In the end, it is suggested that the editors of the book use more images in the next editions to enrich the content and increase understanding and knowledge among readers.

