Chapter 14

Risky Media: Using Subversive Technologies in Education to Question Assumptions about Power, Teaching, and Assessment

Matthew J. Kruger-Ross
Simon Fraser University, Canada

Tricia M. Farwell
Middle Tennessee State University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter seeks to critically examine and question common assumptions underpinning educators’ use and incorporation of technology in the classroom. Drawing upon transformative learning theory, the authors argue that incorporating technology in education cannot and should not be done without first questioning assumptions regarding power, teaching, and assessment. Technology is transforming education in expected ways, but can also transform education in unexpected, unexplored ways. Educators need to move beyond the quick fix of bulleted lists to explore the implications of technology in the classroom more fully.

INTRODUCTION

Web-based technologies are dramatically redefining the boundaries of higher education. Existing conversations and debates in educational research literature surrounding technology in education have been fruitful and generated an enormous body of literature. Yet considerable theoretical and philosophical blind spots that presuppose the almighty and omniscient power of technology continue to permeate educational circles. These blind spots, preconceived notions or assumptions each educator brings with him or her to their approach to integrating technology into the classroom, often go unexamined. These assumptions provide the context and foundation to the educator’s approach to technology in the classroom. Examining the everyday, taken-for-granted, uncritically

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-2970-7.ch014
analyzed assumptions and habits of mind of the education and technology metanarrative will be challenging; but exploring these assumptions also creates a context for increased empowerment and more authentic conversations about the value of education.

Deep philosophical, epistemological, pedagogical, and even metaphysical questions accompany the cacophony of information that surrounds the average college instructor but to date no one has unearthed, named, and extrapolated on these concerns. These include, but are not limited to: When information is everywhere, who authenticates it? When students can watch lectures from professors at MIT and UC Berkeley on YouTube, are they learning? How would we verify such learning? What counts as education? Indeed, what’s worth knowing? Instructors in higher education must acknowledge and utilize the availability of multiple perspectives and sources of information.

This chapter focuses on questions, rather than answers. Technology in education, and thus social and new media in education, is subversive. Technology is subversive in the same way that Postman & Weingartner (1969, pp. 34-37) argue for a subversive, inquiry-based education. To accomplish this, the educator must be simultaneously a part of the technological movement and also a spectator. Rather than offer a bulleted list of best practices, we aim to do the opposite. We will avoid telling the reader what he or she “ought to know”; we will avoid offering quick-fix answers to questions. Therefore we will convey our message through asking open, divergent questions in order to foster, support, and encourage critical dialogue. As we do this, we will most likely leave more topics unresolved than resolved, but in doing so we hope to spur the reader to focus on and value the questions rather than trite conclusions.

Our push away from the bulleted, oversimplified lists of what can and should be done with technology can only skim the surface of questions educators face. Questions abound: How exactly can technology be used to transform learning? How does learning transform technology? What impact does technology have on the “traditional” practices and procedures? What does it all matter? So what? In fact, the number of questions an educator can face may make incorporating technology into the educational process seem to be a daunting, if not impossible, task. Add to these questions, the need to actually show up to class, either online or offline, with a prepared plan of attack creates the scene where often even the simplest question of “Where do I begin?” becomes overwhelming. Yet, despite being overwhelmed, educators are often asked to bet their skills and their students’ education on technology. By adding technology to the learning experience, some educators may feel like they are sitting down at a gambling table, being expected to place a bet without knowing the rules and name of the game. Do we really want to bet our students’ learning?

The goal of this chapter is to name this game and attempt to draw some tentative boundaries in hopes of providing faculty and instructors with a framework that will urge them to action. Rather than technology-as-enemy, educators will see just how much say they have in the matter of technology integration. Drawing on transformative learning theory and philosophy of technology, common assumptions underpinning the intersection of education and technology are distinguished and critically analyzed.

**DISTINGUISHING THE BACKGROUND NOISE: ASSUMPTIONS AND HABITS OF MIND**

Before examining the assumptions present in educational technologies, it is necessary to examine the concept of assumptions and why they are critical to our ability to make meaning. We move through life with basic assumptions contextualizing our daily processes. In a way, they are a shorthand version for people to negotiate settings
Related Content

A Rich Environment for Active Learning (REAL): A Model for Online Instruction
www.igi-global.com/chapter/a-rich-environment-for-active-learning-real/114288?camid=4v1a

Mapping Perceived Socio-Emotive Quality of Small-Group Functioning
www.igi-global.com/chapter/mapping-perceived-socio-emotive-quality/6903?camid=4v1a

Integrating Social Media and Traditional Media within the Academic Environment
www.igi-global.com/chapter/integrating-social-media-traditional-media/75348?camid=4v1a

Re-Envisioning the Millersville University Library: Center for Knowledge Creation and Interdisciplinary Collaboration
www.igi-global.com/chapter/envisioning-millersville-university-library/72679?camid=4v1a