

## ***Metaphors of ED Tech, By Martin Weller***

**Reviewed by**

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### ***THE SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE BOOK***

The author of this book is Martin Weller. This book is in the field of technology in electronic learning. The year of publication of the book is 2022 and published by AU Press, Athabasca University.

### ***ABOUT THE AUTHOR***

Martin Weller is a professor of educational technology, at the Institute of Educational Technology (IET) at the UK Open University. He is the chair of the Open University's multidisciplinary degree, the Open Programme, which is the largest degree in the UK. He is the author of *The Battle For Open* (2014), *The Digital Scholar* (2011), and *25 Years of Ed Tech* (2020).

### ***THE BOOK STRUCTURE***

This book consists of eight chapters whose titles are:

Chapter 1 "An Example of Metaphorical Thinking" includes using visual metaphors created for the multidisciplinary program at the UK Open University, how metaphors can reveal different aspects of education is highlighted to provide an example of its application. Chapter 2 "Thinking about Ed Tech" states that metaphors help us to think about Ed tech in general and its role in higher education is explored. Chapter 3 "Ed Tech as an Undisciplined" emphasizes there are some metaphors that examine the concept of thinking about ed tech as a discipline or field of research. Chapter 4 "Specific Ed Tech" expresses that the metaphors in this chapter narrow the focus from the broader field of ed tech to specific technologies such as massive open online courses (MOOCs)

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and learning analytics. Chapter 5 "Ed Tech Criticism" states the business of educational technology is one in which metaphors are often used to frame an argument. In this chapter, some of these metaphors, such as "Uber for education," are examined and their implications are considered. Chapter 6 "Open Practice" points out that aspects of openness such as open-access publishing and digital scholarship are often difficult to consider since they offer new opportunities and problems. In this chapter, several positive and negative aspects are considered via metaphors. Chapter 7 "The Coronavirus Online Pivot" states that the shift to online learning presented issues for many educators and institutions as to how to develop resilient models should a new outbreak occur, and this chapter uses metaphors to explore some of the issues raised by the online pivot. Chapter 8 "Pedagogy" illustrates that the dominance of the lecture as the model for higher education has highlighted the paucity of other models, so in this chapter metaphors related to teaching methods are explored.

In this book, the author proposes several different metaphors that relate to aspects of educational technology. The criticisms of online education that proliferated during what became known as "the online pivot" revealed a considerable lack of understanding about how educational technology can be deployed effectively, what the real issues are in developing meaningful online education, and what the dangers are of simply accepting the rhetoric on technology. Metaphor provides a means (not the only method, I should stress) of considering ed tech that does not rely on a direct comparison with the existing model. Ed tech is a multi-billion-dollar industry, and the role of companies and technology will influence how education is realized in the coming years rather than being a tool of "the poetic imagination," metaphors are central to how people think, and our "ordinary conceptual system . . . is fundamentally metaphorical in nature"

The definition of "metaphor" varies according to domain, so practitioners in linguistics, psychology, literature, and anthropology might

use the term slightly differently. Metaphors are a non-literal use of language;

In this context, metaphors act as analogies that allow us to map from a familiar domain to understand an unfamiliar domain.

McCloskey (2005) suggests that there are two dominant ways by which people come to understand a topic—by metaphor or through narrative (or models and histories)—and that different fields tend to be dominated by one mode; for instance, metaphors dominate physics, whereas narratives dominate biology. In 2020, Martin Weller published a book, *25 Years of Ed Tech*, that could be considered complementary to this book, although this is very much a stand-alone piece. Both books can be seen, though, as essentially seeking to answer the same question: "How can we better understand ed tech?" The former book can be seen as the narrative response to that question, whereas this one can be seen as the metaphorical response.

Metaphors, then, are a powerful means of understanding or explaining topics. Lukeš (2019) proposes three uses of metaphor in explanation

- Metaphor as an invitation
- Metaphor as instrument
- Metaphor as catalyst

Using this classification, the metaphors in this book aim to act as instruments.

Metaphors, then, are key to how we think about, implement, practice, and evaluate education and thus the role that we see for technology within it.

## HIGHLIGHTS

The author proposes three reasons why metaphors in ed tech are worth exploring.

1. Educational technology is a relatively new field compared with the longer tradition of face-to-face, classroom teaching. Its implications, impacts, possibilities, and problems are aspects

that researchers are still trying to comprehend. Metaphors therefore provide a useful means of understanding this new field.

2. The use of metaphors shapes how ed tech is deployed
3. Metaphors allow us to reason differently about technology

## **CONCLUSION**

The diversity of metaphors in this book is an attempt to demonstrate that almost anything can be a metaphor, although not necessarily a useful one. The range is also intended to highlight that, those working in ed tech, often will have to work with people from different disciplines. My intention in this book is to reveal some insights into ed tech and to highlight the power of metaphors (and language more broadly) in how we shape our relationships with it. Metaphors are powerful tools, but that does not mean that they are always beneficial. They are used for different purposes

- a means of thinking about the deployment of new technology (e.g., “VAR and Learning Analytics”);
- where we should exercise caution about the motives of proponents (e.g., “Castell Coch and Ed Tech Investment”);
- how a problem is framed to suit those with a particular agenda (e.g., “Education Is Broken”);
- the nature of educational technology as a field (e.g., “Digital Mudlarking”);
- the nature of open practice (e.g., “Hidden Labour and Hunter-Gatherers in Open Practice”);
- how research can be conducted and shared (e.g., “Hussites and Guerrilla Research”);

- how to approach the impact of external events such as the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., “Digital Resilience”); and
- a method for rethinking online pedagogy (e.g., “Rhizomes”).

Perhaps most of all I hope that what the metaphors in this book have illustrated is that it is possible to be creative and imaginative in our relationships with technology. Although they are important considerations, there is also room for creativity, excitement, and even enjoyment in how we think and therefore deploy technology in education. Metaphors provide an alternative way of approaching technology beyond the demands of spreadsheets, budgets, and roadmaps that allow for greater flexibility and freedom in how we conceive of its implementation. Ultimately, how ed tech is developed, used, and questioned will be essential for its humane implementation. This book is in the field of technology in electronic learning, although it is a good book, it uses difficult words, the pictures in the book are less than the text, and it has collected and categorized people’s articles. It shows and refers to the digital native. The structure of this book and its clear titles and subsections are noteworthy. The references are complete and detailed. Finally, I hope that this book has raised the significance of metaphors when approaching the area of ed tech.

## **REFERENCE**

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- Lukeš, D. (2019, May). *Explanation is an event, understanding is a process: How (not) to explain anything with metaphor*. Metaphor Hacker