



## Book Review

# Curriculum Models for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Using Learning Technologies in Higher Education

Maree Gosper and Dirk Ifenthaler (Eds.) Published by Springer, 2014

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### ABSTRACT

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The question of how to meaningfully harness technologies for learning and teaching within how we conceptualise, design and implement curricula is a critical and current one in education generally, and particularly within the tertiary education sector. It is also a question that is explored from multiple angles, perspectives and discipline areas in the recently-published Curriculum Models for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Using Learning Technologies in Higher Education.

Featuring a range of contributions from leading and emerging researchers and practitioners, this edited volume is organised into four main sections that respectively address: theoretical considerations for the twenty-first century curriculum; case studies that exemplify how we might move beyond 'traditional practice'; technological and pedagogical innovations influencing curriculum renewal; and sustainable practice in technology-rich environments.

The introductory chapter by the editors, Maree Gosper and Dirk Ifenthaler, tackles up-front the difficult issue of what we might mean and understand when we talk about 'curriculum'. A valuable overview of different conceptualisations of curriculum is offered, with the authors themselves adopting a broad definition (focused on planned learning opportunities and the experiences they help learners to encounter) that usefully frames the chapters that follow. The introductory chapter also introduces a number of recurring themes and issues that are addressed throughout the volume, including the use of technology and technology-enabled curricula to engage more diverse student cohorts; the development of broader skills, attributes and literacies including digital and media literacy; and the evidence base for the cognitive benefits of various educational technologies.

Of the chapters that address theoretical considerations, Stephen Marshall provides a particularly interesting exploration of open educational curricula as interpreted through the Maori concept of Ako. Marshall explains how Ako "embodies the idea that teachers and learners are inescapably entwined in a synergistic experience of learning", and is based on values including mutual respect between people (teachers and learners) who are not equals, and the structuring of work around "implicit and explicit cultural norms and expectations independent of the subject being studied" (p. 57). These values are then applied to the challenges of open curricula, and to OER and MOOCs, in a chapter that offers a rich cultural lens for the critical consideration of technology and open practice.

Further insights relating to practice are offered in the case study section of the book, with the case studies covering issues of cross-disciplinary relevance (e.g. research-based learning, interteaching) as well as presenting examples relating to specific disciplines (e.g. the use of digital wet libraries in biological science, chiropractic clinical thinking, and personalised engineering education).

The most substantial section of the book, in terms of the number of chapters, is the one which addresses technological and pedagogical innovations influencing curriculum renewal. Offering a selection that covers original research, reviews of previous work and evaluations of institutional initiatives, the chapters in this section focus on applications of technology in areas including digital gaming, immersive simulation, virtual worlds and recasting lecture material using podcasts. While each of the chapters in this section describes interesting work, and provides valuable insights to take away, one minor criticism that could be offered is that the connection to the notion of curriculum, and what this means in practice, is more strongly addressed in some chapters over others.

The concluding section of the book, on sustainable practice in technology-rich environments, explores dimensions including partnership working between innovators and institutions to support sustainable change, and learning from experience. The last chapter in the section, and the concluding chapter of the book, finds Judith Lyons and colleagues describing the Course Design Intensive (CDI) model – an important feature of which is the embedding of technology from the very outset of the curriculum design process. In describing their work, and comparable work and curriculum design tools, Lyons and colleagues address a number of fundamental issues that will only become more important. This includes curriculum design as a shared, distributed process.

In producing such a rich volume, which provides a thorough exploration of technology in relation to curriculum and curriculum design, both the editors and the contributing authors are to be commended for the research, practice and experience they themselves have shared here. Such is the nature of the field at the moment, key aspects of this book could and probably would look quite different two or three years down the line. However, we will no doubt continue to grapple with many of the core issues addressed in *Curriculum Models for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Using Learning Technologies in Higher Education* in the years to come, and as a text for thinking about technology and curriculum in relation to the ‘current picture’, and future directions, this book is highly recommended.

#### *Biography*

*Keith Smyth* is Professor of Pedagogy at the University of the Highlands and Islands, and one of the founding editors of JPAAP.

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