BOOK REVIEW

25 YEARS OF ED TECH
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INTRODUCTION

Martin Weller's 25 Years of Ed Tech aims to contribute to the history of the educational technology (ed tech) field which is seen as a nascent area throughout the years. While the author introduces the prevalent ed tech applications and tools throughout the 25 years, he hopes these technologies, lessons learned and experienced gained, can put up to the future implementations of ed tech in higher education. The author examined 25 technologies over 25 years, starting from 1994 until 2018 (Figure 1). Using his personal experiences, reflections from the field and preferences in the selection of these technologies, the author prioritizes each year in which the related technology was effective, not the year it emerged. Even though the choice of "one technology per year" seems to have undervalued some other technologies or technological movements, it appears that there is a need for other publications that should accompany this book, which forms a basis for the ed tech history.

REVIEW OF THE BOOK

Throughout the book, Weller makes a general evaluation of the related technology in each chapter which is dedicated to a specific year and shares his experiences and thoughts within these technologies. In the last section, he makes a critical overall evaluation and reveals general themes. The first six chapters of the book take the readers to recall the technologies that dominated in the 1990s. In chapter 1, the author points out that the year 1994 is a turning point in terms of ed tech, with the use of the Internet in education. In this sense, 1994 was marked by the Bulletin Board System (BBS). The author states that "BBS had the potential to effectively remove the distance element." (p. 11). The author also notes that BBS is an important technological development that paves the way for social media and discussion forums. In the most essential chapter, chapter 2, the author discusses the Web, which forms the basis for all technologies covered in the

book. The author emphasizes the influence of the Web in 1995, although it appeared before. In this period, the Web, known as Web 1.0, provided people the freedom to publish, interact, and share. The web is also a very important step in reducing the cost of distance education providers and enabling the spread of distance education. Chapter 3 discusses computer-mediated communication (CMC), seen as the forerunner of the Learning Management System (LMS). This technology became a popular tool in 1996. CMC, based on BBS, has also increased the importance of communication in online education. Weller also stated that "If the benefit of the web was the removal of barriers to broadcast and publishing, then CMC delivered the ability to collaborate at a distance." (p. 23).
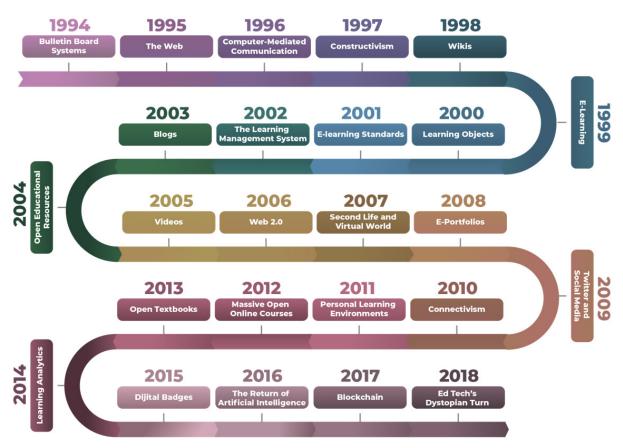

Figure 1. 25 technological innovations through the years from 1994 to 2018

Chapter 4, the year 1997, focuses on how the understanding of constructivism that prioritized learners' own experiences and social interaction came to the fore when web-based learning became very popular. Weller also states that the constructivist approach has brought about a radical change in the role of the educator in web-based learning environments. In Chapter 5, the year 1998, Weller explains Wikis that have enabled students to work collaboratively on a document regardless of place or time. Weller emphasizes the importance of Wikis with the following words "The web democratized publishing, and the wiki made the process a collaborative, shared enterprise.". When it comes to 1999, Chapter 6, it was the time when e-learning was on the rise and started being a part of mainstream education. Weller points out that, for that time, it was obvious that e-learning would be the shining star of ed tech history, although there were some hesitations.

In Chapters 7-12 Weller explores learning objects, e-learning standards, the learning management system, blogs, open educational resources (OER), and video tools. Although learning objects (LO) are important, they haven't been widely adopted. In chapter 7, in which the year 2000 was covered, Weller discussed the factors that hinder the success of LO and stated that although this technology does not get the place it deserves, there are successful applications based on it in today's ed tech field. In Chapter 8, for the year 2001, Weller explains how the rise of e-learning has led to the development of various e-learning standards.

Weller, citing his personal experiences on the subject, states that these standards later evolved into important developments. In Chapter 9, referring the year 2002, Weller discusses LMS, which is probably one of the most successful educational technologies and reinforces its importance day by day. In Chapter 10, for the year 2003, Weller discusses Blogs which he considered as one of the most important tools after the discovery of the Web. Weller also states that Blogs has transformed people into publishers and provided an online identity. In Chapter 11, Weller chooses the subject of OER, a movement that revolutionized higher education, for the year 2004. Weller adds that "OER represents something of a success story in ed tech" (p. 83) history. In Chapter 12, Weller describes how video technology has reached an important point with the widespread use of Internet access and the introduction of YouTube in 2005. He also describes the effects of the videos on "participatory culture" and "flipped learning" notions.

From Chapter 13 to 18 Weller describes 6 technological innovations through the years from 2006 to 2011, namely, Web 2.0, Second Life and Virtual Worlds, E-Portfolios, Twitter and Social Media, Connectivism, and Personal Learning Environments (PLE). In Chapter 13, for the year 2006, Weller discusses Web 2.0 with three important factors that emerged with Web 2.0 in higher education. These are unbundling, granularity, and quality. For 2007, in Chapter 14, second life and virtual worlds topics that were once very popular and whose use in educational settings was not at the desired level, were discussed. Weller states that he still has a hope regarding this technology. In Chapter 15, for the year 2008, Weller describes and discusses e-portfolios, tools like a digital report card for students. Although e-portfolios support lifelong learning and career development of students, Weller discusses some issues that prevent the effective use of e-portfolios in education. Regarding this technology, he remarks that "The success of any technology lies in an alteration to accompanying practice more than the technology itself." (p. 103). In Chapter 16, covering the year 2009, Weller draws attention to Twitter and social media, which are still felt the most effective and widely used tools today. Shaping life from education to research, economy and sociology, social media still has many challenges besides these benefits. In Chapter 17, referring the year 2010, Weller chooses the connectivism approach as an effective tool. The author labels connectivism as "the first Internet-native learning theory" (p. 115) and he also adds "connectivism was an attempt to make the network nature of the current environment central in learning." (p. 120). Although connectivism may not be up to date for today, this pedagogy has evolved into effective applications. When it comes to 2011, in Chapter 18, Weller explains PLE. This technology, which is the products of the initiatives mentioned in the previous chapters in the book, has unfortunately failed to satisfy learners and has become a history in the ed tech journey. Weller explains some possible reasons why PLE didn't get a general acceptance in the history of ed tech.

Chapter 19, which is dedicated to 2012, focuses on the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) phenomenon. This technology perhaps is the most popular initiative in the 25-year history of ed tech and Weller describes MOOCs as the "glamorous side of open education" (p. 137). However, Weller points out that although this technology has made a great contribution to the ed tech field, some problems have come up in practice. The author also expresses his concerns that MOOCs may have negative consequences in the long run. Chapter 20, referring to 2013, tackles the Open Textbooks application, which is the supplementary part of the OER movement. The author defines this technology as the "practical, even dowdy, application" (p.137). The author also presents several key facts of adoption of this ed tech in higher education. In Chapter 21, for the year 2014, Weller describes how and why learning analytics becomes prevalent in online distance education. The author also discusses the drawbacks and ethical issues of the analytics. The author warns researchers and developers about the possible danger of the learning analytics by stating that "instead of analytics supporting education, analytics becomes education" (p. 147). In Chapter 22, for the year 2015, Weller discusses digital badges with the results of the many research in the literature. The author also states that like many ed techs, badges had great hopes at first, but later turned into a stagnant technology. In Chapter 23, explaining the year 2016, the author discusses Artificial intelligence (AI) technology, which has a nearly 30-year history but is now at its peak in popularity. Although it is not yet at the desired level of use in the field of education, the author emphasizes ethical issues in the use of this technology. He also points out that "perhaps the greatest contribution of AI will be to make us realize how important people truly are in the education system." (p. 160). Chapter 24, in which the year 2017 was covered, focuses on Blockchain technology whose role in the field of education has not yet been clarified. Weller sees this technology as a result of the effort to apply every technology that emerges in the education field. However,

Weller defines Blockchain as "technology as alchemy" (p. 165) and likens Blockchain technology to the adventure of alchemy in the field of chemistry. He also expresses his concern that Blockchain can share the destiny of alchemy. Finally, in Chapter 25, Weller discusses the points where ed tech's journey, which started with great hopes at the beginning, left its place to great doubts and questions after 25 years. The author also underlines the need for more critical perspectives and voices. In the conclusion part, the author arrives at a synthesis considering 25 years of ed tech in the book. Within this context, he makes an evaluation of some themes and makes suggestions regarding the future of ed tech.

CONCLUSION

This book, with a critical perspective, is a great one to learn about the recent history of ed tech. Weller takes the readers to 25 stops on this lively journey. He describes an important technology or a technological movement at each stop and explains each scene like a master tour guide. And in each chapter, he explains the subjects mostly with his first-hand experiences and the results of current scientific studies in the literature. This book is highly recommended for field experts, instructional designers, distance education, and technology enthusiasts. Also, in these days of increasing interest in distance education during the coronavirus pandemic, the book can also be recommended as a starting book for those who are interested in technology and distance education and ask, "where should I start?".

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