

# “Is technology good for education?” (author: Neil Selwyn)

Selwyn's book is a timely contribution to the debate surrounding uses of technology in education. It is well-organized and easy to read. Selwyn's thoughtful use of questions encourages readers' engagement as he examines benefits and disadvantages of technology as it is used in education in the broader sense.

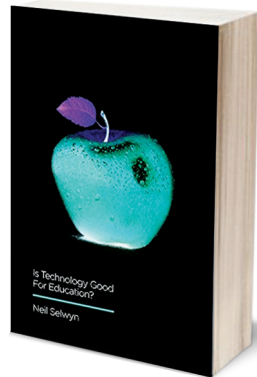
Selwyn categorizes the use of technology in education into three broad areas: improving, transforming, and revolutionizing education. He organizes the discussion into six chapters - five of which are framed as questions:

Digital Education and Educational Change, Making Education More Democratic?, Making Education More Personalized?, Making Education More Calculable?, Making Education More Commercial?, 'Good' Education and the Digital - So What Needs to Change?

Selwyn notes that the current debate on technology in education tends to be one-sided in favour of technology where some of the arguments are that the current educational model is broken and that digital technology can fix it. Such declarations stifle debate and hinder deeper examinations on how technology may serve learners' endeavours. Selwyn rightly encourages debate when he says: “The ideas of digital improvement/transformation/disruption of education clearly require problematizing: that is, taking a step back from them and not taking them at face value” (page 23).

Selwyn notes that proponents of technological solutions for education may have vested interests.

Are they careerists employed to sell technology solutions? Or perhaps academics eager to publish “learned analyses?” Selwyn points out that student learning is not top-of-mind if those are the motivations.



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In his first chapter “**Digital Technology and Educational Change**” Selwyn casts his discussion wider than mere classroom practice, noting that this is but a small part of the overall impact of technology in education. Do the politics of education warrant discussion? He asks what changes are realized by the introduction of technology: do the changes actually improve the educational process, are these changes in the learners' best interest?

In the following chapter, “Making Education More Democratic” Selwyn challenges claims that technology improves both access to and success within institutions of higher learning. Where and what is the supporting evidence?

Selwyn considers experiments in massively open online courses (MOOC) — those which are available at no or low cost to anyone with an internet connection. How many students succeed and which demographic do they represent?

In “**Making Education More Personalized**” Selwyn focuses on the claim that the ability to provide customization is one of the important features of on-line education. He provides a balanced view of the claim, citing the perceived advantage of such concepts as e-portfolios while

noting that the material learned in an on-line environment will essentially be the same for every student.

Selwyn then focuses his discussion on “**Making Education More Calculable**” where the concept of “datafication” of education is gaining some prominence. He defines “datafication” as the ability to collect data on performance of all actors involved in the educational process. He brings to question how those data might be used and by whom.

In “**Making Education More Commercial**” Selwyn wonders what happens to the learners' rights when they are in conflict with a corporate requirement to achieve profit.

“**Good' Education and the Digital - So What Needs to Change?**” provides a concluding discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of technology in education.

In spite of its small size—six succinct chapters in 175 pages—the conversation generated by Selwyn's questions gives the book heft. ■

## About the Author

**Jon Rokne (LSMIEEE)** is a Professor in the Department of Computer Science at the University of Calgary where he served as department Chair from 1989 to 1996. An IEEE member since 1970, Dr. Rokne has volunteered in a number of capacities. In the Computer Society, he completed two terms as Vice-President, Publications and three terms on the Board of Governors. He served as Vice-President, IEEE Publication Services and Products Board and as a member of the Board of Directors of IEEE for two terms. Dr. Rokne is an Associate Editor of the *IEEE Canadian Review*, and has contributed numerous book reviews and articles. He was also a contributor to the Special Focus on Engineering and Technology Education published in the Summer 2013 issue of the magazine; Dr. Rokne wrote on the topic: “The trend towards abstraction in engineering education.”