

Jephias Mapuva, *Technology and the Pedagogics of Learning*.
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Averianova Irina

It is a rare, though disputable, pleasure for a reviewer to come across a book with so much material for unsavory criticism as the one under consideration, especially, one with such a promising and ambitious title as “Technology and the Pedagogics of Learning,” printed by such a reputable company as Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

In the Preamble, the author, Jephias Mapuva, promises that his “three-phase volume” will talk “*to*¹ (sic!) the recent edge cutting research in the utilization of technology in higher education institutions and how this has enhanced educational deliverances and deliverables towards student’s performance.” In the first part, the author states his plan to deliberate on theoretical and legislative frameworks guiding the provision of higher education, specifically online and distant education. In the second part, he wants to deal with intricacies and challenges, which higher education institutions (HEIs) and their constituencies have to contend with in trying to manipulate available technologies for teaching and learning. In Part 3, he intends to identify ways to overcome the abovementioned intricacies and challenges. Finally, he claims to make recommendations on the prospects of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in education and “technology’s propensity to transform the education discourse to come up with a completely virtual teaching and learning environment.” All this seems like a very impressive plan for just 90 pages of the medium-size book, particularly if one takes into account the complexity of the issues mentioned.

Thus, the book opens with Part One, “Theory and Online Education in Today’s World.” The author promises to attempt to provide “a definition and *the role* (sic!) of online education in today’s world as well as the accompanying theoretical framework.” This promise immediately seems dubious, as Mapuva plans to use “online education” interchangeably with “*similar-minded* terms as e-learning, *internet*, e-pedagogy and the application of technology in education and corporate world.” Sadly but unsurprisingly enough, no new or clear definition of online education comes out of the attempt grounded on the assumption, that “online education” equals “e-pedagogy,” to say nothing of “the Internet” or the use of technology in the corporate world. Furthermore, in the section devoted to the trends in online education, the author specifies that, because “ordinarily, online education is synonymous with *internet*,” he intends to use the terms interchangeably.

The author’s lapse on his promise to provide the definition for the main subject of his writing does not seem to bother him, as he turns next to globalization and its effects on higher education, such as i)

¹ Italics are used here and elsewhere by the reviewer to highlight certain idiosyncrasies of the author’s way of writing — IA.

the emergence of new education providers; ii) new forms of delivering education; iii) greater diversification of qualifications and certificates; iv) increasing mobility of all educational components across national borders; v) more emphasis on lifelong learning; and vi) the increasing amount of private investment in the provision of higher education (p. 4). This part of the book is probably perceived by the author as containing his key findings, as the same text is repeated two more times over the rest of the chapter, on adjacent pages, 22 and 23, for stronger emphasis, perhaps. Further reading shows that repetition, or rather the technique of “copy-and-paste” of the same text, is Mapuva’s favorite strategy, reserved not only for his critical deductions, but also for surprising banalities, such as “Researchers across the globe have acknowledged the significance of theory in their research work” (pp. 16 and 21); “research can enhance understanding and expand theoretical knowledge from a disciplinary perspective” (pp. 16 and 20), a whole paragraph about globalization and how it makes “the *work* (“the world”, perhaps? — IA) a global village where communication *have* become efficient and effective, through *internet* and other communication facilities” (pp. 3 and 21)², and many others. Furthermore, a page-long section titled “Opportunities and challenges deriving from globalization” (p. 15) is repeated word-for-word on page 45 under the title “Opportunities and challenges emanating from online education.” This substitution of “globalization” with “online education” shows that Mapuva’s list of disparate notions, synonymous, in his perception, with “online education,” extends to “globalization” as well.

I think the picture is clear how the author treats online education in his chapter “Theory and Online Education in Today’s World.” Now, let’s look at the “theory” part. It starts with the above-quoted trivialities regarding the significance of theory in research and, vice versa, the author’s argument that research can enhance theory. His own study is proclaimed “to be informed by three theoretical underpinnings, namely behaviourism. Cognitivism and constructivism” (p. 17)³. He then provides a brief summary of the ideas of Pavlov, Thorndike, Skinner, Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky. It may seem surprising that no initials are used with these names, but perhaps it is a matter of deference, as *Albert Einstein* does have his first name mentioned, while a Soviet Communist Party leader of the 80s, *Leonid Illyich Brezhnev* (much ridiculed, by the way, for his literary endeavors) even has his patronymic spelled out when Mapuva brings in the following quote by Brezhnev: “‘There is nothing more practical than a good theory’ (1906-1982).” Not only are the years of Brezhnev’s life used instead of in-text reference, no entry for him is made in the bibliography for the chapter, as, incidentally, of many other authors mentioned in the text (for example, *Cody, 1993*, who, perhaps, is also *Cody, 1993*, included in the references). Further, I was unable to find the references for some essential research referred to by the author, such as, the research carried out at the *University of Columbia University’s Teachers College* (quite an original treatment of the name of my alma mater, the internationally famous institution).

Lack of accurate and consistent referencing (even alphabetical order of the lists is distorted) is another remarkable idiosyncrasy of the book, as roughly about half of the in-text quotes are not referenced in the bibliography list, while some others get a footnote reference. The selection of sources, in itself, is also quite astonishing for such an ambitious book. Next to Brezhnev, never known for any learned con-

² Original spelling and grammar — IA.

³ Original spelling and punctuation — IA.

tribution, there are quotes from Wikipedia, definitions without any authorship provided by Google search, and even such websites as <http://www.Make-Money-Dude.com> (this is where Mapuva tries to get the definition for online education). As for the definition of distance education, Mapuva chooses to quote the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a respectable source, per se, but hardly an authority on issues of education.

Mapuva's own contribution to the subject is an astounding development of "*Piaget Bruner and even Vygotsky's* theoretical framework,"⁴ regarding the levels of maturity and skills acquisition in teaching, where the author stipulates that learner's early, "formative," stage necessitates "what, when and where" questions, requiring one-word answers, such as "*What is your name? Where do you live?*" (p. 26), and such⁵. Those of "more mature disposition" would require *more* abstract and sophisticated questions: "Examples of questions *belong* to this realm of maturity would include such questions as... 'Justify whether theory should be included in all research papers'."⁶ Thus, the author emphasizes that "background knowledge on the part of practitioners is based on their knowledge of theory informing the education sector and how levels of maturity *impacts on* the propensity of learners to deal with given concepts." This surprising revelation is followed by one even more astonishing for its incongruous conclusion, the logic and content of which I fail to comprehend:

Accordingly, services offered by online education to distance education has been unprecedented. At no time in the history of learning has teaching and learning made easier and convenient. The introduction of the virtual university⁷ has further reflected that technology has a vital role to play in learning in general and online in particular. Reflect ad bring out the uniqueness of online learning (both on campus and distance education) vis-a-viz traditional pedagogics (p. 26).

I believe that suffices to give one an accurate impression of the "theoretical" Part One, which takes 52 of 92 pages of the book. The other two sections of the book share the remaining 40 pages equally, each being of about 20 pages long. The intention of these parts is to apply the results of the author's study on the challenges and opportunities of e-learning, which he carried out at the University of West Cape (South Africa), to other developing countries. Again, Mapuva's manner of writing prevents one from clear understanding of the objective of his research, which was, he states, "to establish the extent to which users of the e-learning facility within the institution have a deep understanding of what e-learning success" (p. 55). Equally questionable is his methodology for the study, reported in Part Three, "Confronting Challenges to e-Learning." Here, the author decided to interview students to reveal challenges that HEIs encounter in their attempt to integrate e-learning programs within the institution. Even though students, according to Mapuva, "form *central and epi-centre* of the learning continuum ... and therefore their incorporation in this paper is inevitable," they can hardly be considered as informed respondents for

⁴ Original spelling and grammar — IA.

⁵ As I was writing this, it occurred to me that even my two-year-old grandson, who is definitely on a very early formative learning stage, uses more than one word answering these questions.

⁶ Original spelling and grammar — IA.

⁷ NB: The notion of *virtual university* has not been mentioned before.

the purpose of the study. Predictably, no specific results of this research are reported, with the exception, perhaps, of this summary of the survey responses: “Such media institutions and facilities that were likely to reach out to students and the academia were suggested as the most appropriate avenue for information dissemination” (p. 66).

Thus, in the chapters, where the original study should have been reported, we get poorly worded and referenced literature review on the role of leadership (carbon-copied on pages 61 and 77) and the author’s generalizations, many of which are only minimally coherent. Consider this, for example:

The general realization was that while infrastructure and resources were in place [and kept on being resuscitated at frequent intervals] end-users. The general consensus was becoming *he* norm in *may* countries and at various institutions within and without South Africa, there as urgent need for the institution and those whose duty it is to implement e-learning strategy, to ensure that this is done forthwith, in line with international trends where online teaching/learning has almost replaced the traditional student/teacher/lecturer face-to-face interaction (p. 66).

It should be noted here as well that the conclusion at the end of the quote is contradictory to the final conclusion of Part Two, where Mapuva states that “the research has shown that e-learning should not be used as a substitute for classes, but a supplementary measure to reinforce concepts learnt in class and to facilitate further and independent research by students” (p. 70). As neither the specific research, nor how it provided the basis for such a conclusion is adequately clarified, the reader is completely at a loss as to the author’s understanding of the role of e-learning: a virtual world of limitless learning and teaching opportunities or a supplementary measure for the traditional “*chalk-and-talk*” (p. 65) methods of the “*old school*”?

I do think there is no need for further criticism of the book. Perhaps, Mapuva’s effort to explore the issues of e-learning is quite commendable in the context of South Africa’s education. But, most definitely, it would have been more presentable if his opus had passed under the eye of an attentive editor, which appears not to be the case with this publication. Without doubt, Cambridge Scholars Publishing should share responsibility with the author for the fact that “*Technology and the Pedagogics of Learning*” is neither worthy of reading, nor the value of the paper used for its publication (to say nothing of its “satin” jacket).