

BOOK REVIEWS

Education 2.0: The LearningWeb Revolution and the Transformation of the School

By Leonard J. Waks

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Review by Helen Crompton, Old Dominion University

On examination of the book's cover, I believed the images and title would be leading me into reading surface level facts about how technology can be used to support education. I was very wrong. This book was designed to deliver a strong message to all stakeholders in education. Leonard Waks has written this book to present a new type of educational organization as an alternative to the high school system that is in place in the North America today. He clearly states that his ideas do not attempt to fix the broken model, but he strongly advocates for a completely new paradigm.

Waks postulates that we are in an epoch of educational unrest, with the social and economic changes of globalization and the spread of digital networks. I would agree with Waks that the changes are generating contradictions in our educational and social arrangements and creating pressures for change. Unfortunately, this book is also full of contradictions in his arguments against the current system and his suggested solutions.

Waks has logically split this book into four sections: Schooling—The Industrial Paradigm, Learning Networks, Education 2.0: A Network Paradigm for Education, and Educational Revolution. In the first section, it is clear that Waks' education is deeply entrenched in philosophy with a rigorous chronological review of formal education in North America. Despite the occasional annoyances as he connects to how he would educate students (more on that later), this section of the book is extremely interesting.

It is clear that Waks has done his homework for this section as he provides key historical turning points in education and stories about various students who have done amazing things through self-educating via the Internet. The underpinning philosophical theories are drawn from John Dewey, Richard Peters, Ivan Illich, Robert Dreeben, and Thomas Green. The pages on Education as Initiation are very interesting and thought provoking. He defines initiation as "building up active capability sufficient to perform with enjoyment in activities and share in their values." Throughout the book, the author does a good job of providing definitions for all the nuance terms to ensure the reader is clear on what he is saying.

In this initial section Waks goes on to unpack the epistemic beliefs of the philosophical scholars connected with initiation. The stories running through this section are excellent examples that make you want to memorize each one. For example, he describes a quote from the President at Morehouse College to the young Black students telling them that “Morehouse holds a crown over your heads and expects you to grow into it.” Stories like this can revitalize the spark in educators. My enjoyment for this section grew further with the text about Mechanical Production and the Industrial Mindset. Through clever connections to hierarchical organization of top down directives and industrial manufacture, Waks argues that today’s schools in America are nothing more than factory schools.

Before, I leave my enthusiasm with the first section, I want to mention another section of text part worth attention. He made it clear that even if a student does well and makes it all the way through the “factory school” to gain a diploma, it does not mean that the student is guaranteed a job. This is very true and needed saying. This college to job idea was typically true a generation ago, but now there is no guarantee of a job. Unfortunately, after this my enthusiasm for Waks’ ideas took a backward slide.

Part two, Learning Networks focuses on the use of the Internet for learning. This begins with a chapter on the growth of the Internet and the World Wide Web (WWW). The US ethnocentricity of Waks’ ideas was something I noticed earlier in the first section as he was quick to criticize other countries for the bad teaching approaches and reminded the readers that this is what the American people were trying to get away from as they left these other countries behind. This was annoying, but partially ignorable for history shows that many mistakes were made in all countries and we have all learned from mistakes. What cannot be ignored is the chapter on the history of the Internet and the WWW as Waks gives approximately 95% of the credit to people in the US, ignoring the major accomplishments of other (non-American) people for their part in the emergence of this new age.

Tim Berners-Lee, a British man, does get a small mention for creating the WWW, although the author states that it did not get anywhere until an American “grasped the web’s true potential...and the world finally awoke to the web.” Waks’ then ensures that he desecrates the name of Time Berners-Lee a couple of other times before the end of the book.

The following chapters in part two get moderately better than chapter six; but that is not hard after the depths Waks sunk to in that chapter. The rest of section two describes online teaching, online knowledge, and online informal learning, which is the “technical and social infrastructure of Education 2.0.” The vast body of networked information available via the Internet is described as being ready and available for students 24-7. In a nutshell, Waks’ Education 2.0 is that students have access to this information and educators should let students get on and learn from this valuable resource.

As I mentioned earlier, Waks shared the stories of some young teens who have gained success from following their interests. These are heart-warming stories but are not necessarily the way all students are going to succeed. By relying on “free online courses... students motivated by goals inherent in their biological and cultural conditioning...and students learning free from pre-determined learning objectives” are wonderful, but not the way many students are going to learn; especially those who come from less stimulating backgrounds with

less opportunities to travel and gain new experiences and interests. I was very disappointed to read about Waks' idea for teachers with comments such as:

“Young people with Internet access don't need pedagogues because they don't need to be led to knowledge; it is already there in its entirety right in their hands...Learners do not need teachers for any of these conventional tasks” (p. 137)

I use Google. I am not sure what Waks uses. Yes, the Internet is full of great information but finding the right information, learning how to evaluate that information, keeping safe, etc. is something that a good teacher teaches as they facilitate learning. Finding the correct information on the web can be like taking a sip from a fire hose. Do we really want students to learn by making mistakes about keeping safe on the Internet? Would you let a child play with fire before warning them that it can burn? The difference here is that burns can often heal and disappear; things that are posted onto the Internet can often never be removed.

Waks connects with some great ideas from educators such as Curtis Bonk, Vicki Davis, and Julie Lindsay. He does a nice job of summarizing some of their work which is pertinent and also still current. They saw the value in Internet resources but also the value in the teacher to become the facilitator in making it happen. In section three, *Education 2.0: A Network Paradigm for Education* is where the contradictions start to emerge in Waks' argument for his image of a new education organization. For example, although he makes the argument that students should choose for themselves, he then states:

Here is a larger problem: many of my university students were unsure whether the Revolutionary War took place before or after the Civil War, whether Lincoln was president in the eighteenth or nineteenth century, whether Eisenhower fought in Europe or Korea. This gross ignorance is shameful. We could eliminate it by making the mandated history test more like the written portion of the driver's test. (p. 191)

This is the very opposite of what he has been arguing against in that it is teacher selected and directed, and making it like the driver's test sounds very much like memorization of facts. Waks gives a good overview of open resources (free access) on the web, although they are US only and key founders and leaders e.g., the Open University are ignored, but what is ironic is that Waks then chooses to publish this book with Paradigm and not as an Open Source book available on the Internet.

The final section of the book is a call to action to all the stakeholders involved in education. Waks speaks to each stakeholder group individually to show how they can play their part to realize the Education 2.0 dream that Waks has. This is an interesting book from start to finish. Great connections are made to what the Internet can do, but I personally believe this has to happen with organization and teacher facilitation for many students to ensure that each student has the opportunity to reach their potential. We all have to bear in mind that technology is only a tool and what matters is how to use that technology effectively.

Reviewer details

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