

BOOK REVIEW RESPONSE

**Education 2.0:
The LearningWeb Revolution and the Transformation of the School**
By Leonard J. Waks
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Response to Crompton review by Leonard Waks

I want to thank Dr. Helen Crompton for her review, and the editor of *Other Education* for inviting me to reply. Crompton agrees that our current educational arrangements are in need of fresh thinking, and finds my account of the evolution of the American schools and their current predicaments useful. She says that American education is full of contradictions, but claims that my proposals are too. While she doesn't actually identify specific "contradictions," she does offer a number of harsh criticisms, and I want to focus on the most important of these.

An important complaint of Crompton throughout her essay is that my account is America-centric. My book, however, is about American high schools, so it is hard to see how at least in its educational dimensions it could be otherwise. She says that I condemn "bad teaching" elsewhere, and even explain the vast migration from other nations to the United States on that basis. Neither of these claims is remotely true. My book has high praise for the educational arrangements of today's Germany, Austria, and Finland, for example, but argues that they cannot be adopted in the American political culture. I don't explain migrations from Ireland or Central Europe in the 19th century or from Latin America and Asia today, on school failures. Simple political and economic explanations for these are perfectly adequate, and neither I nor anyone else has ever suggested that bad teaching has played any role in these migrations.

But there is a more important theoretical point here. Each nation has its own distinct institutional history and political culture. Suggestions for reconstruction of any nation's arrangements must be set in the nation's own institutions and traditions. My book is about American high schools, and is thus inherently America-centric. Readers elsewhere can at best take from it some suggestive features for development in their own situations.

Crompton has unusually harsh words for my allegedly America-centric account of the history of the World Wide Web. Readers of her review would be surprised by the passage on Tim Berners-Lee and the invention of the web, which paints Berners-Lee as a heroic figure working against severe institutional constraints. I conclude by saying that he invented the web

all by himself. I note, however, that despite his unusual efforts even to give the web technology away for free, he was never able to get it into wide use. That was accomplished by Americans, especially Marc Andreessen, co-author of Mosaic, the first widely used Web browser; and cofounder of Netscape, which commercialized it. This is the standard historical account, which my book draws upon with extensive citations. If Crompton has a less American-centric account, I invite her to offer it. I do note that unlike Rupert Murdoch and many other non-Americans, however, Berners-Lee downplayed the revolutionary change introduced by Web 2.0 technologies, which are central to my educational reconstruction.

Turning to education, Crompton claims that my version of “education 2.0” would simply provide computers and web access and turn learning over to students. Readers of her review would hardly guess that my educational prescriptions are offered as a critique of this view. After a chapter where I spell out this idea, citing web gurus such as Curtis Bonk and Judy Breck, I critique it as providing little guidance for actual institutional reconstruction. My education 2.0 is offered as an alternative to the “do your own thing” education that Crompton attacks. Readers of her review would also think I prescribe schools without teachers. On the contrary, I prescribe four different types of teachers necessary in schools making full use of Internet resources: classroom teachers, academic mentors or learning guides, media educators, and “focus teachers” or professional tutors. *Education 2.0* also makes provisions for many other types of adults in teaching roles.

Crompton rightly notes that few students can attain a good education merely by following their own lead, armed with nothing but the Internet. She appreciates the stories throughout my book of unusual kids doing just that. And I do say in *Education 2.0* that we do not know just what fraction of teens could do that if given more space for self-directed learning. And under the education 2.0 paradigm, all teens would have plenty of space for self-directed learning. That is what makes the book especially interesting for readers of this journal. But all teens would also have the standard first two years of the high school curriculum and the full range of additional standard high school courses if they chose to take them. As optimistic as I am about the amazing potential of teens in the Internet era, I never suggest that all, or most, would thrive educationally merely through self-directed learning on the Internet.

In short, the specific problems and contradictions Crompton finds in *Education 2.0* appear to result from her inadequate reading of the text. I invite the readers of *Other Education*, who are by definition interested in alternatives to today’s teacher and school centric educational arrangements, to read *Education 2.0* and judge for themselves.

Reviewer details

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