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Book review of Benjamin Luke Moorhouse, Sandy S. C. Li, & Sebastian Pahs (Eds, 2024), *Teaching with technology in the social sciences*. Springer Singapore.

Bhaso Ndzendze^A

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Associate Professor, University of Johannesburg

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Introduction

The onset of COVID-19 affected teaching and learning processes in profound ways. According to UNESCO, at least 80%, and as much as 94%, of enrolled learners had their learning disrupted by the pandemic (UNESCO, 2023). Educators and students the world over had to improvise so as to comply with the lockdown conditions introduced by most governments while still maintaining the learning process. In these efforts, technology proved invaluable. The pandemic has thus enhanced the utilisation of digital tools, but also the subgenre of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) which has a focus on technology. In the height of the pandemic, many educators were producing volumes of works reflecting, almost in real-time, on the advantages and lessons offered by the infusion of technology into their work. With the pandemic now firmly behind us, works reflecting on the pandemic are still being churned out, and offering invaluable lessons as we engage with technology as an important pillar in the future of education.

It is against this background that Moorhouse, Li and Pahs have produced the edited volume *Teaching with Technology in the Social Sciences*, published by Springer. The book consists of findings and reflections from Hong Kong Baptist University, many of whose educators introduced digital technology components into their classrooms, as well as student exchange and cultural immersion programmes in response to the pandemic. The academic component stems mainly from the social sciences, namely education, history, social work, sociology, as well as geography and energy studies.

The book is excellently introduced, with the editors explicating its overarching research question and rationale. In this regard, the reader is informed that the book seeks to advance a “greater understanding of how teachers in the various social science disciplines use technology for teaching and learning” in order to foster interdisciplinary lessons. The editors provide an overview of the power and limits of strictly disciplinary structures which have so far defined the academic enterprise. On the one hand, these well-defined fields have provided specialist knowledge that is organised. On the other, it has led to different modes



Figure 1: Book cover.

of researching and research dissemination, presenting an opportunity cost for lesson sharing. The book’s introduction also provides a useful overview of the different forms of technologies that have been integrated into classrooms: (1) presentation software, (2) videos to illustrate, and (3) learning management systems (LMSs). Alongside these, newer pedagogical tools have emerged, namely (4) blended

learning, (5) flipped classrooms, (6) gamification, (7) mobile apps, (8) and virtual reality and virtually augmented reality, including the post-2020 concept of the metaverse.

In total, the book is made up of an Introduction and nine substantive chapters. Chapter 2 ('Using Geographic Information Systems in a Spatial History Course to Develop Students' Digital Literacies and Digital Humanities Skills') by Kwong and Moorhouse provides an analysis of the introduction of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) into a Spatial History course. The aim was to develop digital literacy and digital humanities skills among history students. Chapter 3 ('Metaverse Sojourn: Incorporating Virtual Reality and Immersive Interactive Environment to Enhance Students' Sojourn Experiences') by Siu and colleagues describes the use of potential of the metaverse for cultural immersion and the creation of virtual interactive environments in Hong Kong Baptist University's sojourn programme.

Chapter 4 ('Online Delivery of Clinical Social Work Education: The Landscape of Narrative Therapy') by Chan and colleagues reflects on the application of an online private course for students in clinical social work. Chapter 5 ('Promoting Personalized and Blended Learning for Pre-Service Teachers') by Deng et al. points to the pedagogical benefits of personalised and blended learning for teacher educators. Chapter 6 ('Exploring Time and Space: Merging Historic and Contemporary Virtual Reality Technologies in the History Classroom') by Cobb demonstrates the promise held by virtual reality technologies for teaching history by helping students immerse themselves in historical contexts. Chapter 7 ('Building Cross-Cultural Academic Exchange with University Students During COVID-19 Through Online Deliberation: The Case of an Energy Studies Course in Hong Kong') by Cheung et al. describes the results of an online cross-cultural academic exchange that had participation by university geography students drawn from various international contexts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter 8 ('Enhancing Students' Field Experience in Physical Geography Courses Using Virtual Reality Technology') by Li and Wu shows the results of the integration of virtual reality technologies into geography courses in order to provide virtual field trips. In Chapter 9 ('Lessons Learned and Future Directions for Teaching with Technology in the Social Sciences'), the book's editors reflect on their role within the project, and propose lessons learned and possible future directions.

The book is an important intervention in many respects, but three in particular are worth fleshing out. Firstly, it is a multifaceted, rigorous and frank assessment of the utility of technology in teaching and learning. For example, some of the educators ran surveys among their students, which provided a useful overview of the experiences of the students who were at the centre of this experimental period. Their perceptions are predictably mixed, with some agreeing that they found the process of learning through the new technologies to be engaging, but also noting their difficulties using the hardware as well as students' hesitance to move completely towards digital platforms such as the metaverse. Secondly, and despite its very unique and locale-specific origins, the book has lessons to offer beyond Hong Kong. The authors provide rich, practical detail of the steps

they took in migrating to the various digital platforms, or indeed creating some themselves; thereby making the book useful for any other teachers who may wish to replicate or improve upon their initiatives.

Thirdly, the book provides an analysis of the reasons for the still relatively low uptake of technologies. These are five in total, all mediated by context: (1) lack of hardware and other resources; (2) lack of technical capacity and know-how among teachers and students; (3) discipline-specific hesitations towards technology by some teachers; (4) rigidity in course structures within many institutions, which may prevent experimentation with technologies; (5) time constraints, which may mean there is an opportunity cost to the adoption of new technologies. "The digital tools teachers use, the way they use them, and why they use them, is linked to the mode and environment of teaching (modality), approach adopted in the discipline (pedagogies), and the knowledge and skills the teacher is aiming to develop in their learners (discipline-specific knowledge and skills)," they declare (p. 4).

Numerous other studies corroborate this conclusion. From China (Jiang et al., 2022), to India (Muthuprasad et al., 2021), to South Africa (Makananise & Madima, 2023) and Switzerland (Elmer et al., 2020), studies have shown that technologies are no substitute for teaching and learning. From my own experience in using technologies in my courses, students prefer technologies that enhance their experience by increasing and even diversifying, not replacing contact (with their fellow learners and the teacher). Its key strength lies in accommodating different learning styles and preferences among students. For example, some students may benefit from an in-person lecture to consolidate what they first encountered in a video made available to them through an LMS – or the other way around, wherein the lecture may provide first interaction with the lecturer and then use technologies to consolidate.

Context is thus an important facet in technology adoption or lack thereof. It is at the core of the book. Their final chapter is dedicated to overarching reflections from the project. In total, they offer four reflective lessons which are helpful and globally relatable: adopting a bottom-up approach, learning from one another, adapting to unforeseen events, and creating space for pedagogical experimentation.

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