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Focused reading list

Educational Technology Graduate Portfolio

Western Oregon University

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RE: Graduate Reading List

Dear Esteemed Faculty,

Thank you for your time and attention to this optional graduate portfolio paper, which you will find attached to this cover letter in the form of a focused reading list. The reading list offers technologists, instructional designers, and educators alike a look into pedagogical and andragogical perspectives around the use of technology.

Many of the readings may reaffirm past knowledge while giving rise to new understandings of both old and new technologies. Some of these articles are dense, but incredibly packed with content which induces critical thoughts on the leveraging of pedagogical or andragogical approaches to wielding technologies. A portion of these readings were introduced through this academic journey at Western Oregon University, which inspired several additions to complete this list. This is a reading list I would recommend to those previously mentioned, educators, instructional designers, and technologists. From my own past professional experiences, I have been tasked with implementing technologies for the popularity around technological social fads without consideration for the overall outcomes for implementing said technologies. It is important to be able to both understand and express those critical understandings around the use of technology and the causality and effects of it.

The list is alphabetically ordered by the author’s last name and begins with a short introduction, followed by the list itself, and finally my overall concluding thoughts. For each entry, a summary of the reading is provided followed by my reflection on the content. I hope the content inspires all of us to continue to innovate, while considering the technological efficacies and that I have articulated the summaries and captured a common perspective on these readings.

Sincerely,

Jesse R. Walter

**Introduction**

Throughout my career and during this educational journey there are thoughts and patterns which occasionally resurface over others. One such theme is the intellectual struggles between ‘the knowledge of technology’ and ‘ability to wield technology.’ Modern authors and philosophers of old have battled the philosophical questions around whether knowledge itself or the ability to wield the knowledge is more important or elevated over the other. This reading list houses a compilation of authors, Langdon Winner, Cindy Xin, Andrew Feenberg, Richard Parry, Sean Morris, and Jesse Stommel, which present a healthy balance of technological critiques through an academic lens.

As technologists we are often exposed to emerging technologies while they are being crafted and, at times, we are the crafters. As instructional designers, we may be tasked with wielding emerging technologies for the purposes of creating new learning experiences. As we create these technologies, it is important to design with intent and plan for the unintended. For when we wield and develop learning technologies, we should strive to keep the balance in our technological approaches, be it andragogical or pedagogical.

**Focused Reading List**

Backer, D. (2016, March 22). *The Purpose of Online Discussion*. Hybrid Pedagogy.

<https://hybridpedagogy.org/purpose-online-discussion/>

David Backer holds a PhD in Philosophy and Education with a MS in Interdisciplinary studies/Education. Backer calls to question the purpose of online discussions and whether digital correspondence constitutes discussions. Backer bases his perspective in psychoanalysis rooted in the unconscious and emotional human development. Backer argues that students cathect (invest emotional energy into a person, object, or idea) on the digital devices rather than the person. Therefore, while one may communicate on digital devices, one may not have the fullness of experiencing in person human to human discussions.

Backer’s audience is focused on educators; however I found it challenging to agree with all of his perspectives and in particular with his perception of A/V (audio video) synchronous interactions. He is careful not to dive too deeply into the A/V topic but keeps focusing on more asynchronous digital interaction. Unfortunately, the links to an article of which he comments on, “the discussion forum is dead long live the discussion forum”, only opened to a 404 error. Given the recent publication of this article, I find it quite challenging to agree with the assumption that online discussion is not real discussion. This is particularly true in our current technological age and would happily remind the audience that there are several messaging technologies and/or platforms where asynchronous discussions successfully occur in massive volumes. In example: Twitter, Discord, Facebook, Quora, Reddit, and so on. If asynchronous discussions are successfully engaging and meaningful on these platforms, then perhaps there is something Ed-Tech could learn from these successful technologies.

Bali, M. (2015a, January 22). *Embodying Openness as Inclusive Digital Praxis*. Hybrid

Pedagogy. <https://hybridpedagogy.org/embodying-openness/>

Maha Bali is the Associate Professor of Practice, Center for Learning and Teaching at American University in Cairo and she is also an editor for “*Hybrid Pedagogy*”. Bali argues that critical pedagogy and open education is difficult to embody as educators. It requires making oneself vulnerable by making the “practice explicit and public.” These challenges require truly open educators to make efforts to accommodate the differences of others in which the educator may be unaware of. Bali provides a couple of examples of non-digital critical pedagogical examples and then shares her own personal experiences which demonstrates behaviors that support a more inclusive openness.

Unfortunately, many of the supporting links, as with a number of the Hybrid Pedagogy articles, often returned 404 error pages. This made it challenging to read through her sources to gain a deeper understanding of her perspective. In one of her personal examples she demonstrates how applying openness to an existing interpretation of a twitter game is manipulated to conform to ideals of others (putting it into context) without disrupting the mechanics and or functionality. This article is easy to read and contains a much deeper message within her writing. My takeaway from Bali’s message is that in order to move towards a more inclusive openness, educators must embody these positive behaviors beyond the classroom.

Bali, M. (2015b, April 21). *Pedagogy of Care — Gone Massive*. Hybrid Pedagogy.

<https://hybridpedagogy.org/pedagogy-of-care-gone-massive/>

Maha Bali is the Associate Professor of Practice, Center for Learning and Teaching at American University in Cairo and she is also an editor for Hybrid Pedagogy. This peer reviewed article Bali addresses the art of care and the lack of care in the behaviors and actions of teachers. Furthermore, the article addresses the challenges of providing quality of care to all students, especially those in a MOOC learning environment. Caring and empathy, from MOOC facilitators, may indeed occur when these facilitators personally open themselves up to the students by collaborating and sharing within the MOOCs. While much of the physical interactions associated with empathy are removed in the digital experiences, the sharing, intent, and effort by the facilitators impact the students one way or another in the digital platforms.

Bali once again is wonderful with the sharing of her pedagogical experiences and growth. Unfortunately, many of the supporting links, as with several the Hybrid Pedagogy articles, often returned 404 error pages. This made it challenging to read through some of the provided sources to gain a deeper understanding of her perspectives. Empathy is really the key topic in this article and Bali does provide examples on how to respond and share in a MOOC environment. Bali is not afraid to share her personal experiences and she does a great job of putting them into pedagogical perspective. She lives by example and ultimately this seems to be a recurring theme within her writings.

Feenberg, A. (2001). Whither Educational Technology? *International Journal of Technology and*

*Design Education*, *11*(1), 83–91. <https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1011225903766>

Andrew Feenberg sits on the Canadian Research Chair in the Philosophy of Technology in the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University located in Vancouver. Feenberg maintains a critical yet overall positive view regarding technology. He demonstrates a balance of educational technological debates around both old and new technologies. Feenberg brings to light the differences between interactive dialogic versus automated methods of online learning. Ultimately Feenberg wants the reader to be aware that how we use educational technology is the most important debate, rather than debating the use of said technologies.

Feenberg’s writing is somewhat dense, but easy enough to follow along with. I appreciated his referencing other perspectives in recent history. Feenberg’s dive into the use of technology to de-skill teaching in reference to the all mighty dollar should be a thought to consider as educators embrace and or design new technologies. Feenberg places much of his emphasis on communication, which has been and continues to be at the forefront of educational technology. As educators grappling with the bells and whistles of technology, Feenberg urges us to grapple with whether the technological tool enables us to perform our roles of fostering connections and dialogue with our students.

Feenberg, A. (2002). Transforming Technology: A Critical Theory Revisited. 2nd Edition Oxford

University Press.

Andrew Feenberg discusses the relationship between science, technology, and democracy and four issues. This is an update to the 1991 publishing of this book, which promotes Critical Theory of Technology and considers the concept of socialism within the philosophy of technology as an intellectual and political tool used to address the management of technological progress. Feenberg asserts a conflict between democracy and capitalist and the technocratic organizations. However, the threats visualized at the time of the original printing have changed and this book dives into the rethinking and restructuring of those Utopian techno-political concepts. Feenberg contrasts and compares philosophical approaches to technology from a capitalist and socialist alike. Feenberg responds to globalized trends of computerization and the technical and social impacts of such.

This book is a quaint 230 (give or take) pages, but the read is densely packed with critical thinking and rational around not only the wielder’s use of technology, but also intent through design. Feenberg further elaborates on the impact that emerging technologies throughout our societal dynamics. Feenberg promotes critical thinking in how technology is implemented in our home life, work, and educational environments. While I found the reading to be a bit dry, I did find some of the socialized utopian conceptualizations to be interesting, if not attractive in thought, but I found myself in contrast to some of the contextualized thoughts Feenberg asserts, yet I appreciate Feenberg’s arcing observational importance of the intent of technological usage by individuals or among geo-political masses.

Feenberg, A.(2009). Science, Technology and Democracy: Distinctions and Connections. In

*Simon Fraser University*. <http://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/books/Science_Technology_Democracy.pdf>

Andrew Feenberg sits on the Canadian Research Chair in the Philosophy of Technology in the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University located in Vancouver. Feenberg discusses the relationship between science, technology, and democracy and four issues. With the four issues he calls for a distinction of basic criteria, then proposes a historical trace of cognitive relation of science and society. Next Feenberg argues democratization favors technology in ways it does not for science. Finally, he presents philosophical reflections on the paradox evolving in the public technological sphere.

I found this reading to be quite useful as it supports the overall theme of human stewardship over our own domain. Feenberg provides an in depth look into the entanglement of engagement between science, society, and its technology. While the reading was a bit dense for my preferences, Feenberg packs valuable nuggets of information in each paragraph. After multiple readings I found myself picking up new information and formulating new understandings. Feenberg lays a heavy perspective against capitalism’s use of technoscience, but I would wonder what his thoughts are on the socialist countries of Russia and especially China’s use of science, as from where I am sitting, it does matter if it’s communist or capitalist constructs as the control and lordship over others, in the name of science, trumps all.

Huang, X. (2019). WeChat-based teaching for an immersion cultural exchange program – a case

study in CFL. Smart Learn. Environ. 6, 7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40561-019-0087-0>

Xiaoqin Huang holds a Ph.D. in School of Foreign Languages and Cultures, from Chongqing University, a Masters in Linguistics and Modern Languages, from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and a B.A. in English, from Beijing International Studies University. This research article is the result of Hung’s two-year efficiency action study on the WeChat mobile application as a learning platform to teach Chinese as a foreign language. The mobile course design is rooted in Connectivism, and the study collected data which observed linguistic improvements in students. The study also found the students’ WeChat experiences allowed them to integrate the practice of communicating with other native Chinese speakers, which helped facilitate the sharing of thoughts and integration the knowledge into their lives. However, the study also found that WeChat failed in student’s autonomously learning through the app as the data demonstrates a lack in the student’s engagement as the program neared its end.

The study, in my opinion, read transparently forward as Huang did a great job of acknowledging the strengths and deltas for this form of mobile learning, The study also defines how the learning, leveraged through mobile application technology, is rooted Connectivism. What I am impressed with most is this concept of incorporating learning experiences, which promotes the understanding of the culture of the language, through the current digital integration. Since I have worked in the gaming industry, I am vaguely familiar with Tencent, but was unaware of their efforts in education.

Jonas, H. (1979). Toward a Philosophy of Technology. *The Hastings Center Report*, *9*(1), 34–43.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3561700?origin=crossref>

Hans Jonas was a German-born American Jewish philosopher and was the Alvin Johnson Profession of Philosophy in New York at New School for Social Research. In this dense, intriguing peer reviewed article, Jonas dives deep into the entanglement of the pursuit of technology and the power it brings. He furthermore heeds warning to the endless loop of that pursuit. Jonas points to the earthy costs for such pursuit of technologies. Then the ecological problems such pursuits cause, yet men continue to answer the by-products of technology with new technology. This in turn becomes the next evolution of the endless loop.

The denseness of Jonus’ article may deter some readers; however I would recommend not overlooking the ethical concerns he addresses. Hans Jonus’ ethical perspectives had a great impact on both technology and biology. His driven perspective tackles these entangled topics like a bull fighter with both hands on the horns of the bull. This gives you no choice but to confront these topics as you read through the article. Read through this article multiple times and in doing so you may discover new points of interest encompassed by our current wonders and their destruction of Man and the planet in which he resides.

Kline, S. J. (1985, June 1). What Is Technology? *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*,

*5*(3), 215–218. <https://doi.org/10.1177/027046768500500301>

Steven J. Kline was the emeritus professor of mechanical engineering at Stanford University whose work contributed greatly to the aerodynamic efficiency of the shapes of today’s airplanes and automobiles. In this article, from the peer reviewed journal of Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society, Kline breaks down the word ‘technology’ to provide a deeper understanding of the word and its usage we apply to it. Kline denotes ‘technology’ as ‘manufactured articles’, which are manmade things that do not naturally exist. He then systematically outlines the various usages to point out that technology is best viewed as systems rather than independent articles. Kline concludes by acknowledging that without such sociotechnical systems humans may not exist; and as such humans have grown into powerful lords over this earth and as such humans inherit the responsibility of such powers.

Kline does a great job of breaking down information into more palatable chunks. Kline does this well with the various usages as he outlines each one. Kline provides a clearer understanding of technology as extensions of our own capabilities and are used through sociotechnical systems. While researching Kline’s references to other historical figures’ definition of technology, such as Jacques Ellul, I found the references to be at par with their interpretations but would have enjoyed more examples. This was important to me in terms of embracing the gathering of interpretations for the concluding understanding of onus as both the creators and users of technology.

MagnatesMedia. (2023). The Secret Chinese Company That Owns Everything. Youtube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51fWzJ-A5w4>

John is Youtube content creator, from the United Kingdom, who creates “mini-movies about business, marketing, money, & more.” John’s channel, MagnatesMedia, produces documentaries and shorts which give pause for thought. This controversial video stitches together the historical rise to power of Pony Ma and his Tencent empire, a Chinese multinational technology and entertainment conglomerate, which happens to be a holding company. We learn that Tencent started its business model by copying early chat systems. Despite the lawsuits, Tencent manages to redefine itself into a Chinese government’s digital overlord through a single program called WeChat. As described in the video, this is ‘One app to rule them all’. Tencent has invested heavily in technological companies throughout the world. For any mobile application to become accessible to the Chinese population, it will have to run through the WeChat system. The punch line is that the Chinese Communist Party has the controlling access to all the information sent and received.

I found this video to be very informative about the company Tencent. On its own, it barely fits within the genre of this bibliography; however I was compelled to share after learning about the digital Dr. Huang’s exploratory study to teach Chinese as a foreign language and exchange program, which is technically facilitated through the WeChat program. Given this bibliography’s arcing ethical theme around the use of technologies, I found the information in this video to add supplemental understanding aspects of the WeChat program and the entities who influence this technology.

Morris, S., & Stommel, J.(2013, May 8). *The Discussion Forum is Dead; Long Live the*

*Discussion Forum*. Hybrid Pedagogy. <https://hybridpedagogy.org/the-discussion-forum-is-dead-long-live-the-discussion-forum/>

Sean Michael Morris is the Director of Digital Pedagogy Lab and Senior Instructor in Learning Design, and Technology at the University of Colorado Denver. Jesse Stommel is the Executive Director of Hybrid Pedagogy and Co-founder of Digital Pedagogy Lab. Morris and Stommel critique the use of the digital class discussion forums. They raise concern with critical pedagogy, a philosophy of progressive teaching which promotes the development of critical thinking in the student, particularly as it applies to technology impeding upon learning progression. They argue against constricting LMS forums while making a suggestive embrace of open forum solutions.

Morris and Stommel pack this article with plenty of supporting information. These supporting references provide a healthy amount of background information. Examples provided certainly reflect an understanding of both the student and teachers’ experiences with LMS forums. While the article captures the essence of issues surrounding online forums, the conclusion seemed lacking. They touch on the key points and then they seemingly brush beyond them to settle on web “openness” for a potential answer. A deeper dive into the ‘key’ instances may be needed, where such academic online engagements are flourishing by having the right kind of teacher and right kind of students. While I connected with some of the examples presented, the concussion felt lacking if not barely settled upon.

Parry, R. (2014). *Episteme and Techne* (E. N. Zalta, Ed.). Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy;

Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/episteme-techne/>

Richard Parry reflects to the readers historical philosophers’ perspectives and debates regarding the understanding of techne and episteme. Parry takes us from one philosopher to another building the contrasting views which shapes the debate between “practice” and “knowledge.” Parry’s journey demonstrates a philosophical shifting value over the tangible, the intangible epistemic ponderings, and even complacency over one another. Parry wants us to understand that just because we could envision and create technological wonders, that does not mean we have the skill to wield it. When we wield a technology and put it into action, we gain a skill and thus gain a deeper understanding of that technology.

The reading of this material was dense in nature, yet it was enlightening to understand that it is within our human nature to ponder our technological advancements, motives behind their creation, and our use of these technologies. Parry demonstrates very clearly the questions we ponder today, ‘which revolve around technology, knowledge of creating technology, and knowledge gained from experiences with the technology’, are really not much different than those asked from our oldest known philosophers. I would recommend reading this article more than once. Without knowledge we cannot create technology. Without the technology, we may not obtain a masterful understanding of the knowledge.

Stommel, J. (2020, March 20). *The Human Work of Higher Education Pedagogy*. Hybrid

Pedagogy. <https://hybridpedagogy.org/the-human-work-of-higher-education-pedagogy/>

Jesse Stommel is the Executive Director of Hybrid Pedagogy and Co-founder of Digital Pedagogy Lab. Stommel originally published the article in the Winter issue of AAUP’s Academe as “The Social Mission of Higher Education”. This piece anchors back to another article, “Chronicle of Higher Education”, which he co-authored with Sara Goldrick-Rab. In this article Stommel presents the lack of preparedness which supports many teachers’ experiences and then argues against the use of instructional scaffolding pedagogical methods. Stommel argues for flexibility and support for more inclusive and adaptive approaches. Then Stommel lays out a list of necessary best practices to be applied.

Stommel’s thoughts flow well in this article with much more consistency and directness than some of his other works. Stommel makes a case for the individually tailored educational experiences, which I find to be inspiring yet very utopic but not unachievable in all learning situations. However, I found myself in alignment with empowering and supporting the freedoms which should be awarded to teaching as well as providing flexibility in understanding while connecting with students and their learning journeys. Due to the lack of supporting data or links, as we’ve seen in Stommel’s other writings, I falter and find myself at odds with the utopic as it pertains particularly to the large lecture courses containing hundreds of undergrad students.

Winner, L. (1993). Upon Opening the Black Box and Finding It Empty: Social Constructivism

and the Philosophy of Technology. *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, *18*(3), 362–378. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/689726>

Langdon Winner is the Thomas Phelan Chair of Humanities and Social Sciences in the Department of Science and Technology Studies at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute of Troy, New York. In this peer reviewed article Winner is really speaking out to the philosophers who marvel at our technological achievements, yet we can easily relate to questions and comments derived from this article. Winner introduces concepts of social constructivism, which consist of a variety of cognitive constructivism which places emphasis on the collaborative aspects of learning. Winner brings to debate the usefulness of technoscience within human affairs and observes society’s historical and contemporary engagement and perceptional use of technology. Winner suggests that to fully understand the technology’s pros or cons, we must engage with and study how the technology is being utilized.

Winner’s article is dense and not all of my summary will capture all aspects of his writing. While reading his (his was not the only) article I felt a strong sense of Winner’s Marxist influence, which conflicts with my societal truths. However, I do believe Winner is correct to call to question what is in the “black boxes”. Why should the intentions of technology, of which we so idolize in our modern society, be hidden? Furthermore, why shouldn’t we, regardless of our role as a philosopher, technocrat, politician, or even a simpleton, be allowed to fully understand that technology which we use?

Xin, C., & Feenberg, A. (2006). Pedagogy in Cyberspace: The Dynamics of Online Discourse.

*Journal of Distance Education*, *21*(2), 1–25. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ807801.pdf>

Cindy Xin is a Teacher and an Educational Consultant at Simon Fraser University located in Vancouver; and Andrew Feenberg sits on the Canadian Research Chair in the Philosophy of Technology in the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University located in Vancouver. Together they have written a peer reviewed article which provides some understanding around online educational forums and its pedagogy. Xin and Feenberg define the significant differences between face-to-face classroom discussions and online discussions. They identify four pedagogically significant layers of online educational discourse. Finally, they demonstrate how a moderated online discussion can indeed be effective at producing collaborative cognitive learning.

Xin and Feenberg’s article on the dynamics of online discourse is a dense red. However, the topic is relatable and should be understood as it pertains to today’s use of online forums and the struggles to make these virtual spaces as viable as face-to-face classrooms. I found this article to be helpful in further understanding that once again we humans may have created a usable technology of communication marvel, but we’re still learning to use the tool properly. One may elaborate on this to mean we are gaining more knowledge by use of technology rather than to omit or dismiss it. Ultimately my takeaway is one of positive nature, that we (humans) are working on ethical uses of our technological creations and proving how we use the tool is what matters.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Parry’s journey among philosophers builds contrasting views which shapes the debate between “practice” and “knowledge.” Parry is coupled nicely when followed up by Winner calling to question the construct of the “black boxes” and the mysteries within them. Feenberg’s bricks of text often extrapolates technological understandings to find educational solutions within applied science to leverage technologies for the better. This is evident as Xin and Feenberg defined significant differences between face-to-face classroom discussions and online discussions and demonstrate how a moderated online discussion can indeed be effective at producing collaborative cognitive learning. Stommel often champions adapting technology to meet the educational needs of tailored educational experiences.

Embracing, modifying, and even disengaging aspects of educational technologies are all acceptable when you have gained understanding of them. The subjects brought into the light by each of these authors all have a love for the preservation of the wellbeing of humanity, which drives their inquiries around the usefulness of technologies. When we create extensions of ourselves or allow other humans to make digital constructs to aid our own hubris, we should try to understand the intentions behind the technology and then gain understanding how to leverage it for education. As educators and technologists, we have great power. *“With great power comes great responsibility.”* A great message from the Spiderman movie which, to me, represents understanding. Without understanding new learning opportunities may not exist.