



The War on Learning: Gaining Ground in the Digital University (MIT Press)

By Elizabeth Losh

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Behind the lectern stands the professor, deploying course management systems, online quizzes, wireless clickers, PowerPoint slides, podcasts, and plagiarism-detection software. In the seats are the students, armed with smartphones, laptops, tablets, music players, and social networking. Although these two forces seem poised to do battle with each other, they are really both taking part in a war on learning itself. In this book, Elizabeth Losh examines current efforts to "reform" higher education by applying technological solutions to problems in teaching and learning. She finds that many of these initiatives fail because they treat education as a product rather than a process. Highly touted schemes -- video games for the classroom, for example, or the distribution of iPads -- let students down because they promote consumption rather than intellectual development. Losh analyzes recent trends in postsecondary education and the rhetoric around them, often drawing on first-person accounts. In an effort to identify educational technologies that might actually work, she looks at strategies including MOOCs (massive open online courses), the gamification of subject matter, remix pedagogy, video lectures (from Randy Pausch to "the Baked Professor"), and educational virtual worlds. Finally, Losh outlines six basic principles of digital learning and describes several successful university-based initiatives. Her book will be essential reading for campus decision makers -- and for anyone who cares about education and technology.

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Editorial Review

Review

Elizabeth Losh's *The War on Learning* is the rare book that avoids the Scylla and Charybdis of writing on technology and writing on education. We hear too much that technology will save us or damn us, that education is wonderful or terrible. For Losh, learning is a process, not a product--and so is technology, and so are the institutions of education. She derives as many lessons from the failures as the successes and, more importantly, is able to show us how we can all learn from the most experimental, creative, daring, and sometimes ill-fated attempts to do better, to strive higher, to be bolder. In short, Losh as theorist, critic, and practitioner exemplifies the best methods of learning. If there is a war on learning, I want to be on Losh's side. She's a winner.

(Cathy N. Davidson, John Hope Franklin Humanities Institute Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies, Duke University; Cofounder, HASTAC (hastac.org); and author of *Now You See It: How the Brain Science of Attention Will Transform the Way We Live, Work, and Learn*)

Elizabeth Losh's *The War on Learning* makes an invaluable intervention into current debates about the role of digital media in higher education by adopting an approach that is at once hopeful and skeptical, that rejects technological euphoria and moral panic alike, that challenges the promises made by corporate vendors but also those made by educational reformers, and that insists that core principles of inclusion and mutual respect should govern the relations between faculty and students.

(Henry Jenkins, Provost's Professor of Communication, Journalism, Cinematic Arts, and Education, University of Southern California; and coeditor of *Reading in a Participatory Culture: Remixing Moby-Dick in the English Classroom*)

As an entomologist uncovers creatures previously hidden underfoot, Elizabeth Losh offers a scrupulous and bracing account of the tumult facing contemporary education by uncovering the unfamiliar forces that inhabit it. Parents, students, and teachers alike won't see higher education in the same way once they've caught a glimpse of the critters pinned to these pages.

(Ian Bogost, Ivan Allen College Distinguished Chair in Media Studies, Georgia Institute of Technology)

This is an essential book that takes seriously all the furious pressures on college teachers and students to play with shiny new toys rather than immerse themselves in the projects of mutually teaching and learning. Losh gets to the heart of all the nonsense that digital utopians and dystopians have been shoveling at us for decades. It's a must-read for educators, administrators, and students.

(Siva Vaidhyanathan, author of *The Googlization of Everything (And Why We Should Worry)*)

About the Author

Elizabeth Losh directs the Culture, Art, and Technology Program at Sixth College at the University of

California, San Diego. She is the author of *Virtualpolitik: An Electronic History of Government Media-Making in a Time of War, Scandal, Disaster, Miscommunication, and Mistakes* (MIT Press) and the coauthor of *Understanding Rhetoric: A Graphic Guide to Writing*.

Users Review

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