

Metaphors of Ed Tech

Martin Weller

Outline

- [A narrative detour]
- The role of metaphors
- Why in ed tech?
- The online pivot
- Some examples
- The danger of metaphors
- Conclusions

About me

- Prof in Institute of Educational Technology
- Director GO-GN
- Chair Open Programme
- @mweller
- Blog.edtechie.net



25 YEARS OF ED TECH



25 Years of Ed Tech

[Narrative detour]

Metaphor & Narrative

- McCloskey (2005) - two dominant ways by which people come to understand a topic
- Metaphor or through narrative (or models and histories)
- Different fields tend to be dominated by one mode

- McCloskey, D. N. (2005). Storytelling in economics. In *Narrative in culture* (pp. 21-38). Routledge.



Photo by [Etienne Girardet](#) on [Unsplash](#)

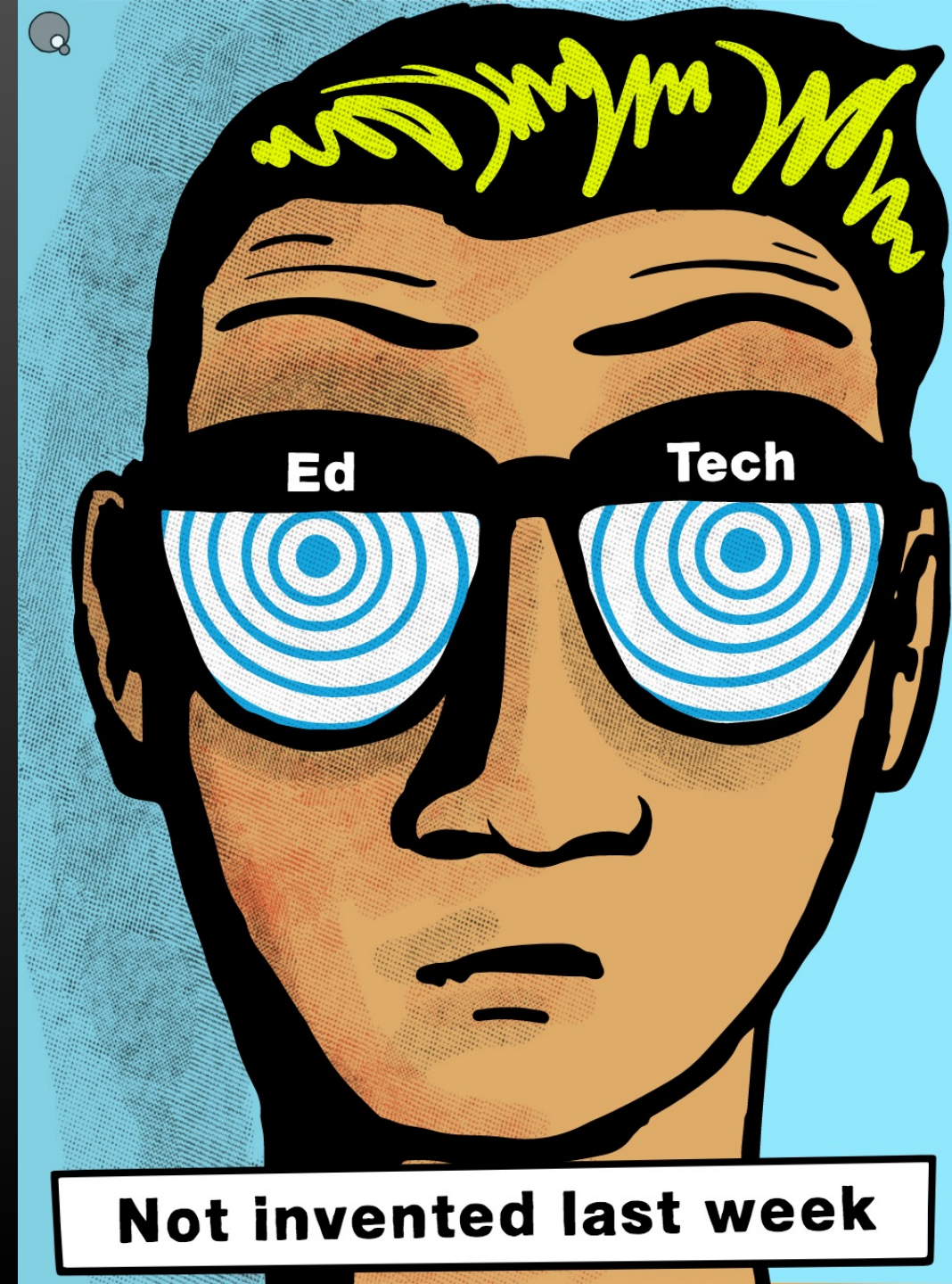
25 Years book

- 25 Years of Ed Tech – (<https://www.aupress.ca/books/120290-25-years-of-ed-tech/>)
- Athabasca University Press
- Openly licensed
- Audiobook and podcast (<https://25years.opened.ca/>)
- Metaphors – June 2022



Approach

- ALT's 25th year
- Choose a tech every year from 1994
- Based on my experience
- When they became significant (not invented)
- <http://blog.edtechie.net/category/25yearsdedtech/>



Why write this book?

- To provide a basis for shared understanding and common knowledge
- To demonstrate a history of innovation in higher education.
- To draw out themes and lessons
- To highlight the necessity of a critical approach
- To provide an alternative historical narrative to the year zero, disruption based one



Historical amnesia

YEAR ZERO



BRYAN MITCHELL

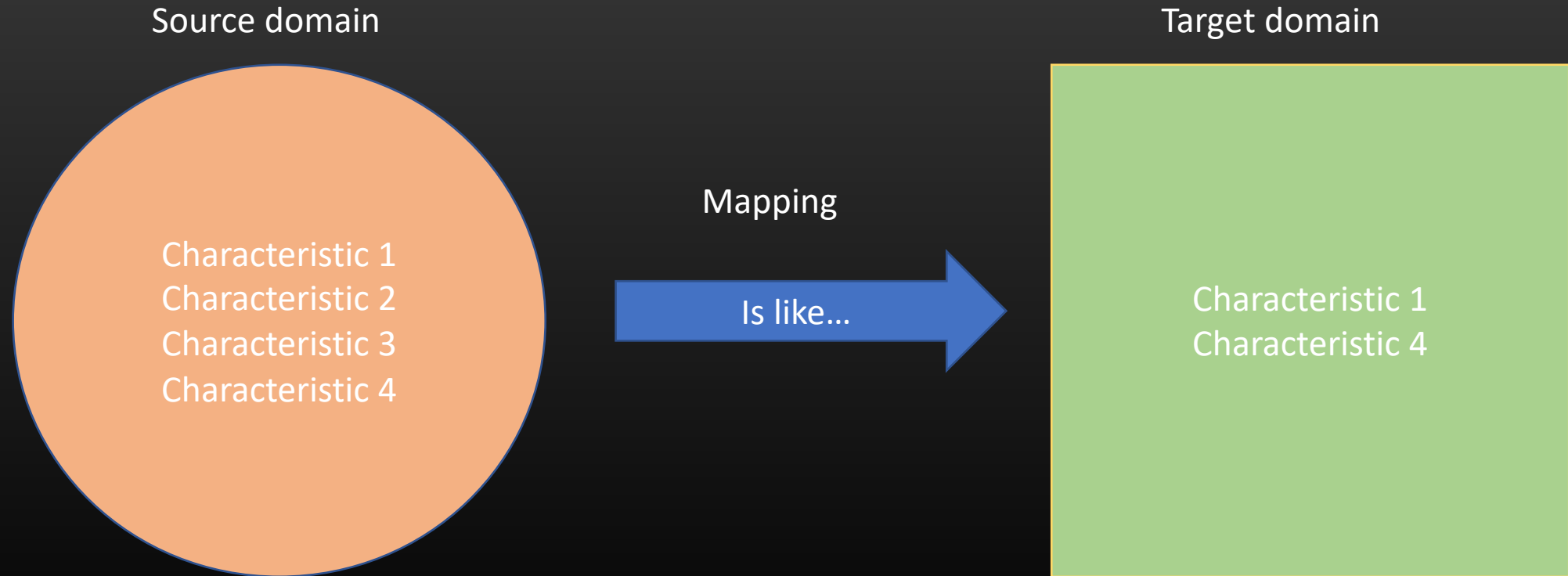
The role of Metaphors

- Our ordinary conceptual system... is fundamentally metaphorical in nature (Lakoff and Johnson 1980)
- Sfarid - metaphors are “the most primitive, most elusive, and yet amazingly informative objects of analysis.”
- Shape our language and thinking in fundamental ways but often remain hidden until coaxed into view.
- Not just for the poets...

- Lakoff G & Johnson M (1980) Metaphors we live by. University of Chicago Press
- Sfarid, A. (1998). On two metaphors for learning and the dangers of choosing just one. Educational Researcher, 27(2), 4–13.



How metaphors work



Metaphors have power

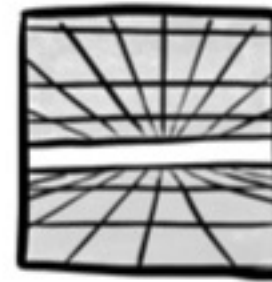
- Mapping from source to target domain
 - Generative metaphor – dialogue between both elements
 - Botha (2009) - “in a metaphor an interaction takes place between two semantic fields. This leads to the creation of a novel meaning.”
 - Metaphor shapes solution – crime as disease or monster (Thibodeau, McClelland and Boroditsky 2009)
-
- Thibodeau, P., McClelland, J. L., & Boroditsky, L. (2009). When a bad metaphor may not be a victimless crime: The role of metaphor in social policy. In *Proceedings of the 31st Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society* (Vol. 29, pp. 809–814). Cognitive Science Society.
 - Botha, E. (2009). Why metaphor matters in education. *South African Journal of Education*, 29(4).



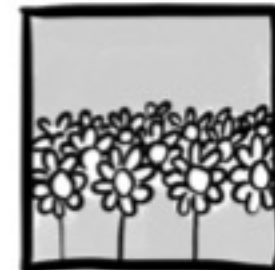
Photo by [Claudia Soraya](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Metaphors in ed tech

- Understanding - Metaphors provide a useful means of understanding a new field.
- Defence - Use of metaphor shapes how ed tech is deployed.
- Fun - Metaphor allows us to reason in a creative manner about technology



METAPHORS of Ed Tech



Metaphor Generator

How is the popular Canadian dish poutine an analogy for LMS?

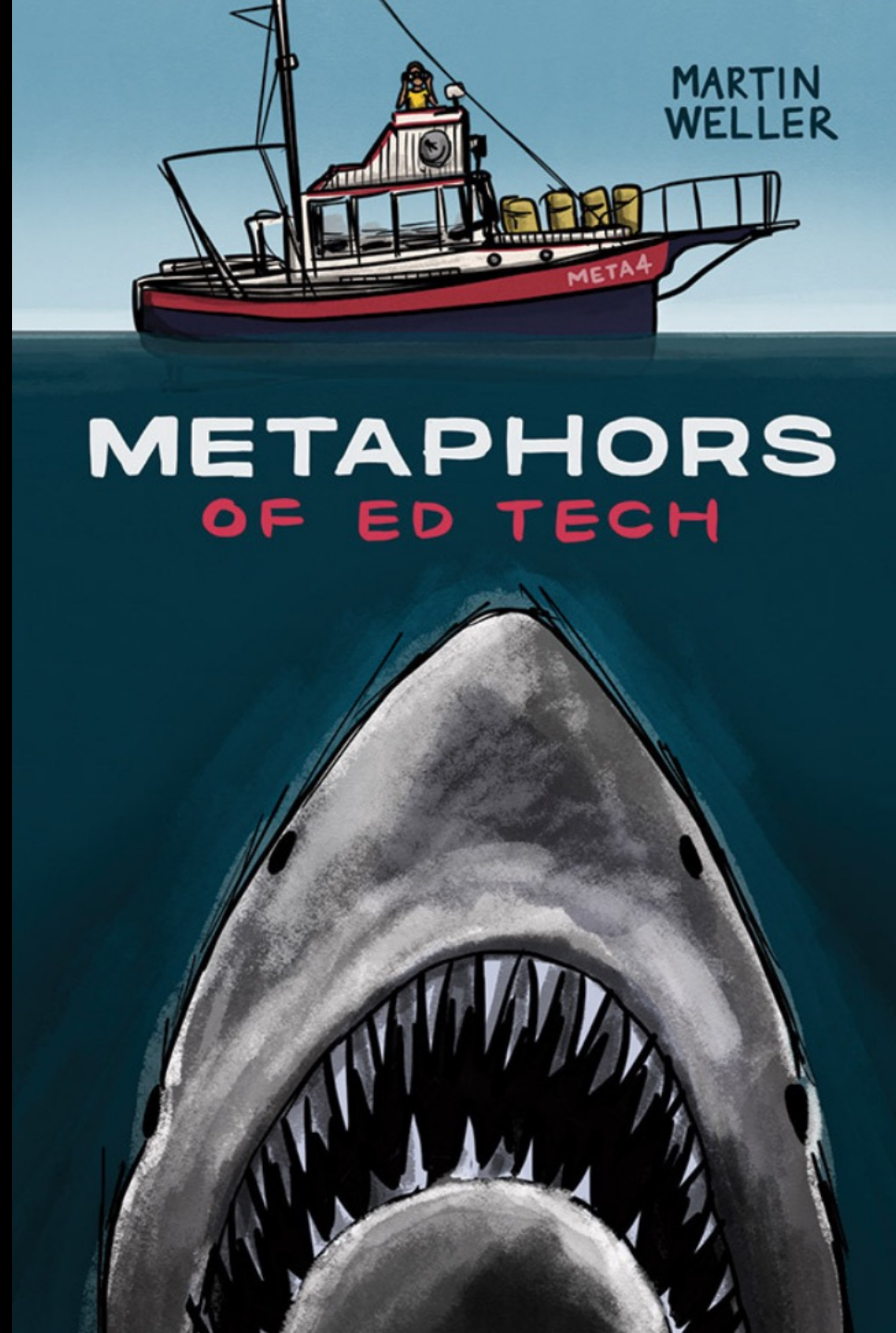
Gimme Another

Tello carrying a big stick - photo by Martin Weller, CC-BY
quick code by @cogdog made for @edtechie • available for forking

- Go to <http://metaphor.edtechie.net/>
- Get a metaphor you like
- Post it in the chat
- (Thanks to @cogdog)

Metaphors of Ed Tech

- Athabasca University Press
- Openly licensed
- <https://www.aupress.ca/books/120309-metaphors-of-ed-tech/>



Available now
to read and
download free.



 AU PRESS



The online pivot

- Nearly all education shifted online
 - Ed Tech moved central stage
 - Revealed ignorance about online ed
 - Eg: 'The main reason why the "distance learning revolution" didn't replace the traditional model is that online learning just isn't as good.' (Laporte and Cassuto 2020)
 - Lecture deficit model
 - Reveals lack of alternative models
-
- Laporte, C., & Cassuto, L. (2020, April 16). How to responsibly reopen colleges in the fall. *Inside Higher Ed*.
<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2020/04/16/practical-advice-how-colleges-can-responsibly-reopen-fall-opinion>

Williamson Wants Student Fees Cut
Universities Not Returning To Face-To-Face



Universities are warned to return to in-person teaching after Covid lockdown ends or face fines of up to £500,000

- There will be no restrictions on continuation of face-to-face teaching from July 19
- Office for Students is monitoring the quality of teaching at universities
- Undergraduates are still paying £9,250 a year despite learning remotely

By [SARAH HARRIS](#) and [CLAIRE ELLICOTT FOR THE DAILY MAIL](#)

PUBLISHED: 23:19, 6 July 2021 | **UPDATED:** 23:19, 6 July 2021

Universities refuse to end online lessons

- ▶ Students suffer as official advice ignored
- ▶ Unions demand distancing and double jobs

Sian Griffiths Education Editor

Top universities have refused to bring back full face-to-face teach-



Liverpool University over threatened job cuts.

Cambridge said most teaching would be in person, but that some

F2F is the only way!

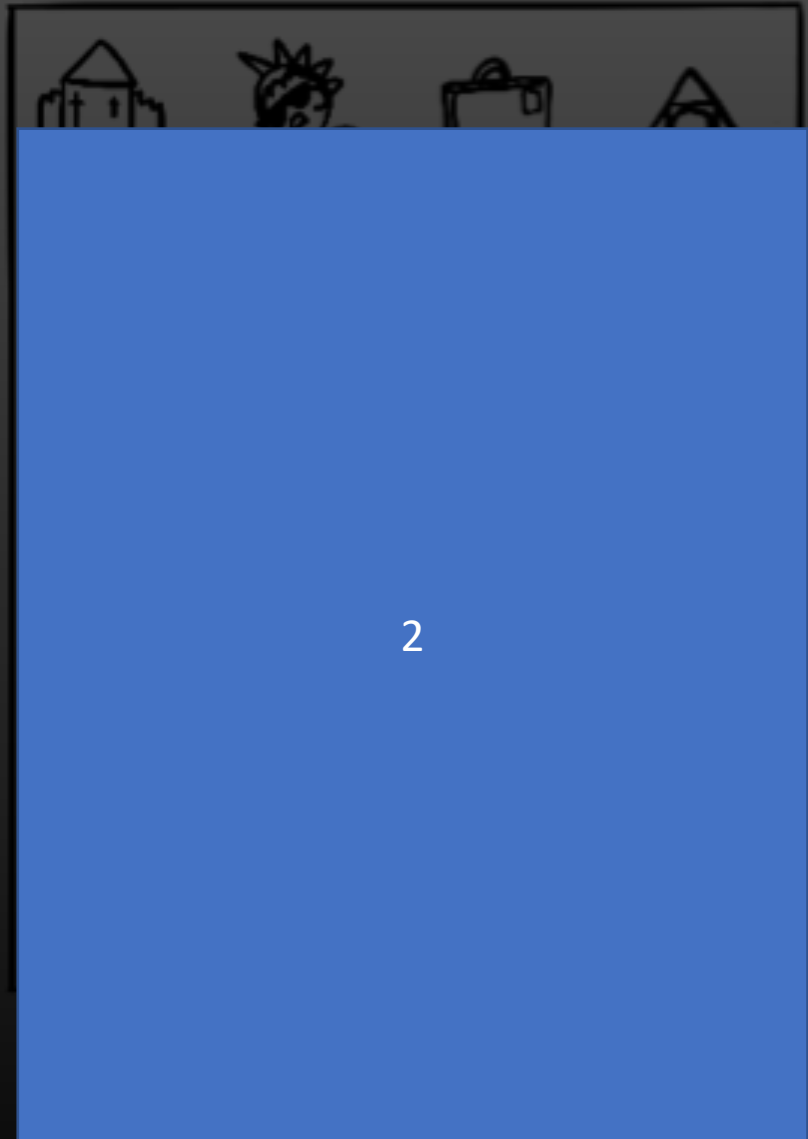


Architecture & learning

- Architecture does a lot of learning design work
- Organisation
- Investment
- Ego?
- Online architecture requires as much effort
- But it's different!

A wide range of metaphors





Randomiser!

1. [VAR & Learning Analytics](#)
2. [Cellini's Perseus](#)
3. [The VLE is a...](#)
4. [Educator as DJ](#)
5. [Rebecca Riots and Open Access](#)
6. [Digital Mudlarking](#)
7. [Uber for education](#)
8. [Jaws and the online pivot](#)



VAR and learning analytics

- Video Assisted Referee
- Inevitable and desired implementation of tech
- Minute measurements to messy human enterprise
- Relocates controversy
- Doesn't fix problems
- Undermines humans
- LA – needs to be implemented sympathetically

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Cellini's Perseus

- An example of a new technique allowing new creation
- Medusa often a symbol of misogyny
- New approaches can replicate existing power structures
- Open source communities often male dominated
- Open labour often unrewarded
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The VLE is a...

- Straitjacket –VLE is seen as constraining the educator
- Behemoth - constraints arise from the nature of VLE 'industry' and associated process
- Digital Carpark –VLE is characterised as a repository or content-dump
- Safe Space –VLEs provide a supportive environment, such as 'security blanket'
- Smorgasbord –VLEs offer a wide variety of choice in terms of functionality
- Pathfinder –VLEs act as a pioneer for further technology and practices, an example being Trojan Horse metaphors.

• Farrelly, T., Costello, E., & Donlon, E. (2020). VLEs: A metaphorical history from sharks to limpets. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*, 2020(1).

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Educator as DJ

- Finds useful segments
- Samples elements
- Remixes into something new
- Adds human element to music
- Educator in a content abundant network?
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The Rebecca Riots



- Protests and disturbances in southwest Wales in the period 1839–1844
- Centred on toll gates, where anyone passing by had to pay a toll to use the road
- Symbolic of other grievances
- Academic publishing
- Greedy Toll owners, absent & detached = publishers?
- Farmers in worsening context = academics?
- SciHub, #ICanHazPDF, Open access alternatives
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Digital mudlarking

- Ed tech is an unclear field/discipline
- People enter it from different areas
- Rapid changes
- Historical amnesia
- Akin to mudlarking
- Tides leave behind artefacts
- Need to recognize and salvage good stuff before next tide
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Uber for education

- Or Netflix for learning. Or AirBnB for education...
- Tied up with unbundling
- Ignore usually awful labor practices/business models
- Ignore why X is NOT like education:
 - Requires a long-time frame
 - It is very diverse, both geographically and by discipline
 - Being licensed to offer formal credit for learning is a complex highly regulated process.
 - Meno's paradox
 - Learning is often a social activity
 - Education is already engaging with online learning and mobile delivery
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JAWS



Jaws and the online pivot

- The shark is the virus - Exposes existing frailties:
- “Those beaches will be open on the 4th July”
- Brody = learners; Hooper = educators; Quint = commerce
- Who will return from the fishing trip?
- “Just when you thought it was safe to go back to campus...”
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Give me your
best/worst ed
tech
metaphor!

Dangers of metaphors

- Powerful
- Often unnoticed
- Can exclude
- Imperfect
- Could find opposite one



DANGER
DO NOT ENTER

Photo by [Raúl Nájera](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Creativity & playfulness

- Ed tech is bound in spreadsheets and roadmaps
- Room for creative thinking also
- Improves critical thinking
- Humanises our relationship with tech
- Encourages discussion

- So, alongside the rollout plan and engagement, run metaphor workshops?



Links n stuff

- Book - <https://www.aupress.ca/books/120309-metaphors-of-ed-tech/>
- Shop - <https://metaphors-of-ed-tech.myspreadshop.co.uk/>
- 25 Years remixer - <https://remixer.visualthinkery.com/a/xrayspecs>
- Metaphor Generator - <http://metaphor.edtechie.net/>
- 25 Years audiobook/podcast - <https://25years.opened.ca/>





METAPHORS OF ED TECH

MARTIN WELLER

Thankyou!

- What role of metaphor is most relevant for you? (Understanding/Defence/Creativity)
- How might you use metaphor in your practice?