

the dilemmas of digital education: looking for the wider picture

// 27. April 2022 // @neil_schwyn

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Problematising digital education

We need to be **nuanced**

We need to be **dis-interested**

We need to **engage with hype** and bad ideas

We need to **'think otherwise'**

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Contention#1. Is there less to be worried about than we might fear?

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Contention#1. Is there less to be worried about than we might fear?

Pedagogical and didactic dilemmas

- * How does digitization affect teachers' didactic scope for acting?
- * How can we ensure reflective didactic practice and meaningful collaboration?
- * How can we overcome the distance that occurs online between teachers and students?
- * What does it mean when our relationships with ourselves and others are increasingly controlled by algorithms?
- * How can we see institutions and teaching in new ways through 'poetic' institutional practice and 'more-than-human' educational practice?
- * What is digitally-born pedagogy?

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Vincent F. Hendricks keynote - 15:00-15:45

- * Are we losing our autonomy and authority as independent thinkers?
- * How is digital education supporting our capacity for informed thought, decision and action?
- * Does EdTech support the development of 'decent human beings'?

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Aden van Noppen
(2021). Creating
Technology Worthy
of the Human Spirit.
*Journal of Social
Computing*, 2(4),
309-322.

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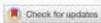
Creating education technology worthy of the human spirit?

- * Digital education that is sensitive toward the vulnerabilities of learning (as well as the vulnerabilities of teaching) ... such as the anxiety and discomfort of 'not-knowing', or the perceived shame of being seen to publicly fail
- * Digital education that evokes feelings of wonder and the joy of discovery, as well as the complex feelings when one begins to feel a connection to something larger than oneself
- * Digital education that is sensitive toward the boredom, frustration, indignation and anger that can arise from institutional coercion

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“There is a danger we get too robotic”: an investigation of institutional data logics within secondary schools

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ABSTRACT
This article examines digital data use within three Australian secondary schools, drawing on in-depth interviews with 50 school staff to explore tensions between: (i) established logics of “data-driven” schooling; and (ii) emerging “datafied” practices associated with digital systems, platforms and devices. Using sociological theorisation of institutional logics, the article examines how promises of digital “dataism” are thwarted by the entrenched temporal organisation of schooling, and teacher-centred understandings of students as coerced subjects. As such, prevailing logics of state bureaucracy and professionalism combine in ways that temper the prospect of individualism, self-regulation, continuous feedback, and other implicit promises of digital data. The paper considers the extent to which school data logics can endure amid the increased digitisation of K-12 education.

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Schools; digital; data; organisational logics

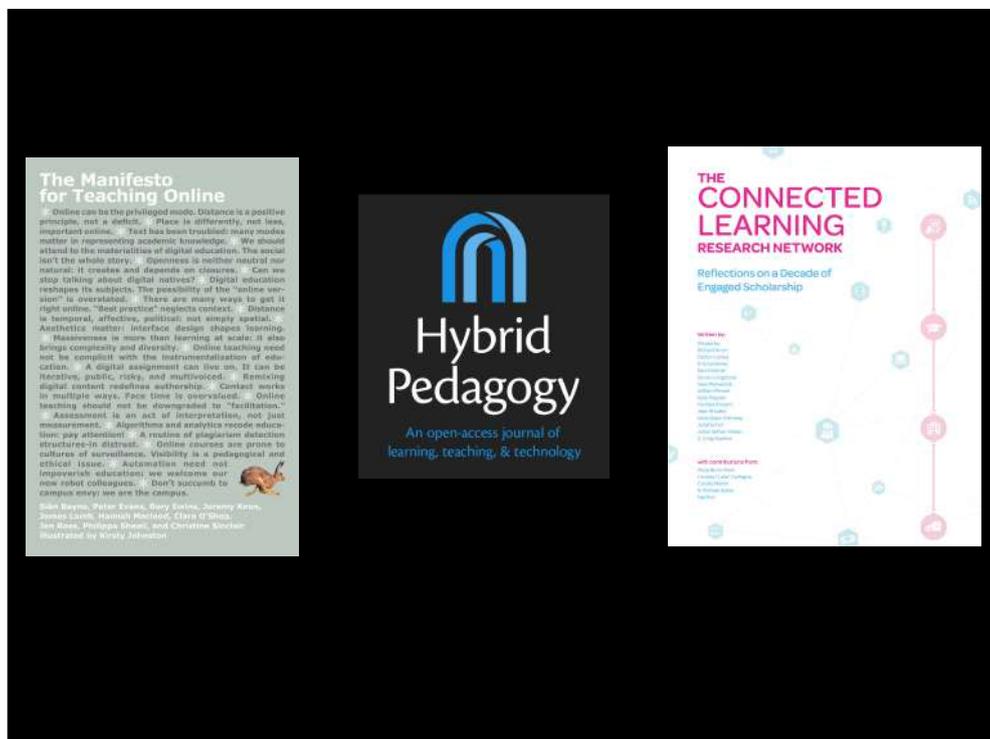
Introduction
This article addresses the pressing question of how schools make use of “data”. In particular, it documents an emerging dialectic between: (i) established logics of “data-driven” schooling; and (ii) emerging forms of school “datafication” associated with digital

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Getting-by ... making-do ... working-around ...

- * Institutional logics
- * The 'grammars of schooling'
- * Teachers as 'street-level bureaucrats' (Lipsky 1989) ... 'street-level algorithms' (Ali Alkhatib 2019)
- * 'School-savvy' students

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Contention#2. Is there more to be worried about than we might fear?

11



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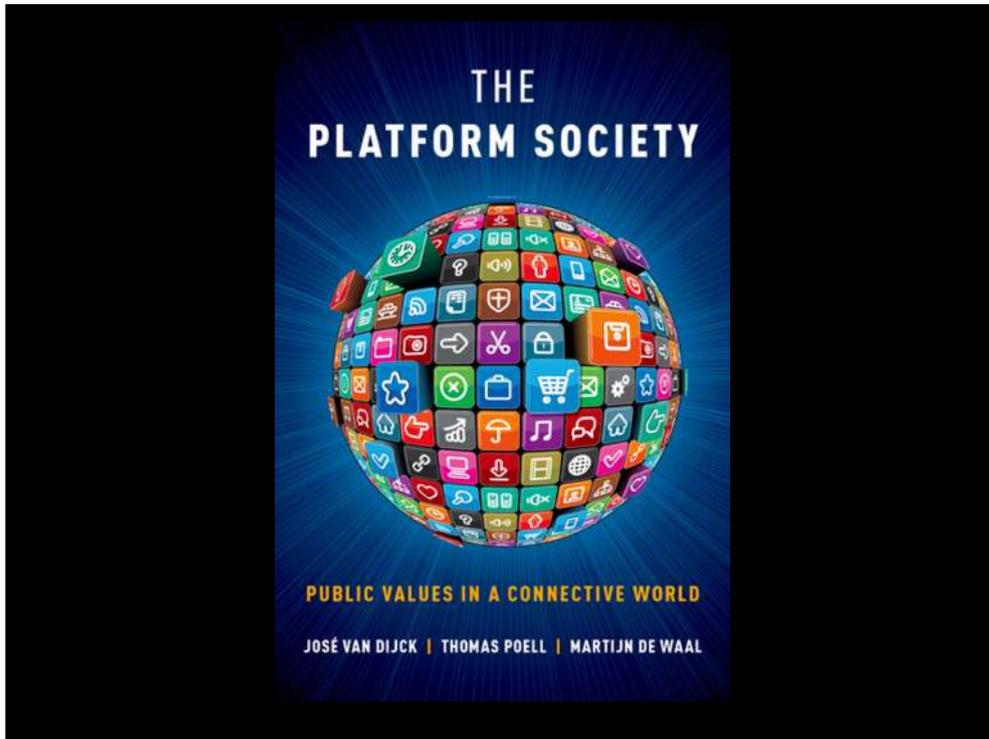


People often ask me how the platformization of education is different from educational technology in general. The big difference is that the center of coordination changes. We've moved from technology in classrooms to classrooms in technology. [#edtech](#)

5:05 PM · Apr 1, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

37 Retweets **11** Quote Tweets **127** Likes

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Digital education logics

Education is a calculated, controllable system that can be run efficiently and effectively

Students and teachers are individual 'users' that operate wholly within a digital ecosystem.

Educational undertakings are scalable and/or can be 'plugged in' on a modular basis

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Digital education harms

Forms of digital education that ...

- ... presume the provision of education as a product in an online marketplace - **consumed 'as a service'**
- ... are wedded to the broader **data economy** and 'surveillance capitalism'
- ... are **profoundly unfair** - ignoring structural inequalities and perpetuating existing disadvantage
- ... suffer from a **lack of accountability & transparency**
- ... amplify social **bias**
- ... lead to creeping forms of '**soft surveillance**'
- ... lead to a **dehumanisation** of education
- ... lead to a **deskilling** of education professionals

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Digital education tensions

Education is **not** a calculated, controllable system that can be run efficiently and effectively

Students and teachers are **not** individual 'users' that operate wholly within a digital ecosystem.

Educational under-takings are **not** scalable and/or can **not** be 'plugged in' on a modular basis

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Digital education tensions

Education is not a calculated, controllable system that can be run efficiently and effectively

Students and teachers are not individual 'users' that operate wholly within a digital ecosystem.

Educational under-takings are not scalable and/or can not be 'plugged in' on a modular basis

The technology does not work in the manner that is promised

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“one believes that they do, and acts on that belief”

(Adam Greenfield 2018)

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Why do we continue to talk about digital education as if it is capable of working in the ways that those who are selling it to us would like us to believe?

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So, who needs to take/be given responsibility?

- **The education community**
- **Teaching unions**
- **Regulators**
- **Government/state**
- **Public**
- **Big Tech**
- **Small tech**

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Concluding challenge

How can educators work to raise a collective consciousness of these issues, develop a sense of solidarity and resistance, and work toward establishing alternate forms of digital education that are based around different sets of values and agendas?

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Some concluding thoughts

The values, norms and understandings that underpin currently dominant forms of digital education are fundamentally at odds with the values, norms and understanding that underpin what might be termed 'traditional education'

The most influential and insidious digital technologies in education over the next few years are likely to be technologies that are 'used on' teachers and students, rather than 'used by' teachers and students

Digital education exacerbates a number of existing harms in education (structural inequalities, bias, surveillance, dehumanisation). It also introduces new harms (environmental, exploitation of global-South labour)

Some of the most serious harms arising from digital education relate to the actual impacts of digital systems and applications not working in the ways in which they supposed to.

These are not wholly new dilemmas ... so perhaps do not require wholly new responses

We should not be opposed to the idea of digital education ... but we should certainly be opposed to the industry of digital education

These dilemmas are not solely a matter of better tech design ... fairer/humane forms of digital education will stem from fairer/humane education systems, which themselves will stem from fairer/humane societies

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