The techification of education through Ontario's virtual school leadership

September 29, 2022

By Ruth Nielsen, PhD Candidate

Western Education

Land Acknowledgement

Traditional Territories of the

- Anishinaabek
- Haudenosaunee
- Lūnaapéewak
- Chonnonton

What is techification?

Hendrikse et al. (2022) define the "Big Techification of Everything" as

- "a scenario whereby Big Tech not only comes to rewire economy and society, but also enmeshes itself evermore with the state, effectively becoming the sun in the new socio-technical solar system" (p.60)

Big Tech

- Alphabet/Google

- Apple

- Amazon

- Facebook/Meta

- Microsoft

- Alibaba

- Tencent

Birch & Bronson, 2022; Fernandez et al., 2020; Foroohar, 2019; Hendrikse et al., 2022

It was not a surprise to hear of Big Tech from Ontario virtual school principals.

It was a surprise to learn the extent & inequitable use of Big Tech for education.

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Methods & Participants

- Qualitative interviews

- 14 principals

- Experience in virtual schools

- Ontario, Canada

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Virtual schools

- Publicly funded

- Synchronous learning

- Entirely online

- Opened during pandemic

- Some have become permanent

How is Big Tech used?

Google Suite as a virtual learning platform

> I didn't mandate D2L […] because many of them are not comfortable, so they're using the Google classroom […] we had **too many teachers that were learning too quickly** and were not comfortable.

How is Big Tech used?

Chromebooks as board-provided devices

> We provide **anyone who wants or needs, anyone who asks,** with a Chromebook, a headset, and a mic. No questions asked about background or need, it's just a matter of right.

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How is Big Tech used?

Hāpara used to monitor students

> A teacher can see, when Hāpara Highlights is on, that a student is not doing their work when they're on a Board issued Chromebook. So **clearly, those are the kids that aren't engaged.**

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So What?

Techification of Education

- Digital literacy becomes Google literacy

- School data is commodified

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So What?

Exacerbating educational inequity

- Hāpara more likely to monitor BIPOC, low SES, or at risk students

- These students will be held to a higher standard than their peers

Escueta et al., 2022

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Recommendations

- Provide enhanced training on board-supported programming

- Institute 1:1 device programs for all students

- Apply monitoring software equally to all students, if at all

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Thank you

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