The global pandemic and the legitimisation of pervasive EdTech: Critical perspectives on educational technology use in Higher Education

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Abstract

Whilst technology may have been the 'saviour' of Higher Education (HE) from some of the immediate logistical and enforced geographical challenges caused by the global pandemic, there are important questions to be asked of the longer-term implications of educational technology in relation to its mounting legitimacy within HE. The opportunistic dialogue that emerged in response to the pandemic has imbued HE debate with notions of the pandemic as a catalyst for change and as an opportunity for transformation. This dialogue has brought about a revisioning of HE - its function, its reach, its purpose – with technology as the determinant of this change. As this paper will describe, the pandemic has acted to justify and legitimise the technological pervasion of an already technology-centric HE landscape, culminating in unprecedented levels of investment into a new paradigm of data-driven technology to serve the needs of its imagined future. As this paper highlights, empowered by the apparent success of technology's deliverance in the face of the pandemic, this new technological paradigm is entrenched in notions of transformatory potential, libertarianism, and market opportunity. Consonant with the conference themes and aligned with the think piece *Higher Education industry expansion: commodification versus assetization* (Komljenovic, 2021), the aim of this paper is to reposition and critically frame discussions of educational technology. Whereas existing research has sought to problematise the impact and effects of educational technology, this paper introduces a new angle of critique, one that critically explores the role of dialogue, rhetoric, and discourse in the act of defining and legitimising the future role that educational technology plays in HE. By applying a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to key sector-orientated literature published in response to the pandemic, this paper describes how the emergent dialogue of the pandemic has acted to catalyse and legitimise a new paradigm of technocentricism that grants countenance to, and is mediatory of, neoliberal, libertarian, and consumerist ideologies. This paper therefore introduces a new angle of critique in that it explores the discursive characterisation of educational technology. By positioning educational technology in a critical and uniquely political light, this paper offers a much-needed critical lens through which to view this new era of technological pervasion.

Keywords

EdTech, Critical Theory, Discourse Analysis, Legitimacy, Datafication

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