Review of the book: Selwyn, N. (2016) Is Technology Good For Education?, Polity. ISBN: 978-0-7456-9646-1, 160 pages.

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In his recently published book *Is Technology Good For Education?* Professor Neil Selwyn encourages us to think critically about the trend of a wide adoption of technology in education and to consider, in a dispassionate manner, the unintended consequences of digital education. He calls for more 'grown-up debates to take place around the complexities and contradictions of technology and education' (p.159) and challenges us to reflect on whether technology makes education more democratic, personalised, measurable and commercial.

Each chapter pushes critical analysis of digital education forward by unveiling what is new about latest technology innovations, and highlighting some of the underlying technology-focused agendas of technology producers. It is argued that the push for more technology in education and its adoption en masse in schools worldwide are 'not value-free extrapolations of neutral technological innovation'. Readers are repeatedly reminded to consider the wider agenda behind technology-driven initiatives and are presented with several examples illustrating the computational approach to digital education which is characterised by 'experimentation and learning through failure' (p.124) and by a lack of a sustainable business model. As a result, Selwyn argues, technology in education is dominated by markets, profit, commerce, rather than by pedagogy and theory. Moreover, its distribution is governed by a few individuals rather than the educational community. This 'is inevitably a reductive approach to what is an obviously complex and chaotic social situation' (p.128) and is unlikely to reduce social disadvantage.

The key issues and debates surrounding technology and education are summarised in four core chapters, focused on democracy, personalisation, measurement and commercialisation in digital education. In all four chapters, Selwyn points out the key trends, sketches their origins with reference to selected theories, historical and societal factors and key difficulties. The last chapter presents three "impossible sets of suggestions for the future": 1, to make technology and education an area of extensive and intensive state involvement; 2, to create a more participatory model of offering technology to schools and 3, to start a more honest, clear discussion of technology in public. The book does not aim to offer solutions or go into in-depth theoretical detail. The book's title *'Is technology good for education?'* invites a yes/no answer and in this respect, the book delivers what it says on the tin.

Written in a conversational style (although at times interrupted by academic expressions or quotes from academic literature), the books reads like a comprehensive blog on the topic of digital education. This reading experience is supported by the visual appearance of the book, with big quotes displayed in white colour on separate black pages. Arguments and

examples are referenced to blogging sites as well as academic literature and examples are contemporary and random rather than systematic. As such, the style and book's organisation contribute to an enjoyable, "light" read.

I was left unsure about whether the author deliberately made a choice to produce such a 'light' enjoyable read, and plans to publish an academic version of the same book, in which he would review the debate in detail from a research perspective. He has a forthcoming book on the subject titled *Education and technology: key issues and debates* due in 2017 from Bloomsbury, so a sequel to this book could easily be in order. Perhaps a future version of this book could address the following four key points:

First, the author's main argument could be strengthened with more references to research and academic literature. Few would disagree that discussions and decisions about technology in education should be driven by educators and those who actually use technology in the classrooms, rather than politicians and technology giants. Selwyn makes this same argument at several points in the book, in relation to various examples, including computing and the emergence of the computing curriculum in the North American and UK schools. A fuller account of the issue could dedicate space to the positive spin-offs computing engendered: for instance, the emphasis on 'making' rather than simply using digital technology and the encouragement of more aesthetically pleasing, simplified and varied programming languages, appealing to wider coding communities.

Second, a follow-up publication could extend, or replace, the "impossible propositions" that Selwyn outlines in the last chapter, with some solutions which are actually viable and possible. For instance, as an example of a different funding mechanism for technology in education, Selwyn suggests that technology could be funded by state investment banks and driven by public sector organisations, akin to the climate change technology. A critical reader would be quick to ask why are national and international policy issues omitted from this suggestion. If perennial problems such as assessment, feedback, gamification of high school curricula or the concept of 21st century skills are to be critically assessed and understood from a bigger picture perspective, then it is important to offer readers some realistic examples illustrating what might be possible in the future.

Third, a follow-up book could be more precise about its definitions and less repetitious about the main messages. As I write this review I note that my terms fluctuate, which reflects the book's loose use of key terms: technology, digital education, digital technology. It is not clear whether by 'education' the author means all kinds of education for all age groups and whether by 'technology' he means tablets and laptops or perhaps the Internet or perhaps some bigger wider categories. There is an obvious overlap of topics in the four core chapters: for example, personalised education is very closely linked to measurable, commercial and democratic ways of innovating education. As such, dividing the four concerns around digital education into four chapters introduces some unnecessary repetition across the chapters. It would be more efficient to point out how and why their joint influence affects digital education.

Fourth, a follow-up book could extend and elaborate the many negative examples of digital education. For instance, there are selected examples of how technology negatively impacts essay marking. What about mentioning a counter-example of universities which consciously decided to go against this movement? There is a sustained argument throughout the book that digital education marginalises the collective and common. What about the fantastic work being done in this area- for instance the digitally-mediated intergenerational community projects documented by Rachel Heydon in Canada? There are also some examples which seem as outright accusations, for instance: 'digital education is distinctly commercial in its origins, intentions and sustenance' (p.121)' or 'Innovations such as Coursera, Thiel Fellowships et al. could be seen as conforming to many of the core values of what was described earlier on in the chapter as Californian capitalism' (p.124). What about highlighting initiatives which aim to bridge the gap between schools and the technology sector?

While it is true that thus far, the democratic potential of digital technology has been rarely realised, equitable approaches to digital education are possible and there is a need to bring to fore positive examples to inspire the future. The inclusion of examples which would counteract the profit pursuit of a few technology giants could inspire readers and empower them to think more critically about digital education.

Overall, the book's thesis that we need to pause for thought and critically reflect on the extent of commercial influence on digital education, is a take-home message worth remembering. How exactly to do that is a book for all of us to write.