

Our Children @ Risk

EdTech: Who Benefits?



“Corporations like to make citizens believe that our interests are the same: that people benefit when corporations are successful. But in most instances, corporate interests and the interests of citizens wanting a strong, equitable, publicly funded and publicly controlled education system, are in conflict. Excessive technology is not better for learning. Fewer teachers is not better for students.”

Tara Ehrke (70)*

It seems that corporate reformers and “Big Testing” have changed their tactics in the face of strong pressure from the parental opt-out movement and criticism that the misuse and overuse of standardized tests has been harming children's mental and emotional well-being and the quality of their education.

Now the education profiteers are promoting even more lucrative testing and teaching strategies, called “personalized,” or “competency-based” learning and “embedded” or “adaptive” testing. These products help Big Testing continue to control the curriculum and access vast amounts of student data. Our children and their education are even more at risk today.

Who benefits from EdTech? Not our children, and not our democracy. Here are some warnings:

- “The leading promoter of the replacement of paper textbooks by e-books and electronic devices today is Apple...but mindless servility to technology for its own sake...will make things worse, not better. That's because it distracts from and sucks money away from the most important goal, which is maintaining good teaching practices and employing good teachers in the classroom.” (78)
- “In this modern computer era, digital personal data is gold, currently being traded like currency. You know when you search for something on Amazon and Google and then you start seeing ads related to that search in your feed? That is the result of data mining....This data grab is a gold mine to companies that want to market and design products. For venture capitalists, Education is the new hot commodity.” (74)
- “Turning schooling into primarily job preparation centres will not produce a highly educated, active and democratic citizenry. Computers will not personalize education. 21st Century Learning should be seen for what it is: a highly effective corporate lobby campaign. Citizens, teachers, students and parents should reject it.” (82)
- “It is a model that is not proven, an experiment that has relegated students to becoming software beta-testing lab rats.” (75)
- “Although companies that collect, sell, analyze, and buy data may not know children's names (though they probably do), that hardly matters if they have the information and tools necessary to model everything about those children—including their interests, social networks, personalities, vulnerabilities, desires, and aspirations—and if they have personalized access to children, via their electronic devices, to shape them.” (77)

* The parenthetical numbers indicate entries in our documentation paper (<http://tinyurl.com/edtechdocu>)