

“I’m Not Trying to Sell Anything”: Technology Tycoons’ Discourses of Urgency and Heroism in the Shaping of Education Policies and Utopias

Fabio C. Campos, New York University, fabioc@nyu.edu
Paulo Blikstein, Columbia University, paulob@tc.columbia.edu

Abstract: This paper examines the narratives conveyed by three technology leaders of past and present: Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, and Salman Khan. Based on frameworks of technology discourse, we employ critical discourse analysis (CDA) to explore how such leaders communicate challenges and potentials of education, and what ideological markers can be discerned. We find and discuss four narrative genres that influence education policy and politics, and suggest key implications for the Learning Sciences.

Introduction

The relationship between technologies and education has become increasingly complex: while technologists try to dictate system-wide change through new products and practices, their discourses are often rife with faulty pedagogies and unwarranted claims (Blikstein & Blikstein, 2021). By force of repetition, and backed by mass media, ideologies about “good teaching” and the optimal locus of technology in schools – are being rapidly normalized. More importantly, such technocentric narratives set new expectations: the “classroom of the future” is one of many metaphors that suggest the revamping of teaching, learning, and education management by claiming that the centrality of technology is inevitable. This paper contributes to understanding which technology and schooling discourses are reinforced and disseminated by prominent technology leaders of past and present. To this end, this study treats discourses not just as acts of communication but also as capable of affecting social practices (Anderson & Cohen, 2018). Starting from Roderick’s (2016) idea of “Great Men” – embodiments of progress who move society towards betterment – this paper analyzes public talks of three influential technology leaders of the last decade: Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and Salman Khan. Based on their manifested views about education, we employ critical discourse analysis (CDA) tools and well-studied technological narratives to create semiotic descriptions of an emerging EdTech ethos towards schooling. Gaining deeper insight into the discourses propagated by such technology leaders is not only key to understanding their influence over education practice and politics, but also an invitation for learning scientists to challenge such assumptions and propose new ideas about the politics, affordances, and limitations of technologies for teaching and learning.

Background

Discourses are conceptual systems that manifest through knowledge, language, and communication (Fairclough, 1992; Gee, 2010). While discourses are shaped by sociocultural practices, they are also *socially constitutive*, or capable of influencing practices and determining how individuals experience the world (Fairclough, 1992). Individuals, however, are not always aware of their own conceptual systems (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008), or the values and ideologies they might be reproducing through communicative acts (Freire & Macedo, 2005). In this sense, discourses need to be approached as silent communicators of “master narratives” (Brown & Gilligan, 1993), knowledge systems that convey culturally dominant, socially accepted norms, practices, and identities.

Power structures are often created, transmitted, and reinforced by discourses (Van Dijk, 2008). Foucault’s (2007) social semiotic approach foregrounds how discourses become accepted truths and exert control over individuals and institutions. Foucault also explains how discourses are internalized by individuals and develop into subtle forms of surveillance and control. In this context, knowledge is inseparable from power, with power being exercised through ways of understanding the world. The same phenomenon is seen in education technology discourses: ideologies and practices around learning with technology become naturalized and integrated into common sense views about education as inevitable.

Critical approaches to analyzing discourses

The language of everyday speech is complex and symbolic (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008; Morris, 1946). The fields of Linguistics and Semiotics traditionally break down discursive acts (e.g., spoken language, written text, nonverbal communication, etc.) in two dimensions: *signifier* (the material, or visible aspects of language) and *signified* (the underlying meanings) (Saussure, 2011). This layered approach finds echo in Gee (2010), who separates the observable elements of communication (e.g., word choice, tone of voice, syntactic construction,

aspects of genre, etc.) from “Big D” discourses, or the ideologies and beliefs that are enacted through communication and social practices. Under such layered view, how should learning scientists approach the complexity of discourses to reveal underlying narratives and belief systems?

Gee (2010) proposes that discourse analysis should start with a reflection about Big D discourses and then descend into other discursive layers, such as text and meaning. Similarly, feminist theorists suggest that analysts should seek both master narratives and contrapuntal voices – divergent discourses that deviate from norms and conventions – when approaching a corpus of text (Brown & Gilligan, 1993). Both views are examples of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a method that focuses on issues of ideology, power dynamics, and influences of one societal domain (e.g., technology) over another (e.g., public education). CDA takes into consideration not just bodies of written text but also considers the sociopolitical context in which messages are conveyed. As Fairclough (2013) proposes, acts of communication such as public talks or interviews should be examined as social practices through the lens of CDA. This study considers that analyzing the outer (i.e., written text) and inner (i.e., underlying meanings) layers of discourses are complementary parts of CDA and that, together, might reveal how speakers communicate and contribute to received views of technology and education.

Technology discourses

Technology cannot be merely understood as tools or industrial processes, but as a lens individuals use to make sense of the world (Heidegger, 1977). As with any other aspect of culture, individuals receive and reproduce discourses about what technology is and what purposes it serves. One of the most persistent of such discourses portrays technology as a neutral, pragmatic means to inevitable ends. The idea of **Technology as Progress** (Roderick, 2016; Slack & Wise, 2005) understands “progress” as tied to society’s betterment and advancement towards the future. In this sense, humanity is seen as moving *forward* providing that technological innovation is achieved. This genre of technological discourse facilitates strong personality cults, with railroad tycoons and Big Tech CEOs being the *Great Men* of their respective ages (Roderick, 2016). Progress, however, demands *inevitable sacrifices* of resources, and people. It is widely documented how such narratives have been utilized and continuously recycled to justify colonialism, armed conflict, and negative impacts on the environment.

Common sense frequently attributes causative powers to technology. The idea of technology as an actor in society, capable of producing change alone, is an example of Technological Determinism (Roderick, 2016; Slack & Wise, 2005). This discourse gives rise to other ideas such as technological solutionism (i.e., “if there’s a problem, there’s an app for that”) and technological revolution (i.e., social practices need to “start from scratch”, be “disrupted”, “transformed” and “fundamentally changed”). Individuals also tend to personify technology, attributing to it causative powers and capabilities that exceed their actual technical affordances (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). Roderick (2016) describes this phenomenon as Technological Fetishism: ascribing an autonomous personality to the technological artifact and manifesting a desire for sublime and magical properties. Any similarities to the expectations towards generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT) in education are not a coincidence.

Why discourses matter in education

Discourses are not innocuous acts of communications but might have real impact on education practice and research. Several scholars have studied how discourses directly shape or construct frameworks for education policy (Anderson & Holloway, 2020), in matters that range from curricular choices, teacher training, district management, and technology adoption, to cite a few (for examples, see Levin, 1998; Priestley, 2002; Sam, 2019; and Selwyn, 2013). Even aspects of teacher identity might be influenced by such narratives about teaching, learning, and technology (Marsh, 2002). What is more, the effects of discourses over education policy are not bound to a school district, a state, or a nation, but may quickly spread internationally, much like an *epidemic* (Levin, 1998).

One key (but subtle) discursive practice identified by scholars is the establishment of schools and teachers as antagonists to progress. This is often achieved by disseminating stereotyped views of school systems, which are described as ineffective, “analogic,” and anachronistic (Blikstein & Blikstein, 2021). Terms such as “transformation,” and “the future of education”, and the discourses they belong to, bear significant negative influences on public education by positioning innovative technologies over and above “traditional” school systems and “slipping into pejorative views of schools and teachers” (Vossoughi & Bevan, 2014, p. 38).

Discourses that antagonize public school systems are often accompanied by a slow and steady push to change established curricular practices. A general trend is to suggest educational technology (EdTech) products as the “medicine” to what is described as a malfunctioning and outdated education system, or to appeal to gaps in the nation’s workforce in the future. This is precisely the case of Apple and Microsoft, which pushed coding into the US curricular standards by warning against an imminent blackout in computer science majors (Singer, 2017). Treating technological progress as the answer to a broken system echoes the idea of *necessitarianism* advanced

by Munck (2003), or the notion that “there is no alternative” (TINA) to technocentric reforms. The mass media play a key part in giving rise to such manufactured crises by giving rise to personality cults and creating **Discourses of Derision**: narratives of moral panic that drive public opinion and shape the political agenda (Wallace, 1993).

Discourses about EdTech also amplify market-based views about schooling, with technology (or its lack thereof) being employed to justify attacks on the public sector. Williamson (2018) explains how Silicon Valley entrepreneurs often reinforce the need for “radical disruption” of schools. The new prototypical “smart school” is not only a fruit of a technocratic ethos but a reflection of “corporate education reforms that have sought to create ‘shadow schools’ as competitive alternative marketplaces to state schooling” (pg. 233). Similarly, Anderson and Cohen (2018) maintain that the widely accepted discourse of managerialism creates a need for a New Public Management (NPM), or the transfer of well-established market principles to the public sector. When thinking about schools, these views of the public sector as *in need* of the private sector echo Roderick’s (2016) idea of inevitability: to pave the way for “schools of the future”, sacrifices will need to be made.

Methods

Following Roderick’s (2016) concept of Great Men, this article examines the discourses enacted by three of the most influential technology leaders of the last decade: Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and Salman Khan. Two selection criteria guided the choice for these individuals: first, all of them have significant influence not only in the realm of technology but also in the public and private spheres. Second, each represents a particular segment: the private sector, venture philanthropy and foundations, and education startups (Table 1).

Table 1

Corpus of data used in this study

Data	Context / Length	Perspective
Steve Jobs: <i>Computerworld Awards Oral History Project</i> (1995)	Interview: 20min (excerpt), 3,214 words	Private sector
Bill Gates: <i>“Teachers Need Real Feedback”</i> (2013)	TED Talk: 10min, 1,518 words.	Venture philanthropy
Salman Khan: <i>“Let’s use video to reinvent education”</i> (2011)	TED Talk: 20min. 3,608 words	Education Startup

Data sources

The corpus of data utilized in this study (Table 1) is composed by online videos, selected in accordance with their topic, availability, and potential influence. The first source – Steve Jobs’ interview – is one of the first to reflect how technology leaders from Silicon Valley view the role of public education in contributing or hampering what they deem as progress or innovation. The interview was given in the context of the 1995 Computerworld Awards and covers topics that range from the voucher system, the role of teachers, and school competition in a free market. Despite being more than two decades old, this interview is still the most complete and extensive material containing Job’s views on education available on public domain. Considering that video platforms did not exist at the time of the interview, it is unlikely that Jobs was aware of the potential reach of his words. Also, Jobs’ interview was given in a time in which business leaders were much more “naïve” about what they said publicly, without more carefully-crafted language we see today in similar interviews, likely prepared with the help of PR departments and public image consultants.

Gates and Khan’s videos are TED talks, where speakers have full control over their presentations and, with rare exceptions, do not take questions from the audience. In his 2013 talk, Bill Gates defends that American teachers should access video recording of their classes as a form of automated coaching and professional learning. Gates criticizes public schools for letting teachers drive blind, without a close support of video-coaching, such the one developed by his foundation. Similarly, Salman Khan’s 2011 talk advocates for the use of free instructional videos to relieve the work of teachers and personalize learning. He explains the benefits of self-guided learning using web-based movies prior to formal classes, a practice that is introduced as “flipped classroom”.

Data analysis

This study aimed to make underlying discourses visible by creating semiotic descriptions of how messages were built and conveyed, intentionally or unintentionally (Fairclough, 2013). The analysis of the videos adopted an intentional critical stance, based on Fairclough's (1992) and Gee's (2010) CDA. First, we adopted a deductive approach to identify "Big D" discourses (Gee, 2010), mainly those previously studied by Roderick (2016) and Slack and Wise (2005), and discussed in the previous section of this paper. For each discourse, we coded "DISC", plus a short memo describing the nature of that instance. The second movement was also deductive: we looked and coded for specific vocabulary choices that reflected those present in Selwyn's (2013) and Williamson's (2018) analyses. For example, words such as "traditional" or expressions such as "traditional classroom" were coded "TEXT/VOC" and connected to one of the macro narratives identified in phase 1 of the analysis. Third, we took an inductive, bottom-up open coding approach, where text-features such as additional vocabulary choices, allegories, and metaphors were identified and grouped (Gee, 2010) under parent codes such as "AL/MET" for allegories and metaphors and "GEN", for generalization language. One example is "all our students," which is repeated across all three sources and is indicative of a generalization. These codes were then recombined into four categories, which are presented in the following section. Finally, in step 4, we actively listened for *contrapuntal voices* (Brown & Gilligan, 1993), or discourses that deviated from the main narratives identified in step 1. One example is found in Jobs' interview: while defending solutions as a needed addition to traditional classrooms, he views humans – and not computers – as fundamental to mediate learning. In this step, both authors also discussed their own biases as learning scientists, creators of both knowledge and products. Although we acknowledge intentionally conducting the analysis from a critical standpoint — as proposed by the CDA tradition — we kept each other under check to avoid any conclusion that was not based on the data.

Emergent discourses

The textual and contextual analyses of the videos rendered four macro narratives, which we present below:

Discourses of antagonism: Schools are broken

Consistent with the literature, all three videos advanced a narrative that depicts the American public school system as broken, inefficient, and incapable of delivering what is needed in the Information Age. At the vocabulary level, employing CDA revealed several cases of synecdoche, a literary device typically employed by speakers to create generalization language (i.e., the part representing the whole). For instance, words such as "traditional" were combined with others such as "model" and "classroom" to represent entire pedagogical paradigms and school systems, respectively. The lines below, from the Khan talk, illuminate this case:

"The traditional model penalizes you for experimentation and failure... In a traditional classroom, you have homework, lecture, homework, lecture". (Khan, 2011)

The commonplace discourse that vilifies schools and their communities is usually coupled with comparisons between the US and other countries in international assessment. Without contextualizing the nature, size and conditions of each school system, influential figures such as Bill Gates make all-encompassing assertions about the current situation of education in the country. Consider Gates' words about international rankings:

"Consider the rankings for reading proficiency. The U.S. isn't number one. We're not even in the top 10. ... So, there's really only one area where we're near the top, and that's in failing to give our teachers the help they need to develop their skills." (Gates, 2013)

Gates' message deviates from Khan's previous excerpt in one key aspect: it explicitly incorporates elements of moral panic by connecting "the system we have today" with a risk to the country in the global arena.

"The system we have today isn't fair to them. It's not fair to students, and it's putting America's global leadership at risk." (Gates, 2013)

Similarly, Jobs suggests that, if teachers were as good as corporate workers, they could be earning higher salaries. Jobs also suggests that mid-career educators are not suitable for teaching anymore, as they "lost their spirits".

"I'd like the people that are teaching my kids to be good enough that they could get a job at the company I work for, making a hundred thousand dollars a year. Why should they work at a school for 35/40 thousand dollars a year if they could get a job here at a hundred thousand dollars a year? ... Unfortunately, the side effect of pushing out a lot of 46-year-old teachers that lost their spirit 15 years ago and shouldn't be teaching right now..." (Jobs, 1995)

Another textual feature present in Jobs' interview is the constant use of "they" (marked in bold), suggesting a conspiratorial school system focused on limiting creativity and controlling students.

"School was pretty hard for me at the beginning.... And **they** almost got me, **they** really... almost... they came this close to really beating any curiosity out of me. ... **They** tested me, and **they** decided... I could skip one grade." (Jobs, 1995)

Discourses of urgency: "Kids can't wait"

In all videos, discourses of broken schools converged to a single point: if rapid changes are not made, students will suffer. Similarly, if investments are not made to professional development, educators will suffer. The possibility of educators and pupils being at risk was reinforced by two textual features: *generalization language*, materialized by expressions such as "everyone" and "we all" (italicized below), and *conditional language*, as evidenced by the verb "need" and other expressions in past tenses, such as "wanted" and "could" (in bold):

"*Everyone* **needs** a coach" (Gates)

"No reason why it really **can't happen** in *every classroom in America*" (Khan)

"And this **could happen** in *every classroom in America* tomorrow" (Khan)

"We **wanted to donate** a computer to *every school in America*." (Jobs)

"One day, we **would like** *every classroom in America* to look like that." (Gates)

The idea of a whole generation "in the dark" is intensified by a *sense of urgency* and *prospect of loss*, as seen in Jobs' and Gates' words below:

We realized that a whole generation of kids was going to go through the school before they even got their first computer. So, we thought: The kids can't wait. (Jobs, 1995)

But this system would have an even more important benefit for our country. It would put us on a path to making sure all our students get a great education, find a career that's fulfilling and rewarding, and have a chance to live out their dreams. (Gates, 2013)

Discourses of corporate heroism

The attacks on public management pave the way for multiple flavors of necessitarianism and reinforce cults of personalities. These discursive allegories resemble Roderick's (2016) Great Men, thus resonating with the American collective imaginary. Khan, for instance, uses the stage to recount his organization's foundational myth, or the story about how he left a career in a hedge fund to start Khan Academy. The archetype of the benevolent capitalist is evident when Khan explains his decision of offering instructional videos for free, as a means to achieve "*something of social value*". In what resembles an infomercial – which informs and advertises – he explains:

I want to talk about how I started. ... I saw no reason to make it private.... Here I was, an analyst at a hedge fund. It was very strange for me to do something of social value. You can go to the site right now, it's all free, not trying to sell anything. (Khan, 2011)

The use of *heroic language* is not exclusive to Khan. In his interview, Jobs recounts how he tried to change a federal law for the benefit of students, illustrating how public figures actively influence federal regulation. Jobs' refusal to hire a lobbyist adds to the narrative, reinforcing the idea of a powerful leader (Jobs himself), fighting the government ("*they*"), and willing to invest his own wealth in America's schools and students ("*the kids*").

We could give a hundred thousand computers away, one to each school in America. (...) We literally drafted a bill to make these changes... We called it 'the kids can't wait bill.' (...) I refused to hire any lobbyists. I went back to Washington myself and actually walked the halls of Congress for about two weeks. (Jobs, 1995)

Jobs suggests that it takes entrepreneurship, capital, and good intentions to "transform" education, with no mention that pedagogical knowledge is necessary for such endeavor. Resonant with his views of young *versus* old professionals, he suggests that graduates from elite universities should found schools and outperform teachers:

If you go to Stanford Business School, they have a public policy track. They could start a school administrator track (...). You could have twenty-five-year-old college kids, very idealistic, full of energy, instead of starting a Silicon Valley company, they start a school. And I believe they would do far better than many of our public-school teachers do. (Jobs, 1995)

Similarly, Gates incarnates another well-established archetype in the American imaginary: the activist. By using language commonly seen in civil rights marches and political campaigns (“fair”, “just”, “deserve”), Gates conveys a message in which he is the caregiver, one who advocates for the rights of educators:

[teachers have] one of the most important jobs in the world. This wouldn't just make us a more successful country. It would also make us more fair and just too. I'm excited about the opportunity to give all our teachers the support they want and deserve. (Gates, 2013)

Gates' activist-like discourse mirrors Khan's words when both declare teachers deserve more, but diverges from Jobs, who posits that teachers are fundamental but not good enough.

Discourses of disruption: Recreating the public school

In their approach and ideologies about education, technology leaders tend to overemphasize *curiosity*, *creativity*, *failure*, and *discovery* as opposed to what is seen as “*traditional schooling*”. The data, however, showed different variations of this type of narrative. Jobs, for instance, resists the view of technological determinism by positing that curiosity and discovery should be sparked by human agents, and not machines. Khan defends a balance between mastery, experimentation, and failure, in opposition to what he describes as traditional schooling.

The most important thing is another person that guides and feeds your curiosity. Machines cannot do that ... The elements of discovery are around you. (Jobs, 1995)

The traditional model penalizes you for experimentation and failure, but it does not expect mastery. We encourage you to experiment and fail. But we do expect mastery. (Khan, 2011)

Looking into the social practice of teacher preparation, Gates proposes one single technology – video feedback systems – as a remedy to gaps in teachers' coaching and professional development. In his presentation, however, there is no indication about how teachers would interpret their own data, whether they would be coached by a human agent based on the images and, ultimately, what are the desired behaviors that could lead to the improvement of teaching practices. Gates' propositions are inconsistent with the body of Teacher Noticing literature, which upholds that intentional, visible scaffolds need to be in place for teachers to benefit from video recording of their practices (see, for example, Sherin & Van Es, 2005).

Jobs' version of how to recreate the school system incorporates elements of the neoliberal reform agenda, namely competition and choice. He uses words such as “freedom” and “boring” and alludes to the tensions between “equal opportunity and equal outcomes” to communicate views about education policy and equity. The antagonism with unions is self-evident, and a reflex of the first genre of discourses identified in this study:

I'm a big believer in equal opportunity as opposed to equal outcome. ... I believe very strongly that if the country gave each parent a voucher, a check for forty-four hundred dollars they could only spend at any accredited school... But the problem of course is the unions. The unions are the worst thing that ever happened to education; because it's not a meritocracy. It turns into a bureaucracy, and teachers can't teach, and administrators run the place, and nobody can be fired. ... We need to attack these things at the root, which is people and how much freedom we give people; the competition that will attract the best people. (Jobs, 1995)

Discussion

By employing Critical Discourse Analysis tools, this study found four macro narratives present in the speeches of influential technology leaders. Representing technology corporations, startups, and venture philanthropists, Steve Jobs, Salman Khan, and Bill Gates portrayed public schools as the establishment, inefficient, and in need of corporate support (Anderson and Cohen, 2018; Munck, 2003). In essence, **Discourses of Antagonism** use generalization language to paint a picture of a malfunctioning school system, governed by inefficient educators whose aim is to exert control by limiting students' creativity. This type of discourse gains traction by establishing school systems as an adversary to progress-oriented reforms (Blikstein & Blikstein, 2021). With the antagonist identified, **Discourses of Urgency** establish an impending nefarious future for the country (e.g., “the kids can't wait”) and urge society to *demand* change, immediately, or else something terrible will happen.

The **Antagonism-Urgency** discursive pair has been extensively described by linguists, philosophers of language and learning scientists. Bakhtin (1984), for example, while exploring the politics, aesthetics, and morality of deeds, saw *dialogism* as a fundamental characteristic of human communication: in everyday acts of

speech or language use, speakers often position themselves in relation to another. This *I-for-the-other* serves not only to establish and reinforce the speaker's identity but, most importantly, to justify certain actions or urges to act. In the case of EdTech, the Antagonism-Urgency pair serves to justify the urge towards products and ideas without the need to describe current educational systems in more precise and accurate ways, nor to provide robust evidence of *how* these products will fulfill their goals (Blikstein et al., 2022).

What follows in the discursive sequence observed in our data are **Discourses of Corporate Heroism**, in which technology leaders establish themselves as Great Men. Represented as corporate heroes and activists, technology tycoons resort to language that establish education reform as a mission suitable only for young entrepreneurs, college graduates, or savvy technologists, who offer their skills to serve the public good. Finally, **Discourses of Disruption** establish how particular views of education – as well as products and partnerships – are fundamental to prevent the otherwise unavoidable tragedy in education. In essence, Corporate Heroism and Disruption are discourses that result in one single narrative, where the hero is typically not concerned with tranquil negotiations nor complex understanding of nuanced contexts. As in century-old stories, such archetypal heroes have a rebellious, outlaw side, who needs no permission to abruptly disrupt, “move fast and break things.” In our data, we observed a common stance towards schooling models towards participation in a “market society.” Interestingly, Mautner (2010) reminds us that even “The Market” is often discursively reified as an anthropomorphic entity and a cultural model used to regulate behavior — another entity that is inconsequentially authorized to “break things”.

Beyond typifying narratives, this study identified several discursive mechanisms and moves employed by technology leaders to communicate technology-oriented education reform narratives. For example, discursive strategies such as comparing countries in international education rankings and the use of words such as “just”, “fair” and “deserve” create the framework needed to establish technology leaders as key partners to policy makers (Anderson & Holloway, 2020). The analysis also revealed how technologists mimic the language typically associated with politicians (e.g., “everyone needs”) and equity advocates (e.g., “education for all”, “no child left behind”) to justify the urgent need for their proposed technologies, and policies (Singer, 2017).

The portrayal of public education systems as in need of *constant saving* can be decomposed into several elements. First, as seen repeatedly throughout the analysis, such narratives often imply that public schools should be modeled after private corporations (Anderson & Cohen, 2018; Levin, 1998; Munck, 2003; Priestley, 2002, Rudd, 2013). Unfortunately, these claims typically “displace other education stakeholders from setting the agenda” (Blikstein & Blikstein, 2021, p. 22), and silence nonconforming voices at schools and districts (e.g., “The unions are the worst thing that ever happened to education”, as declared by Jobs). Second, as shown by several studies, advocates of “radical disruption” often seek to shape narratives about learning in ways that are disconnected from evidence-based claims (Anderson & Holloway, 2020). It is important to note that EdTech is not inherently wicked, nor every entrepreneur or technology leader a disseminator of the narratives identified by this study. However, the key challenge academics are faced with is to identify instances when learning technologies are appropriated to legitimize power and corporate interests (Rudd, 2013).

Implications for the learning sciences

While this study focused on three leading Silicon Valley technology leaders, their discourses reach far beyond the US. Anderson and Cohen (2018), Levin (1998), and Priestley (2002), have demonstrated how trends in education have assumed an international character, with policies – and their underlying discourses – migrating across the globe. As suggested by Levin (1998), discourses that propose the radical transformation of education systems have the power to spread fast, like an *epidemic*. So, what responsibility falls on us, members of a global Learning Sciences community? First, we have a duty to understand how such discourses shape our own practices, within the lab, across schools and in the many research-practice partnerships we engage in. More than understanding, the research community may contribute to “strengthening the public mind on education to increase ‘resistance’ to ‘infection’ by superficial but seemingly attractive policies.” (p. 139). Much like in a pandemic, the response to the rapid spread of educational technology discourses – and their pervasive influence on policy, business, and management – lies on the idea of *prevention*, or opposing fictive narratives with evidence-based claims. Understanding that any new educational trend — from Automated Tutors to Personalized Learning — is “half technical and half a narrative” (Blikstein et al., 2022) is a consideration we invite our peers to make.

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