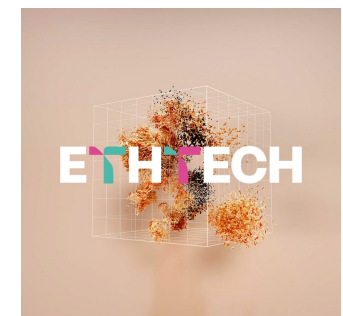# Ethical tensions in education and digital technology research

Pablo Rivera and Judith Jacovkis

Universitat de Barcelona

Research results point to ethical questions more than to answers

From the point of view of the object of study. Ethics and digital technology

Digital monoculture at school

Digital governance of education

Towards to the individualization of responsibility?

When research practice raises the issue

1. Digital monoculture at school

- Lack of **exposure** to different digital environments --> lack of knowledge and experiences on them

- Digital experiences mostly on **private** / corporative environments

- Beyond instrumental digital literacy, education fails in **widening possible (digital) worlds** to students (and teachers!)

- *ChromeBooks --> Google Chrome --> Google Classroom --> Google Drive --> Gmail...*

Is the current scenario fostering new [ethical] ways to think about technology?

2. Digital governance of education

- **Techno-solutionism** shapes the demands (and *needs*?) of public administration –also of education.

- **Reactivity**, lack of leadership

- The regulation of the provision is constrained by
  - The **lack of resources** to satisfy the schools/education *needs*
  - The abuse of **market position** by the Big Techs

- Perceptions among policy-makers and companies show strong tensions between the **desirable** and the **possible**.

- The actual setting of the digital infrastructure tends clearly more to the **dependence** than to the **sovereignty**.

Are there strategies to change the **thinkable** *technology?*

3. Towards to the individualization of responsibility?

- **Tendency towards individual responsibility:**
  - Actors struggle to determine who decides which digital resources to use in education.
  - A neoliberal trend shifts the burden to individuals (teachers or students) who often lack the necessary skills.

- **Impact of the neoliberal approach:**
  - Responsibility shifts from the system to the individual.
  - Reduces the role of public administration in defining policies and providing support.

- **Central question:**
  - Is the individual truly responsible, or should the system ensure informed and equitable decisions?
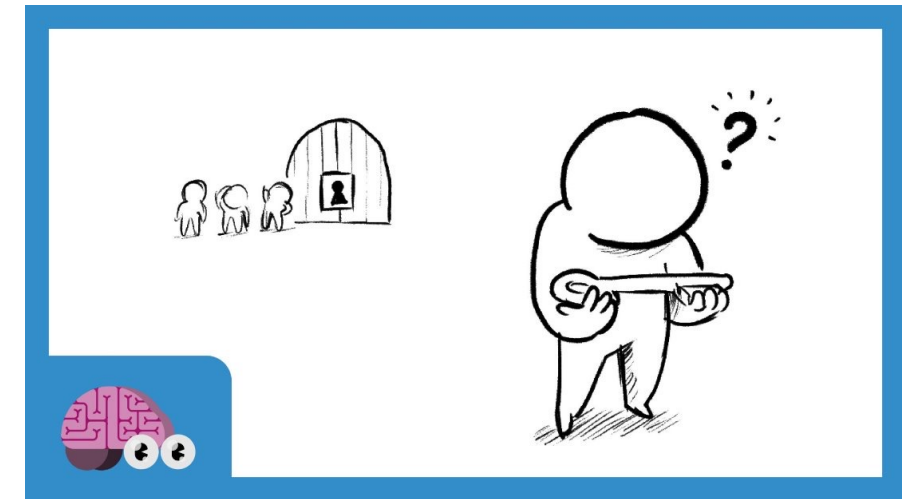
Who defines the educational paradigm?

The neoliberal inertia blames individuals while neglecting the system's duty to design an inclusive and effective educational paradigm.

4. When research practice raises the issue

When research can also teach

- **Researching the Unknown:**
  - Researching the unknown tends to reveal gaps in understanding among actors.
  - The research process not only explores but also **has the potential** to educate and empower participants.

- **Dual role of research:**
  - It tends to generate new knowledge while fostering critical awareness in the field.
  - It could encourage actors to engage with and interpret complexities they initially could not grasp.

- **Key dimension:**
  - What to do with this new knowledge?
  - Research invites reflection on how to apply this understanding in real and meaningful contexts.

How can research not only uncover knowledge but also teach, build capacities, and foster reflection on the use of this new understanding in education?

New questions about our research practice

- How to do good research when ethical positioning is strained?

- What about us? Ethical research practice (data, platforms…)
  - How can ethical dilemmas in AI research be tackled when regulatory frameworks are lacking?
  - What criteria should be followed to select digital platforms that ensure ethical research practices?
  - How can the protection of personal data be guaranteed in studies that rely on open sources or social networks?
  - How can participant communities be actively involved in co-designing ethical research practices?
  - What mechanisms can be implemented to prevent ethical biases in data collection and analysis within digital environments?