

Click Here if You Agree (to Reclaim the EdTech Classroom through Speculative Co-design)

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Summary

This workshop critically interrogates the language used to describe new educational technologies. Participants will engage in creative group activities to develop marketing pitches and compliance strategies for well-established tools used in classrooms all over the world (post-it notes, scissors, blackboards, etc.). Through playful and subversive application of the terms and concepts commonly associated with new digital products (Personalised learning! Empowerment! Terms of service... Privacy policies...) participants will reflect on how the language of edtech shapes our understanding of the tools we use in the classroom, as well as the promises and perils associated with them. We hope that the workshop will help participants to reclaim and reshape our ways of thinking and talking about technology in education.

Workshop description

Any examination of new educational technologies should look beyond the hopes, dreams and promises that inevitably follow in their wake. To fully understand the impact of new tools on teaching and learning, we must also identify what will have been lost and what will have been surrendered when the next shiny thing is (chosen to be) implemented. This workshop seeks to critically examine the language that is used to describe, market and push technologies into the classroom, which is also a language that surrenders our choices, diminishes our agency, and limits the scope of our imagination to the visions pushed by the powerful few. We propose speculative and creative approaches for introducing critical and deeper conversations on edtech in the classroom. Teachers and student teachers encounter a wide variety of voices and registers through which edtech is promoted, criticised and implemented in their schools, which leads to tonal and conceptual dissonances that are difficult to navigate. Edtech products are introduced through optimistic marketing materials and hype that do little to illuminate the actual workings of technology (Wieczorek & Romele, 2025). What exactly does AI-powered personalisation mean? Why does learning require a revolution? What ideas about learning stand behind the visions spun by edtech marketers? Such hype-driven language is in stark contrast to the highly technical and legalistic wording found in terms of service, privacy policies and user manuals that accompany (and obfuscate) edtech's everyday use. These make it clear that the glorious future is open only to those willing to enter on tech companies' own terms and conditions.

We created this workshop as a space for exploring how we could bring these different registers, tonalities and discourses together. Building on our experiences with initial teacher education, teacher professional development courses and critical edtech methods (Wieczorek, 2025a; Costello et al., 2025; Costello et al., 2023; see also Gidiotis & Hrastinski, 2024; Hrastinski & Jandrić, 2023; Rahm, 2024), we present our ideas for discussing edtech marketing and terms of use with student teachers in a way that exposes the values, intentionalities and power relations hidden behind them. We demonstrate this through a creative activity asking participants to describe tools present in every classroom – blackboards, desks, pens, paper, etc. – through the language that is currently being used to describe (and obfuscate) new edtech products. What hopes might we have once held for everyday teaching aids and learning materials? What licensing agreements do we need to accept to ensure that we use this old-school tech responsibly and for intended purposes?

Participant outcomes

We use the workshop activities as a starting point to stimulate reflections on the role of technology in teaching and learning, the kinds of language useful for discussing it with teachers, and new methods for fostering critical and more democratic perspectives on digital tools in the classroom. We aim to help participants develop critical lenses and conceptual tools for more skilfully engaging in debates about EdTech at various levels, from the

Pitch 2 10 minutes Final plenary pitches
Teams report back on final synergies and on any implications for classroom practices.

Final wrap up 10 minutes Expert facilitators unveil educational vision
Facilitators sum up the workshop, unveiling any visions that might transform education as a result of the workshop. They will also circle back to any actual ideas or implications for practice that may have accidentally been realised.

Conclusion

We hope you can join us to reclaim the language we use in a digital classroom. Through collaborative inquiry, we aim to develop ways of talking about edtech that go beyond performing the inconsequential, non-choice offered by providers' take it or leave it standard terms and conditions, but invite us instead to think together so we can think otherwise.

Note: an optional activity will involve using scissors, and left-handed scissors will be provided. No participants will be harmed in the making of this workshop.

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Dr Michał Wieczorek is an Ad Astra Fellow - Assistant Professor in AI-Driven Educational Innovation in UCD's School of Education. While the title might look tech-forward, he mainly does critical work on educational technologies and the ideas that underly them. He loves technology but makes his living by pointing out that a lot of what we see in education today – especially all the AI stuff – is pretty bad and poorly aligned with the goals, values, and practices of education. And as a philosopher with an applied ethics background, he gets a lot of leeway in defining what counts as bad. His work deals with ethics, pedagogies, societal and practical impact and everything else that is less than great about edtech.

Dr Eamon Costello is an Associate Professor of Digital Learning at Dublin City University, president of Irish Learning Technology Association and an accomplished teacher, researcher and public speaker. He is deeply curious about how we learn in different environments and is known as a creative and innovative communicator. He is concerned with how we actively shape our world so that we can have better and more humane places in which to think, work, live and learn. He is an advocate of using the right tool for the job or sometimes none at all, for not everything can be fixed or should be built.