**ENGL 877 Reading Response 2 by Tina Le**

This Reading Response comes from a course called ENGL 877 Advanced Topics in Digital Humanities at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Spring 2023. Each week, we do Reading Responses engaging with ideas from the texts we read that week. This is the second Reading Response, along with a comment I left on a classmate’s Reading Response:

**Instructions for Reading Response 2:**

Please write an essay that combines your reactions to this week's article plus this week's class discussion.

Also, after you submit your response, please read one of your colleagues' responses and write a short reply in which you offer some constructive feedback. Please choose an essay upon which no one has yet commented.

Specs

Undergraduates: 400 words + 100 words feedback

Graduates 500 words + 100 words feedback

In “Reprogramming the Invisible Discipline,” Erin Rose Glass calls on academics to “fight the forms of surveillance and control that are increasingly imposed on individuals by corporate digital technologies,” and one way to do that is to be mindful of how educational technology normalizes surveillance and to critically engage students in discussing the role of agency in technologies used by educators and schools.

Many ed tech tools operate on a lack of trust in students and normalize students’ lack of consent in being tracked. As a few examples, some digital testing platforms track students’ eye movements and whether they open new browser tabs. A professor last semester talked about how UNL employs staff whose job includes monitoring how much time students spend on Canvas as a data point, seeing how it correlates with academic success. During class discussion on Tuesday, a few classmates brought up how UNL is pushing everyone to use UNL software, such as Outlook and OneDrive; the argument is that these programs are more secure, but they also give the institution more power over the data. When I taught high school in LPS, there was a program called Hapara available for teachers to use; it allowed teachers to see what students were doing on their district-issued Chromebooks, and it included functionalities like teachers being able to exit out of students’ browser tabs for them, pause students’ Chromebook activity so they can’t open anything new, and prevent students from going outside of pre-assigned websites. I’ve always felt uneasy about using Hapara due to not wanting to surveil students (Also, I don’t really want to know what 14-year olds are Googling. Sometimes, ignorance is bliss), but some teachers use it frequently, such as during tests so that students only stay on the test page.

Ed tech tools such as these are prevalent in schools, and students do not have a say in whether or not they consent to their privacy being invaded—and they might not be aware that their privacy is being invaded in the first place. Glass brings up Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, saying that “his argument that education, typically conceived of as an instrument of self and social betterment, is often a critical site for carrying out oppression.” These educational technologies are advertised as instruments of “self and social betterment,” such as the arguments that they help students to focus, spend more time studying, and uphold academic honesty. However, it is an oppressive colonizing mentality to assume that these motives are what’s best for students and force them into these structures without their knowledge or consent. Teachers using Hapara to close out of tabs for students when they are “off task” during class does not teach students self-determination. More time on Canvas does not necessarily mean that students are studying more; they might simply have the tab open because they know they are being tracked. To help students move beyond “a passive acceptance toward software” in their everyday lives, educators can start by being transparent about the educational technologies they are using and inviting students to critically examine ways they might be helpful or harmful.

**comment:**

Hi Makena,

I also wrote about how digital technology in classrooms sometimes contributes to a surveillance state! I'm curious about how the sociology is feeling about the software that alerts advisors about students' failing grades. Do you know if they will incorporate that as a whole department, or whether it will be up to individual instructors?

Your mention of the difference between instructors of large lectures versus smaller classes was interesting. It made me think of a friend who told me about attending a large lecture hall class where the instructor had a program for students to log their attendance based on their seat number. In theory, students would only know their seat number if they attend in person. However, that doesn't stop students from guessing a random seat number and hoping it hasn't been taken, or asking a friend to let them know of seat numbers that were open.