

Emotional AI and EdTech: Serving the Public Good?

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Emotional AI and EdTech: Serving the Public Good?

Abstract

Education Technology (EdTech) companies are deploying emotional AI to quantify social and emotional learning. Focusing on facial coding emotional AI that uses computer vision and algorithms to see, recognise, categorise and learn about facial expressions of emotion, this paper evaluates nascent usage of these technologies in education. To do this, it assesses the nature of child rights, the history and modern usage of face-based emotional AI, methodology and efficacy, and what this paper sees as a clash of private and public interests. Concern is shown to be two-fold: first is on method, especially given scope for material effects on students; second are ethical and legal concerns. While proposing a list of considerations for any implementation for these technologies in the classroom, the paper concludes that significant risks exist in deployment of these technologies in the classroom.

Key words: Affective computing, creepiness, EdTech, emotional AI, human rights.

Introduction [A]

Emotional AI is a collect-all term to refer to affective computing techniques, machine learning and Artificial Intelligence (AI) (AUTHOR). This is a weak form of AI in that these technologies read and react to emotions through text, voice, computer vision and biometric sensing, but they do not have sentience or undergo emotional states themselves. Ultimately based on mathematics, analytics are applied to describe and predict behavioural patterns among people by generating data points from people's words, pictures, intonation, gestures, physiology and facial expressions.

In education, the application of emotional AI promises to assist with personalised learning, development of social and emotion learning, to understand if students are struggling with class material, and which students need to be challenged further by class content. This idea is not new: back in 2001, Rosalind Picard (the originator of the term and practice of affective computing), recognised the scope for emotion-sensing in education. Indeed, her team traces the development of computerised tutors that are sensitive to emotion and affect back to 1988 (Lepper and Chabay 1988, Picard 2001a). Noting the diversity of emotional and affective behaviours in the classroom (frustration, dejection, hopelessness, curiosity, interest, exploration and enjoyment), Picard et al. (2001) sought to build a 'computerized learning companion that facilitates the child's own efforts at learning'. The goal of the companion was to improve pedagogical techniques by using computer vision techniques to watch and respond to the affective states of children. The context of this observation was two-fold: that the interplay between emotions and learning is highly important; and that education systems do not focus sufficiently on *how* rather than *what* students learn (Picard et al. 2001a).

This paper anticipates the consequences of deploying emotional AI-based Education

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3 Technologies (EdTech) in the classroom. Influenced by postphenomenology that is keen to
4 avoid dystopian narratives of technology or progressivist utopianism (Idhe 2002), the paper is
5 interested in the empirics of face-based emotional AI employed in EdTech. It is also sensitive
6 to pragmatism where moral truths (potentially fiercely fought for) are contingent upon period
7 and context (Rorty 2010 [1993]). As such, it does not see the datafication of human emotion
8 as innately wrong, especially given wider writing on emotional AI and its potential benefits
9 in human-computer interaction (AUTHOR). To assess emotional AI that makes use of facial
10 coding techniques, it examines these in relation to internationally agreed principles laid out in
11 the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (OHCHR 1990), an influential
12 visionary report by the World Economic Forum (WEF 2016), and critical literature on
13 emotional AI and EdTech pedagogy. It answers whether schools that employ companies
14 using products based on emotional AI are serving the public good. The paper concludes with
15 a list of considerations that should be passed before emotional AI-based EdTech is employed
16 in education.

37 **Rights of the child [A]**

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39 To consider the merits of deploying emotion-sensing technologies in education settings, it is
40 useful to ask whether there exists a variance between social values and the technological
41 capability of emotional AI. In other words, is there an inherent *creepy factor* (Tene and
42 Polonetsky 2014)? In the case of facial coding emotional AI in the classroom, it appears that
43 there may well be a divergence. The technologies will be unpacked below, but to understand
44 the social values part of the moral equation it is useful to understand in some detail the
45 *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, an agreed set of principles ratified by
46 the majority of the international community for persons under the age of 18 (OHCHR 1990).
47 While support of the United Nations amongst its members is not equal, it is still notable that
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3 this community spans normative, social, cultural, legal, economic and political differences.
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8 The Convention primarily details the most fundamental rights of a child (such as parental
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10 access, sanitation, nutrition, care and physical and mental wellbeing), but also states that
11
12 signatories should act in the best of interest of children, that children have the right to have
13
14 their privacy protected, and that their lives not be subject to excessive interference. There are
15
16 at least six relevant articles including: the need to act in the child's best interests (Art. 3); the
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18 child's right to freedom of thought (Art. 14) and to privacy (Art. 16); the child's right to
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20 physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development (Art. 27); the child's right to dignity
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22 when being disciplined (Art. 27); the development of the child's personality, talents and
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24 mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential (§1 Art. 29); the child's right to liberty
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26 (§2 Art. 29); and the child's right to be protected from economic exploitation and from
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28 performing any work 'likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to
29
30 be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development'
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32 (Art. 32).
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40 In addition to technological capability and social values, a normative assessment should also
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42 consider the motive to deploy technology. In the case of EdTech companies, this is primarily
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44 financial. This contrasts with Art. 3 that requires that the interest of children be the primary
45
46 consideration. Some pragmatism and appreciation of educational specifics are required, not
47
48 least because there are many commercially developed products used in education and
49
50 children's services. Rather, the presence of private interests in public service needs to be seen
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52 both in context of the technology itself (that uses biometric data about children) and how
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54 EdTech that uses emotional AI fares with other aspects of the Convention. While there is a
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56 good argument to be made that business and educational interests may align in service
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3 provision, it is also correct to say that child wellbeing must be a secondary consideration for
4
5 businesses because their primary goal must be revenue (for profit and to pay staff and
6
7 shareholders). Next, on Art. 16 and Art. 32, it appears that this profit motive connects with
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9 arbitrary interference with privacy because power and technology is used in such a way that
10
11 clearly advances the interest of a company, yet the benefit for children remains unclear. Art.
12
13 27 and Art. 29 also have application, especially given interest in ‘mental, spiritual, moral and
14
15 social development’. The scope for ‘chilling effects’, and how young people experience their
16
17 own emotional and affective states, is relevant here, especially definitions that ground
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19 chilling effects as when a person may feel deterred even when the activity they are engaging
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21 in is not the one an organisation seeks to stop (Schauer 1978)
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28 **Face-based emotional AI [B]**

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30 For those unfamiliar with facial coding, the historical context is useful to understand that
31
32 these logics are not new. The clear forerunner to modern facial coding is Guillaume-
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34 Benjamin-Amand Duchenne de Boulogne. Duchenne (1990 [1862]) is a 19th century
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36 neurologist who used cutting-edge technology of his time to track and understand facial
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38 muscles, create a semiotic taxonomy of facial behaviour, and then capture emotion
39
40 expressions and findings through photography. Not only did he map and record emotional
41
42 expressions, he set in place the intellectual discourse that today permeates facial coding
43
44 applications and arguably wider emotional AI. For Duchenne there was no possibility that
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46 emotional expressions could be culturally contingent, arguing, ‘Education and civilization
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48 only develop or modify’ abilities to express and monitor emotions (ibid: 29). The logics and
49
50 technics are important because, even around 150 years ago, forerunners of emotional AI
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52 sought to *gauge* facial expressions as universalized and autonomic *leaks* of emotion
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54 (Duchenne 1990 [1862]). Other applications tried to *meter* pleasure (Edgeworth 1881),
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3 attention and learning (Wundt 1902).
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8 In the 1960s and 70s Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen drew upon Tomkins (1962, 1963), and
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10 less directly Darwin (2009 [1872]), to continue Duchenne's arguments. They posited a
11
12 universal 'Basic Emotions' view that suggests existence of biologically given programs that
13
14 control emotional reactions, and that facial muscles function as a feedback system for
15
16 emotional experience (Ekman and Friesen 1971, 1978). Famously and controversially, in
17
18 their New Guinea study, Ekman and Friesen showed photographic plates of white westerners
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20 and their facial expressions to local people assumed to be untainted by media images. The
21
22 goal was to assess whether they would recognise these expressions, which they believed
23
24 would prove a universal language of emotional expression. Technologically, the research
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26 technique employed static photography and then-recent hand-held colour video cameras to
27
28 provide a dynamic sense of how test subjects reacted and formed their own facial expressions
29
30 in response to the stimuli. This work led to the development of the Facial Action Coding
31
32 System (FACS), the measuring of facial movement in humans and the refining of a taxonomy
33
34 of human emotions and facial expressions (Ekman and Friesen 1978). FACS is based on
35
36 Ekman's identification of seven facial expressions of primary emotion (joy, surprise, sadness,
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38 anger, fear, disgust and contempt); three overall sentiments (positive, negative, and neutral),
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40 advanced emotions (such as frustration and confusion) and 19 Action Units (AUs). Today,
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42 the FACS system that details the facial action units, head positions and movements, eye
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44 positions and related movements, descriptors, behaviours and codes to map faces involves
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46 more than 7000 action unit combinations (McDuff 2014).
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56 As will be developed, the nature of emotional life is by no means settled and there is
57
58 extensive controversy about Basic Emotions and categorical approaches. By contrast, the
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3 *dimensional* approach rejects the idea of Basic categories. It argues for broad dimensions of
4 experience based on *valence* and whether the experience is pleasant or unpleasant, and how
5 *aroused* a person is. Taken together valence and arousal provide a two-dimensional axis on
6 which emotional experiences can be mapped. Anxiety and distress, for example, map onto
7 the same quarter of the valence/arousal axis (Zelenski and Larsen 2000). The dimensional
8 approach rejects the idea of upfront programs of emotion, seeing emotions as labels (which
9 are linguistically and socially constructed) that we attribute to affective states. However, the
10 FACS, Basic and categorical approach is appealing to technologists because it reduces the
11 complexity of understanding what emotions are and how they can be diagnosed.
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26 Emotional AI itself derives from affective computing techniques and advances in machine
27 learning and ‘artificial intelligence’ (AI). Taken together AUTHOR labels these as emotional
28 AI. This is a weak, task-based, non-general and narrow form of AI (Warwick 2012) that is
29 reliant on machine learning, a sub-domain of wider AI research (Cawsey 1998). The reading
30 of expressions involves machine training and reading of words and images, seeing and
31 sensing facial expressions, gaze direction, gestures and voice. It also encompasses machines
32 sensing and learning about heart rate, body temperature, respiration and the electrical
33 properties of our skin, among other bodily behaviours. While there exists a variety of
34 emotional AI techniques, it is FACS-based facial analytics that is receiving the most interest
35 from EdTech companies and legacy technology companies, such as Microsoft and Intel, that
36 see opportunity in the education “market”. Face-based emotional AI is typically reliant on
37 computer vision (a perceptual aspect of AI) and supervised machine learning. Unlike systems
38 (such as video) that simply record and store visual information, computer vision also extracts
39 information from images, video and what cameras see. This is not straightforward and relies
40 on mathematical and probabilistic means to identify three-dimensional shapes and objects in
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3 images (Szeliski 2010). Although computer vision has roots in the late 1960s and 1970s as
4 the attempt to extract three-dimensional understanding of the world for robots (Boden 2006),
5 in the 2000s vision recognition research began applying machine learning techniques to
6 computer vision problems (Szeliski 2010). Here, in context of computer vision that seeks to
7 identify emotion expressions from faces, machines are first shown training examples of
8 named facial emotions. Coded by humans, this entails people trained in the Facial Action
9 Coding System (FACS) taxonomy to deconstructing facial behaviour into anatomic elements
10 (action units) and thereafter identify what given emotional expression has taken place. This
11 raises a key concern: who is doing the annotating and who are the people whose expressions
12 are being read? As identified in AUTHOR ****, there is evidence that it is typically white
13 Westerners that hand-annotate the facial expressions used as the basis for international facial
14 coding applications. Although harms regarding bias and ethnicity have not been established
15 in relation to facial coding, the potential is clear: training data in some cases is racially
16 distorted.

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19 Having been provided with classifications and labels, and trained, computers see with
20 cameras, receive input features, register pixelated facial elements, process these against
21 labelled training data and generate outputs of named emotional states. For example, computer
22 vision may track the movement of lip corners, the speed with which this occurs, and the
23 length of time corners of the mouth are moved from their usual position. Nose wrinkling
24 represents emotions such as disgust, and depressions of the corner of lips are connected with
25 sadness. Of course, people have unique faces, they execute expressions in different ways,
26 they are not always directly facing a camera and they appear in different contexts. The
27 learning element takes place when computers are given many faces (potentially millions) and
28 software is written in such a way to allow itself to be trained by incoming data. This is done
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3 by software auto-adjusting its algorithms to improve detection of expressions in unfamiliar
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5 circumstances and situations. These include naturalistic settings such as classrooms where
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7 lighting might be poor, children may be wearing glasses, moving their heads, or they may be
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9 positioned against complex backgrounds.
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11 12 13 14 15 **Commoditising emotion [B]**

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17 As noted above, a normative assessment should consider motives to deploy technology as
18
19 well as technological capability and social values. Undoubtedly most (if not all) working
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21 directly in education will have a foremost interest in child wellbeing. However, connecting
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23 with wider interests in labour-based critique of AI and companies that employ machine
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25 learning (Crawford and Joler 2018), it should not be missed that inferences about student's
26
27 emotions are used to train the neural networks owned by the EdTech providers.
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33 This is significant because both well-known and lesser-known companies use facial coding
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35 for ends beyond education. All are thirsty for training data to improve their algorithmic
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37 services in other business contexts. The result is that data about child emotions are
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39 commoditised to improve the company product, create competitive difference (in terms of
40
41 how many faces are analysed) and serve business and strategic contexts for which the
42
43 classroom data was not intended (such as in-car analysis, retail, out-of-home advertising,
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45 market research, user experience, legal depositions, media and entertainment, and more).
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51 The business model is significant in that technology firms license their facial coding software
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53 and the resultant data teaches the vendor's system to more accurately judge emotional
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55 expressions. Applied to this paper's interest in education, this means that students have scope
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57 to become a population resource to not only sense, analyse, mine and learn, but commodify.
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3 This is because prowess developed from education and children may be applied in other
4 contexts. Again, echoing Crawford and Joler (2018), modern AI is rooted in, functions, and
5 grows by means of, exploitation of the human body. Indeed, although this paper has restricted
6 its interest to facial coding applications, more physically invasive applications are on the
7 socio-technical horizon-line. In addition to seeing the face (which is literally a surface of the
8 head), computer vision may also be used to gauge emotions through *remote* ocular
9 measurement of heart rate and heart rate variability in real-time (Gupta and McDuff 2016).
10 This is now being actively pursued at Microsoft through research on how camera image
11 sensors may measure variations in light absorption related to the delivery of the blood
12 volume pulse (Blackford et al. 2018).
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29 **A question of method [A]**

30 There is then the question of whether these technologies may actually interpret emotions.
31 This is a multifaceted question, first because what emotions are is not settled (Lewis et al.
32 2010). A multitude of theories of emotion are summarized by Scherer (2010: 10-14) and
33 further paraphrased below:
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- 39 - *Adaption*: an *evolutionary conception* where emotions prime an organism to deal with
40 challenges to its well-being.
- 41 - *Dimensional*: conceived of emotions on a pleasant-unpleasant continuum (*valence*) and
42 whether an organism is activated or remains passive (*arousal*)¹.
- 43 - *Appraisal*: recognizes that there are opportunities for many emotional types as conditions
44 change and new situations emerge. Emotions here are *determined by conditions* and what
45 the organism makes of a given situation. Some emotion theorists argue there are as many
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59 ¹ The valence/arousal approach to psychology originally belongs to Wundt (1897).
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emotions as there are possible situations. Others argue that the multitude of possible emotional responses are fashioned out of more Basic Emotions.

- *Motivation*: a psychobiological approach by which emotions are derived from *primitive emotional states* (e.g. fear/danger = need for flight; anger = preparation for flight).
- *Circuit*: an approach to emotions strongly influenced by the neuroscientific and neuroanatomical outlook. This equates emotions with genetically *coded neural circuits*.
- *Discrete*: this points to the existence of *Basic Emotions* as the blocks with which more complex emotions are built. Each emotion is said to have its own physiological, expressive and behavioural patterns.
- *Lexical*: this involves working backwards from language and expression to *examine metaphors* we use to describe experiences. The analyst then organises metaphors to build structures of emotional domains and subdivisions of emotional types.
- *Social constructionist*: this is the socio-cultural outlook whereby *societal structures* are held as the main influence on emotional make-up of people. This sees emotions defined in terms of collective norms and meaning to reactions generated by the socio-cultural context in which they appear.

While the nature of emotions remains disputed, this paper opts towards an amalgamation of psychobiological and sociocultural components in line with dimensional and appraisal-based theorisation. On discrete and Basic emotion, these have long been challenged, especially by social constructionists. Seeing emotions in discursive terms, they are said to exist in relation to systems of expression and understanding that ‘make sense’ because we interpret them according to learned social rules (Fridlund 1991, Russell 1994, Barrett 2006, Gendron et al. 2014). This invites questions about the social construction of labels by which people categorise their core affective state and the systems of expression and signification connected

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3 with these. Closely related, the leak-based view misses a great deal regarding the
4
5 communicative and interactionist role of emotional behaviour (Fridlund 1995, Leys 2012).
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7 As a result, for constructionists, social labelling of affects and communicative aspects of
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9 emotion places emotional expression within the domain of language and intentionality
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11 (Fridlund 1991, Leys and Goldman 2010, Leys 2011). They argue that the ability to recognise
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13 emotions is not prelinguistic, that emotions are a combination of bodily affects and the socio-
14
15 cultural labels we attach to these, and that they are not simply expressions because emotion
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17 also has social and communicative functions. If compromise between Basic Emotions and
18
19 constructionist views is required, the constructionist argument can be sub-divided into strong
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21 and weak varieties (Harré 1986, Jasper 1998). Strong constructionism argues that there are no
22
23 basic emotions, whereas weak constructionism (which this paper prefers) recognises the
24
25 existence of basic emotional behaviour but argues that this explain little. For example,
26
27 whereas anger, surprise and Basic Emotions of the Ekman sort are directly connected with
28
29 bodily states, more complex emotions such as jealousy, compassion or shame are more
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31 closely associated with the social and cultural contexts in which they are experienced (Thoits
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33 1989, Jasper 1998). Keenly aware of social constructionist approaches to emotion, in the
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35 afterword to Darwin's (2009 [1972]) *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*,
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37 Ekman directly attacks cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead's argument that social
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39 behaviour is determined by culture. Instead Ekman argues that while expressions may be
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41 filtered through culturally defined *display rules*, Basic Emotions exist and that these are
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43 leaked through facial behaviour (Ekman 1977).
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54 What appears to be clear however, especially given Barrett et al.'s (2019) recent work, is that
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56 the Basic Emotions approach does not capture how people convey, or interpret, emotion on
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58 faces. For example, a smile can express more than one emotion depending on the situation,
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3 the individual or the culture. Moreover, given that ‘similar configurations of facial
4 movements variably express instances of more than one emotion category’ (ibid), what is
5 clear is that more detail on the context of the situation is required to understand the emotion.
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7 Echoing the weak constructionist position of this paper, as Barrett et al. (2019) argues, this
8 should not be taken to mean that expressions are meaningless. While facial movement should
9
10 not be read as being correspondent with a named emotion, expressions are useful if
11 information about context is present. In other words, expressions are more contextually
12 contingent than the Basic view suggests. Lastly, while many commercial applications are
13 reliant on Basic approaches, we should not be misled into the over-simplistic belief that
14 everyone interested in affective computing and synthetic emotions would agree with the
15 Basic Emotions view. Many would argue that single labels do not always capture complex
16 emotional and affective behaviour, such as embarrassment (Baron-Cohen and Tead 2003,
17 Gunes and Pantic 2010). To end this section, the answer to the question posed of whether
18 technologies may actually interpret emotions is that Basic approaches are deeply flawed.
19 Contextual and appraisal-based approaches (in theory) have a much better chance, but this
20 requires a large-scale revision of approach to begin with local particulars (and potentially
21 self-annotation) over universal understandings.
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45 **Deterritorialising emotion [B]**

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47 In the late nineteenth century, the potential for seduction by data representations of emotion
48 was captured and unwittingly illustrated by Edgeworth, who poetically remarked:
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54 From moment to moment the hedonimeter varies; the delicate index now flickering with
55 the flutter of the passions, now steadied by intellectual activity, low sunk whole hours in
56 the neighbourhood of zero, or momentarily springing up towards infinity. The continually
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3 indicated height is registered by photographic or other frictionless apparatus upon a
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5 uniformly moving vertical plane. Then the quantity of happiness between two epochs is
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7 represented by the area contained between the zero-line, perpendiculars thereto at the
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9 points corresponding to the epochs, and the curve traced by the index [...] (1881: 101).
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14 What this poetic fetish shows is that the role of media technologies (gauges, meters,
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16 photography, video and now computer vision and algorithms) to mediate emotion should not
17
18 be missed because it is a vital element in each wave of facial coding applications. In line with
19
20 Verbeek (2005) and Idhe (2002), this is to consider how technologies and scientific
21
22 instruments frame how we perceive the world and ourselves. It is also to ask about
23
24 ‘hermeneutic relations’ (with hermeneutics being the theory and methodology of
25
26 interpretation) suggested by Idhe (1990). As Verbeek (2011: 8) points out, a thermometer
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28 does not convey what is to be hot or cold, but it provides a representation of these states.
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30 How then does face-based emotional AI filter and constrain what we ask, know and believe?
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32 The beginning of the answer, as argued above, is in the limits of the technology.
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40 Emotional AI based on computer vision and supervised machine learning that requires a
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42 broadly universal and homogenous view of emotions (although this may allow for regional
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44 variations in relation to the intensity of the expression of a given basic emotion). What it does
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46 not *currently* allow for is heterogenous and context-specific accounts of emotion, as required
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48 by constructivist critique. Next is the issue of children’s expression, which raises a range of
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50 problems for application of basic emotions and facial coding to children. Central is that
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52 children are by definition at an earlier stage of emotional and communicative maturity.
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54 Indeed, Barrett et al. (2019) state that, ‘In young children, instances of the same emotion
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56 category appear to be expressed with a variety of different muscle movements, and the same
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3 muscle movements occur during instances of various emotion categories, and even during
4 nonemotional instances' (2019: 27). They point out that young children's facial movements
5 lack strong reliability and specificity, giving examples of fear. In FACS this involves wide-
6 eyed and gasping facial configuration, but this has rarely been reported in young infants.
7
8 Other differences between FACS for adults and young children's behaviour includes
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10 expression of anger (infants do not reliably produce a scowling FACS facial configuration) or
11 even smiles. Again, they have not been reliably observed to smile when they are in visually
12 engaging or mastery situations, or even when they are in pleasant social interactions. When
13 the child was angry (such as when being refused an object they wanted or being made to do
14 something against their will), a variety of facial movements were observed, including frowns,
15 furrowed brows, and eyerolls. Further, expressions of anger were more often vocal than facial
16 (ibid: 23-27).

17
18 Also, simplicity when backed up by [big] data can be seductive and misleading. Affectiva is a
19 leading facial emotion recognition company that has shown a keen interest in education.
20 Their product, Affectiva, uses cameras in personal devices or public spaces to capture facial
21 expressions of people as they view or interact with content or objects. Depending on the
22 capacity of the reading device, multiple faces can be scanned at over 20 processed frames-
23 per-second. Affectiva employs FACS to assess the movement of 45 different facial muscles and
24 key feature points, such as the eyes and mouth. The system analyzes each pixel in the region
25 to describe the colour, texture, edges and gradients of the face. It maps these and classifies
26 arrangements of pixels into named emotions. The big data lure is the most prominent feature
27 of Affectiva's home page stating that (as of August 28th 2019) they have analysed 8,333,646
28 faces. When there is attractive visualisation backed by corporate clout and big data, does it
29 matter that the fundamentals of the method might be wrong?

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5 As facial coding deterritorialises emotional life, this also raises questions about the ways in
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7 which these articulations and representations: a) are said to constitute students' emotional
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9 experience for learning and interaction; and b) how they may lead children and older students
10
11 to internalise these articulations of their affective states which, to an extent, would
12
13 deterritorialise existing understanding about emotions. This is echoed by Kennedy et al.
14
15 (2016) whose study on visualisation and representation also identifies questions of power,
16
17 knowledge and simulation in the design conventions of data visualisation. Similarly, in an
18
19 educational context, Williamson (2018a) raises alarm about dashboards, visual analytics
20
21 technologies, the ushering in of a hidden infrastructure of big data techniques, and the
22
23 eventual market reform of education. Here, through overly simple emotional taxonomies and
24
25 the social semiotics of data visualization, education professionals are working with an
26
27 account of emotional life that appears quantifiable and true, but is actually established on
28
29 convenient, commercial and highly debatable foundations. Ultimately this expedience is
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31 grammatical (Agre 1994) as emotional life is being reorganized around the limited units and
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33 measures that computer vision and emotional AI can process.
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42 **Operationalising SEL through AI [A]**

44 Given a topic as innately sensitive as biometrics and emotions, it is all too easy to point to
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46 neo-behaviourist industrial technics of extraction, mining, behaviourism and social
47
48 optimisation, rather than to assess emotional AI itself and how it alters the relationships
49
50 between technology and society (Achterhuis 2001). However, as we have seen above,
51
52 knowledge of empirics and specifics may also lead to ethical understanding. The same can be
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54 applied to education in that while there are identified harms, the goal of emotional AI enabled
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56 EdTech is not malevolent: it is to improve student learning by teaching software to identify
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3 the emotional and affective states of children. The rationale is that academic skills need to be
4
5 complemented with social and emotional skills and related competencies. This sees a ‘whole
6
7 child’ approach that connects success with ability to pay attention, understand and manage
8
9 emotions, and work effectively in groups (Aspen Institute 2019). The appeal of emotional AI
10
11 is clear in that it facilitates tracking of expressions and, in theory, emotions, attention and
12
13 interpersonal behaviour. Applications of these emergent technologies should be seen in the
14
15 context of ongoing datafication of schoolchildren, behaviour and performance (Lupton and
16
17 Williamson 2017, Williamson 2018). Such “disruptive innovation” to education from start-
18
19 ups and legacy technology companies alike raises questions, not least how solutionist
20
21 discourses around learning casts the student as a ‘user’, which in turn entails language of
22
23 commodification and depoliticization of education (Ramiel 2017). Neither EdTech or public-
24
25 private tensions are new, progress through technology and business narratives has a history.
26
27 These include Edison’s vision of film as an educational technology (1920s); Pressey’s
28
29 “machine for testing intelligence” (1920s); and Skinner’s mechanical and electronic
30
31 "teaching machines" that, following logics of operant conditioning, sought to speed-up
32
33 student feedback (Watters 2014, Selwyn 2017). Modern EdTech, including that which
34
35 employs emotional AI, remains a social force in which private interests play a prominent role
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37 in public education. It is also a manifestation of technological solutionism whereby
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39 questionable methods are used to solve structural problems of how schools are funded
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41 (Morozov 2013, Williamson 2015, Wright and Peters 2017).
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51 Such initiatives are some distance away from an enlightenment-based Humboldtian model of
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53 education. Rather, they represent a preparatory stage for the labour market (Peters 2016).
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55 This applies to soft as well as hard skills, especially because social and emotional skills
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57 (especially those connected with creativity and resilience) are seen as critical to the
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3 workforce of the future (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2018).
4
5 An extended report by the World Economic Forum (WEF 2016), 'New Vision for Education:
6
7 Fostering Social and Emotional Learning through Technology' identifies a current lack of
8
9 capacity to quantify and measure social and emotional learning. The cites Affectiva's Affdex
10
11 as a 'specific high-potential example' of how face-based emotional AI is being deployed for
12
13 educational purposes (2016: 15). In an educational context it is used to gauge attention,
14
15 emotion and comprehension, to use data to augment teaching methods, and to allow
16
17 educators to modulate delivery and class schedules. The significance of the World Economic
18
19 Forum is that it connects business, government and other relevant stakeholders, and has
20
21 significant influence in creating and driving high-level agendas in education. Certainly, one
22
23 expects the World Economic Forum to emphasize and potentially champion the role of
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25 business in education, but their pronouncements on issues involving personal data and
26
27 privacy is usually done with greater understanding of involved technologies.
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35 Given ambiguity (at best) around facial coding and children, to proceed from weak scientific
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37 foundations is problematic for evidence-based education. However, this uncertainty is not
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39 present in influential pronouncements, as the World Economic Forum champions affective
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41 computing to 'recognize, interpret and simulate human emotions' (2016: 15). Indeed, this
42
43 'New Vision for Education' is seemingly entirely unaware of debates regarding the nature of
44
45 emotions. Interest in social and emotional learning has created a business opportunity for AI
46
47 companies that use computer-sensing to infer emotional states. The vision is to progress
48
49 EdTech from being a means of making class-time more productive, to using technology to
50
51 enhance Social and Emotional Learning. This is the process through which children and
52
53 adults understand and manage emotions so as to enjoy personal wellbeing, empathise, and
54
55 establish and maintain positive relationships (Philibert 2017). The report cites affective
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3 computing as an ‘emerging set of innovations that allow systems to recognize, interpret and
4 simulate human emotions’, also stating that these show ‘great promise for developing social
5 and emotional skills such as greater empathy, improved self-awareness and stronger
6 relationships’ (WEF 2016: 15). Vendors of these applications promise to identify students in
7 need of attention, to help diagnose the nature of the problem, predict future failures, identify
8 risks and tailor learning materials.
9

10
11 In discussion of the marketisation of education and technologies that make use of psycho-
12 physiological data about the brain, Williamson (2018) draws on Whitehead et al. (2018) to
13 account for this in terms of ‘neuroliberalism’. This helps ground numerous issues:
14 marketisation of education, quantification, and understanding brain functioning to engineer
15 neuroplasticity and shape behaviour. This is not idle critique, especially given that the World
16 Economic Forum report states:
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Developers can embed SEL into traditional academic ed-tech products and reach large untapped markets. And developers can push the boundaries by integrating SEL into products at the forefront of technology. As they do, they are taking action to spread, reinforce and advance SEL. (2016: 15)

Beyond profit motives, other financial factors play a role. Schools around the world have relatively limited resources for teaching and professional development related to social and emotional learning. As such, one can see the appeal of technologies that promise intimacy-at-scale to solve a longstanding problem in education: how to provide personalised attention to packed classrooms. This is less about automation and replacing human teachers, but detection of emotions and affective states to tailor learning approaches. The problems, as detailed,

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3 involve issues of method, coercion, choice, accuracy, material consequences,
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5 commodification of child data, chilling effects (feeling inhibited and excessively self-
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7 conscious), emotional self-governance, relationships with peers, un-intruded upon mental
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9 space, control over what to reveal, and what here is considered as prima facie right not to
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11 have emotions profiled. While children do not have adult autonomy rights, privacy still plays
12
13 an important role. This is because excessive, inescapable and recorded observation of
14
15 emotional behaviours does not align with the need for a significant degree of mental and
16
17 emotional reserve to ensure human flourishing.
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24 Although this paper focuses on emotional AI that senses and makes use of data about facial
25
26 expressions, it should be seen in the context of wider psycho-physiological and biopolitical
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28 interest in augmentation of child behaviour in education (Williamson 2017). On facial
29
30 coding, there are variety of start-ups such as Affectiva and SensorStar Labs that use cameras
31
32 to capture students' emotional expressions to gauge attention and classify student
33
34 engagement. A key recent development however is the increased interest from legacy
35
36 technology companies. The education branch of the technology company Intel states that they
37
38 are researching how recognition of affect may personalise learning experiences and provide
39
40 'adaptive learning' (Intel Education, 2014). Key factors for Intel are scope to recognize
41
42 individual learners' expressions of excitement, frustration and boredom, so educators may
43
44 modulate and optimise the difficulty levels of content. Intel also seek to track 'patterns of
45
46 student motivation' and 'gauge emotional investment.' Microsoft Azure (2018) offers similar
47
48 facial coding products which are marketed alongside their face identification and detection
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50 products. Beyond sensing and detection, users of their Application Programming Interface
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52 (API) also grant capacity to search, identify and match faces within databases of up to 1
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54 million people. These may be segmented by features, similarities and behaviour. This
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3 portends not only class and school-level analytics, but searchability across much larger
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5 groups, potentially for wider social scoring purposes.
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10 **Are the technologies in tension with the UN's stance? [A]**

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12 This paper appreciates the 'multistability' of technology (Idhe, 2002) in that technologies are
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14 not innately bad or good, but neither are they neutral. Their moral charge comes out of its
15
16 relationship with the context in which it is applied (and how this takes place). The nature of a
17
18 technology is not fixed but comes into being in relation to people and usage. While this paper
19
20 does not take a dystopian or utopian view of the technologies themselves (it sees scope for
21
22 positive usage of wider and emergent forms of emotional AI in human-computer interaction,
23
24 entertainment and even art), it is concerned about deployment in education.
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31 Practically and legally, emotional AI raises questions about the role of third parties, sensitive
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33 personal data in the form of biometric data, knowing where and how data is processed, and
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35 allowance of data erasure, but it is Art. 5(1) of the European Union's General Data Protection
36
37 Directive on 'data minimisation' that has special relevance due to its intention to curtail over-
38
39 use of personal data through big data techniques. This provides guidance on a question that
40
41 underlies many parts of this paper: *Is emotional AI necessary for successful education?*
42
43 Specifically, Art. 5(1) states that lawful bases of using personal data requires 'data
44
45 minimisation' and that processing is 'necessary' for a specific purpose. Given that it is
46
47 reasonable to suggest that teachers can empathise and monitor class reactivity without
48
49 processing data about emotions, the lawful basis to process personal data about emotions is
50
51 doubtful. This doubt is amplified by debatable methodology, current effectiveness and scope
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53 to inhibit human flourishing through surveillance.
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3 Beyond Europe and other regions with an interest in maintaining “adequacy” with European
4 data protection principles, the issue of human flourishing is key given its centrality to the
5
6 *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (OHCHR 1990). As detailed earlier,
7
8 Art. 27 and Art. 29 have special application given their interest in mental, spiritual, moral and
9
10 social development. Other articles apply though, including the need to act in the child’s best
11
12 interests (Art. 3), the child’s right to freedom of thought (Art. 14) and privacy (Art. 16), the
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14 right to develop to full potential (§1 Art. 29); the child’s right to liberty (§2 Art. 29); and the
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16 child’s right to be protected from economic exploitation (Art. 32).
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24 However, Art.29 §1 of the Convention raises a counterargument to that being advanced in
25
26 this paper, because it could be argued that applications of AI in the classroom will help and
27
28 not hinder a child’s ability to reach their ‘fullest potential’. Not without merit, this argument
29
30 would be based on accusations of ideological antagonism to market involvement in education
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32 and that luddism blocks scope for children’s development and flourishing. Connected, Art.29
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34 §2’s interest in non-interference to ‘establish and direct educational institutions’ should also
35
36 be seen as having scope to provide a normative defence for EdTech companies. Anticipated,
37
38 the response to the charge is that: a) the science of emotion needs to be sound; and b)
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40 evidence needs to be provided *before* deployment that concerns about harms to children’s
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42 flourishing argued in this paper are incorrect.
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49 Although the applications detailed by EdTech providers and legacy companies are clearly at
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51 odds with the UN’s stance, this paper’s postphenomenological orientation (that involves a
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53 need for empirics and understanding of context) keeps it open to the role of emotional AI in
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55 education. This would not be FACS-based due to methodological concerns, but the idea of
56
57 using emotion and affect-sensitive technologies is not entirely dismissed. Close attention to
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3 child benefits, efficacy, methodology, privacy, data protection, scope to flourish and
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5 exploitation would all be factors in a future assessment. These are criteria that would apply to
6
7 many emergent technologies and practices. A more novel issue stems from the fact that
8
9 schools, to an extent, play an 'in loco parentis' function.² To help understand whether the
10
11 public good is being served by emotional AI technologies, a key question is this: *Do schools*
12
13 *that employ emotional AI companies behave as any reasonable parent would do in promoting*
14
15 *the welfare and safety of children in their care?* This is to ask whether parents would
16
17 outsource development of their child's social and emotional skills to companies that use
18
19 resultant data to improve their algorithms to serve other clients, including those from
20
21 commercial and security sectors. Beyond the question of the commensurability of the private
22
23 interests of emotional AI companies with the public good, child and educational benefits,
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25 methodology, privacy, data protection, scope to flourish and absence of exploitation, this
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27 paper suggests the following considerations for any deployment of emotional AI by
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29 educators, whether this be based on facial analytics or a different sort (see Figure 1):
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38 **Conclusion [A]**

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40 Focusing on face-based approaches that employ Basic Emotions methodology, the goal of
41
42 this paper has been to consider benefit and risks of emotional AI-based EdTech. As a prima
43
44 facie principle, the suggestion that technologies may assist teachers in their activity is not
45
46 problematic. Emotional AI is also not seen as innately unethical, although the paper is
47
48 mindful of that existing applications (such as in advertising and retail are taking place with
49
50 questionable consideration of ethical factors such as consent). Centrally, this paper did not
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55 ² In the UK, under the Children Act 1989, teachers have a duty of care towards their pupils. This is
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57 referred to as 'in loco parentis'. Legally, while not bound by parental responsibility, teachers must
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59 behave as any reasonable parent would do in promoting the welfare and safety of children in their
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61 care.

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3 begin with the assumption that private interests and serving the public good are
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5 incommensurable. However, it finds numerous methodological, legal and normative
6
7 problems with emotional AI-based EdTech, especially applications based on facial coding.
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9 These are: 1) serious questions about effectiveness, validity and representativeness of training
10
11 data; 2) financial incentives and the wellbeing of school-children do not align in this
12
13 situation; 3) mining the emotional lives of children is normatively wrong, especially when the
14
15 value extraction does not serve the wellbeing of those children; 4) it is problematic to use
16
17 inferences about children's emotions to train neural networks deployed for other commercial
18
19 purposes (such as advertising); 5) scope for mission creep where in-class data may be used
20
21 for other socially determining purposes (such as social scoring); 6) the social desirability of
22
23 chilling effects in the classroom; 7) existence of data minimisation principles that should ask
24
25 if emotional AI is necessary for successful education; and, lastly, 8) contravention of the
26
27 creepiness principle. This paper concludes that, in the case of emotional AI and facial coding
28
29 in the classroom, these technologies are incommensurable with current and near future social
30
31 values. The test posed for any deployment of emotional AI by educators is conceived as a
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33 good start, rather than the definitive test. Ideally it will be amended and improved through the
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35 work of many hands to help guard the public good.
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Figure 1 Considerations for deployment of emotional AI by educators

Concern	Issue
<i>Scientific scrutiny</i>	Does the technology do what its proponents claim? Has the data been trained on a suitably diverse dataset? Has independent scientific scrutiny been solicited?
<i>Universality</i>	Proponents of facial coding are adamant that Basic Emotions are universal, but what of: a) ethnocentric considerations; b) representative training data; c) location variation in emoting; d) individual-level variation in affective reactions and emoting?
<i>Methodological expediency</i>	Emotions are articulated in a way that makes sense to machines. Has consideration been given to the risk of creating an understanding of emotional life that suits data analytics, but not people?
<i>Relationships with self</i>	Has due consideration been given to how these technologies may impact on students' own emotional understanding?
<i>Mental health</i>	Are policies in place if the technology detects ill mental health and how will these be balanced with privacy and data protection concerns?
<i>Disavowing self-reporting</i>	Will students be believed if they complain that they <i>were</i> paying attention?
<i>Students and parents: may they opt-out without penalty?</i>	Power asymmetries and lack of choice of schools conspire to make meaningful consent impossible. What is the policy and rationale if parents or children do not want to be subject to sensing by emotional AI?
<i>Trust</i>	Has the trusting nature of people and their willingness to engage with non-human actors been considered?

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<i>Review</i>	What processes and checks are in place to review the implementation of the emotional AI application? Have suitable independent experts been solicited and are they available to assist where answers to this test are unclear?
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