

Source: Season 2, Episode #4

Digital technologies have entered the chat with Dr. Christina Colclough

Episode Highlights

Join Mia Travers Hayward, CTF/FCE Researcher and Policy Analyst, as she chats with Dr. Christina J. Colclough, founder of the [Why Not Lab](#), former leader in the global labour movement and advocate for the digital rights of workers.

This episode discusses:

- digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, and how they are impacting teachers and education workers;
- Protecting labour rights and privacy in the current trajectory of digitization;
- Support and practical tools to leverage when bargaining around digital tech;
- Next steps in digital rights advocacy;
- And more.

What is artificial intelligence (AI) exactly?

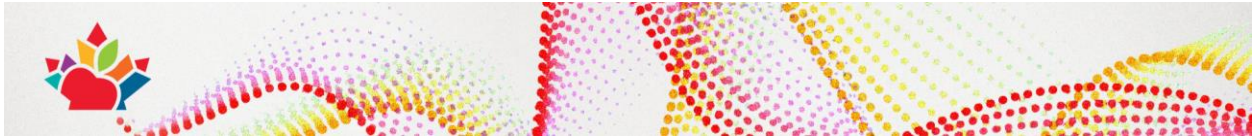
Christina Colclough (CC): In technical terms, AI is a set of rules in computer programming code aimed at solving a particular problem or performing a task. But, there's no one definition of AI. What we can do is think about AI as a recipe, imagining that we're going to make tomato soup, for example. It needs ingredients, or instructions. Your tomato soup will not taste as good if your tomatoes are rotten. So, if the data that it relies on are not representative for your culture, for your people, or if they for some reason are historically biased, then the outcome will be biased. Your tomato soup will not taste good if the data – or the ingredients – were rotten. That said, we should be saying digital technologies, because there's a lot of digital technology out there, which is having a lot of impact, which is not AI. It can be machine learning, deep learning, which are subcategories of AI, or it can just be data-driven analysis.

What are the research findings on the impacts of education technology on education workers, unions, and the system?

CC: What was very clear from the research is that there's a sharp increase in the use of education technology or "EdTech". Another thing we found out in that research was that across the world, teachers were simply not consulted on what their needs are and what technologies they would prefer. Another thing that stood out was that teachers' training needs on all things digital were overwhelmingly not met. So, they were asked to use technologies, but they were not trained in using them or in understanding them. And to no surprise, work intensification was a big problem. Lastly, another conclusion that stood out is the whole idea around negotiating for our data rights and for the right to have a seat at the table in the use of these technologies.

What role do education unions play in protecting teachers' labour and digital rights?

CC: First and foremost, we have to understand that we're in this together and it's important that we all speak the same language. Once we have that common vocabulary in place and we've done a critical analysis of the benefits and harms, there's a few key topics to bring to the



negotiation table: data rights and the right to be free of algorithmic manipulation (the right to know what data is being collected, why, and by whom); the need for teachers to be consulted in a continuous evaluation of how these systems are actually working and their impacts; and ensuring a good balance between work life and private life.

One example of this in practice is in California, where they recently made amendments to their data protection regulation to include a de-commodification clause, which is the right to opt out of the selling of your data. This is the only data protection clause in the world.

What do you see as the next steps in advocating for digital rights in education?

CC: Well, we need to address a gaping hole in a lot of our governmental discussions around the world regarding certifying these systems so that they're allowed into the education system. But what none of our governments are seriously discussing is how do we acknowledge that the majority of these systems are fluid and changeable. And if they can learn something, they can also learn the wrong thing. So, if we want to protect human rights, workers rights, citizen rights, then we have to continuously govern them. A bridge we need to connect is making governance more inclusive by including the voices of teachers, educations workers, and students, and making that mandatory in the use of education technology.