



The global, cross-sector conference on
technology supported learning and training

Nov 30 – Dec 2, 2016

NEWS RELEASE - For Immediate release

Teachers v Techies: The Big Robot Debate

Robots could soon replace teachers.

In fact, not only could they replace them, but they should and will.

That's the view of two top education technology experts, who'll be at the OEB Debate in Berlin later this month to argue their case that substituting artificial intelligence for real teachers will boost quality and lead to better results.

Robot teachers "never get ill, don't forget much of what they are taught, operate 24/7 and can deliver from anywhere to anywhere there is an internet connection," says Edtech entrepreneur Donald Clarke. "Unlike our brains, they don't sleep for eight hours a day and, in a fatal objection to human frailty, neither get burnt out, retire nor die."

Together with his colleague, Christoph Benzmueller of Berlin's Free University, Mr Clarke will propose the motion that "this House believes that artificial intelligence could, should and will replace teachers."

"The OEB debate is always lively," says former British MP Harold Elletson, who will chair the proceedings, "but this is likely to be more explosive than usual. Passions are running very high about the use of artificial intelligence in education and the idea that robots could soon do away with teachers altogether is dynamite."

The motion will be opposed by futurist thinker Nell Watson, the founder of 'Poikos,' and by Andrew Keen, author of 'The Internet is not the Answer' and director of 'salonFutureCast'. They argue that teachers have many roles, which cannot be replaced by artificial intelligence.

"I can foresee machines being excellent coaches, perhaps better than humans," says Watson, "but, as for replacing the best mentors, I doubt that machines will realistically challenge the role of people in that regard any time soon."

For Watson, 'mentoring' is at the heart of the relationship between teachers and their students, and technology is already distracting from this, creating a "testing and tracking culture." Students, she says, are becoming "nails" with "algorithmic hammers smashing them back into place."

"This may turn into a 'teachers v techies' debate," says Elletson, "but it's an opportunity to kick important ideas around. It'll be fun, there'll be lots of noise and, at the end of the



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evening, we'll all know a lot more about the potential for artificial intelligence in education and the issues involved in developing it further.”

The OEB Debate is one of the highlights of OEB, the annual conference and exhibition on technology assisted learning, which will take place at Berlin's Intercontinental Hotel from the November 30th to the December 2nd. The debate will be held on the evening of Thursday December 1st, from 17.45 to 19.00.

For more information about OEB, please contact press-service@icwe.net

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Notes for editors

OEB 2016 is the 22nd global, cross-sector conference on technology supported learning and training. The conference is held at the Intercontinental Hotel in Berlin from November 30 - December 2, 2016.

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