A Phone on Your Face? Rethinking Mobile Device Policy when Smartglasses are mainstream in Education

Abstract: This paper critically examines the sociotechnical risks posed by AI-enhanced smart glasses in K–12 education, focusing on Australian mobile phone and wearable technology policy. Framed by Foucault's concept of governmentality and Bacchi's 'What's the Problem Represented to Be?' methodology, we interrogate twelve state and territory policies to explore how commercial surveillance is normalised through policy silences. While marketed as assistive tools, smart glasses enable covert, real-time recording, live streaming, and biometric capture; technological affordances that challenge the boundaries of relational trust. Our analysis reveals that current policies fail to explicitly address these risks, allowing Big Tech actors to operate as spectral presences, exerting invisible but powerful influence over educational governance. We argue that the lack of regulatory clarity shifts responsibility onto schools, teachers and students, reinforcing neoliberal logics of responsibilisation. As networked devices such as smart glasses, increasingly resemble benign objects like prescription eyewear, their integration into schools demands urgent policy reform. This paper contends that smart glasses represent not only a new surveillance risk but also a form of educational assetisation, transforming classroom interactions into rent-bearing data. We conclude by calling for renewed scrutiny of policy frameworks to ensure that educational spaces remain sites of trust and collective accountability.

Key words: educational policy, governmentality, smart glasses, responsibilisation, Bacchi, spectral presence

Imagine this.

It's 2027. You are a dedicated secondary school teacher, sitting down for what should be a routine parent-teacher meeting with a Year 9 student. The fluorescent hum of the lights, the posters on the wall, the empty chairs, everything feels familiar. So does the script: a calm conversation about student progress. And perhaps a 'check in' on a recent incident. But something is different. Unseen by you, thousands of eyes are already watching. You begin the meeting with empathy and professionalism, recapping how the student is doing in class and then 'check in' on a restorative conversation from the previous week. What you were unaware of, is that a video had now been shared online. That video had now gone viral – it amplified the harm, breached school policy, and deepened the wound only today. And now, the students' parent was sitting across from you, and after you 'check in', the tone shifts. What begins as dialogue, spirals into accusation, and you are accused of bias, perpetuating injustice and systemic sexism. Voices rise. What you don't know is that the parent is now live streaming everything, broadcasting your every word through his smart glasses to thousands of followers. Is it your responsibility to have known they were wearing smart glasses? They're watching. 'Liking'. Judging. Commenting. In real time. You are no longer just a teacher in a room, you are a viral spectacle – but don't know it until you get home. Exposed, scrutinized, and tried in the court of public opinion. You now realise that hundreds of comments could have been scrolling on the parents' glasses, as they spoke to you. You don't sleep. You don't know what to do. You didn't give consent. There was no warning. It wasn't a recording device in class. There was no time to think. This isn't dystopian fiction. This is the fractured, high-stakes reality we are already beginning to live. Yes, recording devices have existed for years, but smart glasses are different. They enable real-time, covert, affordable and continuous broadcasting without consent. They collapse private dialogue into public spectacle in an instant. The algorithmic theatre of modern education has now become the stage for viral clips, providing a novel profit stream benefiting from the relative silence of smart glasses form function in policy.

Introduction

Though the above scenario might seem implausible, an examination of current consumer offerings in the wearable technology space would suggest otherwise. Wearable devices are increasingly popular as technological adjuncts and assistants in our daily lives, with students engaging with smart technologies during exams for close to a decade (Chugh, 2016). From smartwatches on our wrists to health tracking rings worn on our fingers, traditional objects of function and fashion are increasingly augmented by connected forms of technology. "Smart" eyeglasses, equipped with cameras, microphones, speakers, and AI-assistants, are the latest entrants to this burgeoning field of wearable technology, collecting and sharing what Pink et al (2017) refer to as 'mundane data.' Mundane data is collected and shared by seamlessly embedding technology into everyday routines, capturing continuous, often unnoticed digital traces, such as gestures, expressions, and interactions. This data provides significant opportunity. For example, smart glasses like Envision (https://www.letsenvision.com/glasses/home) enhanced with ChatGPT-4 can scan text, identify objects, and deliver real-time audio descriptions, as well as answer spoken questions, summarize documents, translate languages, interpret charts, and guide navigation (Waisberg et al., 2023). Mundane data, when algorithmically processed, visualised, and converted through artificial intelligence (AI) can transform ordinary moments in real time, into experiences that can reshape the landscape for the wearer.

But how might smart glasses reshape the landscape for those not wearing the technology, those whose faces, voices, and behaviours become data points without their consent or awareness? Mundane data from wearables has long been used to offer educators new opportunities to tailor learning, monitor progress, and create more responsive and inclusive classroom environments (Borthwick et al, 2015). For example, Mills and and Brown (2023) in an exploration of how Microsoft HoloLens 2 smart glasses are used by students, talks to new possibilities for interactive, spatial, and embodied learning in the classroom. And more recently, students have created a tool using smart glasses, facial recognition and AI to identify peers and retrieve their personal data, including home addresses in real time (Hill, 2024). However, when considering those not wearing the technology we can consider the work of Andrejevic and Selwyn (2020), who argue that while facial recognition technology in schools may offer practical efficiencies, it also necessitates urgent scrutiny due to its potential to entrench surveillance capitalism, erode student autonomy, and deepen social inequalities. Further, Lee and Ching (2025) highlight that trust in embodiment technologies is inherently unstable and context dependent, challenging assumptions of technological reliability and consistency. As such, smart glasses, with their capacity to continuously capture, process, and potentially store biometric and behavioural data in real time, and through relatively covert mechanisms in a classroom and surrounds, requires critical scrutiny of associated policy.

This paper considers policy relevant to mobile phones and wearable technology in the geographical context of Australia and within K-12 educational settings. Although situated in Australian policy for context, the findings resonate with global scenarios. Although educational policy has come to terms with the implications of mass adoption of mobile devices such as smartphones, the increasing adoption of wearable technologies raises new questions with respect to how their use will intersect with the rights and responsibilities of learners, teachers, and school communities. Noting smart glasses function as 'a phone on your face' but, disguised as prescription glasses, presenting a distinct and complex risk profile that warrants careful consideration. To explain, in the imagined scenario above, had the parent held up a mobile phone to record the conversation, the teacher would have been aware that the interaction was being streamed. The covert and seemingly innocuous nature of smart glasses, combined with their ability to deliver real-time, wearer-only information, significantly alters the dynamics of education, demanding deeper understanding of the impacts for those not wearing the technology and how policy affords protections for those not wearing the technology.

This paper examines the tensions and complexities surrounding the emergence of smart glasses in education, asking the broad question: What gaps exist for wearable devices in Australian K-12 educational policy? Rather than simply identifying potential regulatory omissions, the paper investigates the epistemic implications of potential gaps. Using Foucault's concept of governmentality

and a Bacchi-informed analysis, we analyse twelve Australian policies on mobile phone and wearable technology, to interrogate how educators are governed through institutional, public, and platform-based mechanisms. We argue that policy *silences* function to redistribute authority to commercial actors, ushering in an era where everyday interactions in the classroom may be recorded, edited, and circulated, relegating harm as a by-product. We acknowledge that the 'person not wearing the technology' could be the teacher, student, parent or someone sitting outside the school. As such, the analysis identifies, what Vicars et al. (forthcoming) refer to as *spectral presences*, or the forms of power that appear to be absent in policy discourse yet remain influential in their impact. We show how current Australian mobile phone and wearable technology educational policy do not sufficiently anticipate the sociotechnical implications of smart glasses. By doing so, we offer a global provocation about how eyewear embedded with networked functionalities reveals critical regulatory blind spots (despite existing privacy legislation). What follows is a note on terminology, followed by a brief background on wearables, our conceptual framing, methods, results, and a discussion that critically explores the hidden power structures associated with gaps in Australian K-12 educational policy associated with mobile phones and wearable devices.

A note on terminology

In this paper, smart glasses are conceptualized as offering personalized, wearable interfaces that augment an individual's learning experience in real time. In contrast, smart classrooms, like those discussed by Forsman et al. (2024), are spatially designed environments that reimagine collective learning through immersive technologies such as AR and holograms. Notably, Mills and and Brown (2023) discuss smart glasses in terms of immersive interactions with 3D holograms using hand gestures, gaze, and voice. In this paper, we are *not* discussing augmented reality or the overlaying of digital content (such as 3D models, animations, and interactive elements) onto the real-world using devices such as smartphones, tablets, or AR headsets.

We acknowledge the innovation such devices provide in terms of immersive, contextualized experiences, but make clear that we are focussed on Generative AI (GenAI)-powered glasses, that look and feel like normal prescription glasses, but can integrate real-time AI-driven responses and live stream. That is, these functions combined with the technologies' form factor (presented as seemingly innocuous glasses), being sold at a price point less than a smartphone but can provide an intelligent assistant without the same obvious presence as a smart phone or other wearable technology, present novel risks to be considered in education. Unlike augmented reality (AR) and similar visual glasses that emphasize interactive, spatial learning experiences by augmenting the environment, our focus is on smart glasses that leverage GenAI for adaptive, AI-driven content generation and real-time knowledge assistance, including the capacity to record and live stream, through what appears to be prescription glasses. This makes them more of a covert dynamic tutor rather than an interactive visualization tool.

Smartglasses that look like prescription glasses, but are a networked technology, have the capacity to be always connected, constantly collecting, processing, and transmitting data via the cloud or local networks, without drawing attention like a smartphone might. Smart glasses are like an invisible *phone on your face*, always connected, hands-free, integrated with digital networks but having the potential to go relatively unnoticed. This demands a rethink of mobile device policies in education, unlike the ways in which AR has been conceived. This is significant as, while Andrejevic and Selwyn (2020) argue that facial recognition in schools is concerning, we are witnessing smart glasses being applauded for their innovation (Rudra, 2025) without the networked capacity of GenAI enhanced automated tools being considered for their capacity to reinforce racial and gender biases, automate decision-making in dehumanising ways, and risk normalising authoritarian control in educational spaces. This paper focuses on only one of these issues, commercial control in educational spaces.

This differentiation from other AR technologies and focus is significant. First, smart glasses in this paper are conceived to have the capacity to discreetly live stream and interact with generative AI. Second, they are often built into everyday-looking frames that double as prescription glasses, raising important questions around equity, cost, and accessibility. Unlike bulkier AR headsets designed for

immersive overlays, smart glasses therefore require critical inquiry, as they blur public and private boundaries in more covert ways, making their real-world use both more accessible and more ethically complex. Third, it is not difficult to imagine a scenario, where features like eye tracking, emotion detection, and biometric sensing become mainstream. This capability enables claims of real-time analysis of attention, mood, and cognitive states to be commercially marketed. In the earlier speculative scenario, such technology could have transformed a routine one on one teacher-parent interaction, covertly live-streamed, into a moment of mass public biometric scrutiny and predictive profiling, all without the teacher, school or state's knowledge or consent.

Background

Networked and wearable technologies such as smartwatches have embedded members of the educational landscape within a larger ecosystem of consumer products for years. As a result, on a daily basis, and through a single piece of hardware, a student, teacher or parent might interact with hundreds of apps and software platforms (Rennie et al., 2019). The student, staff or parent (often referred to as the 'user') becomes integrated with sensors that can harvest a significant quantity of personal data, collected for a variety of purposes (Triantafyllidis et al. 2024) and often repurposed for activity beyond the original context. Notably, the impact of the information and data collected by wearables extends beyond the individual wearing the device. For example, smart glasses with integrated cameras can now stream an individual's first-person experience of the world directly to social media (Rayban, 2025) which when considered that those wearing the glasses can recognize faces (Waisberg et al., 2023) and have access the personal information (Hill, 2024) raises significant privacy, consent, surveillance, and ethical issues. It also raises questions about policy protecting members of the educational community from harms associated with safety, including exposing sensitive classroom interactions, and compromising educational integrity. Although the opportunities and risks of such devices have been explored with respect to social interaction and public places (Iqbal & Campbell, 2023), the implications of their use in schools remains largely unexplored, particularly with respect to how public policy in Australia will regulate their use as technologies distinct from mobile phones.

The popularity of wearable technology has surged in recent years, driven by decreasing prices and increasing integration with dedicated applications on mobile phones. Although smartwatches lead the wearable technology category in terms of consumer adoption (Counterpoint, 2024), other form factors (the physical size, shape, and layout of a device or component) are also gaining popularity, including a variety of health and fitness trackers worn on other parts of the body such as the wrist or the finger. The trend to integrate smart functionalities such as real time feedback and generative output, into personal accessories and wearable items is also gaining ground in the eyewear market. Due to the accelerating miniaturization of camera and sensor technologies (Ferrara, 2024), and "Meta attempting to make smart glasses a mainstream technology" (Waisberg et al. 2023, p.1), the educational landscape is situated at a pivotal moment of change.

Although eyeglasses originated as a form of assistive technology to enhance sight, smart glasses (whether worn with or without corrective lenses) are growing in popularity among a much broader set of consumers (Bhardwaj et al. 2024). Signalling a shift in how educational spaces can be mediated, monitored, and potentially transformed, current designs can make and receive phone calls (Rayban, 2025), capture photographs and video, stream recorded media to the internet, playback audio through on-board speakers, and interact with artificial intelligence (AI) (Kaviani et al. 2024). Such activity can reconfigure the educational landscape into a space of continuous surveillance capitalism, ambient data capture, and algorithmic mediation of teaching and learning, whilst also challenging the very notion of assessment validity. For example, smart glasses can project a readable text display to waveguide lenses, allowing new ways to engage with texts (Realities, 2025), which when combined with the capacity record and communicate their first-person experience of the world to others with little friction or latency (Meta, 2025) challenges the notion of 'sitting an exam' in person as a solution to academic integrity issues raised by GenAI. Although there is no individual model of smart glasses that currently features all of the aforementioned features and technologies, their convergence into a

single product appears to be imminent (Hector, 2025) as the functionality and useability of smart glasses accelerates their adoption in the marketplace. In a Fourth Quarter 2024 Results Conference Call (January 29th, 2025), Mark Zuckerburg (CEO of Meta) hinted at the anticipated ubiquity of AI-enabled smart glasses: "*This will be a defining year that determines if we're on a path towards many hundreds of millions and eventually billions of AI glasses -- and glasses being the next computing platform like we've been talking about for some time...*" (Meta, 2025, p. 2).

Acknowledging the imminent complexities that smart glasses introduce to the education landscape, this paper focuses on how the latest generation is distinguished from earlier models by their discreet, inconspicuous form factor. Unlike previous entrants to the field such as Google Glass (Kudina & Verbeek, 2019), the current design aesthetic for smart glasses is one that increasingly conforms to the conventions of traditional eyewear. By way of example, the Meta Ray Ban 2's can be purchased with or without corrective lenses, configured with transition lenses for in- and outdoor use, or purchased with tinted lenses for use as sunglasses (Rayban, 2025). According to the research firm Counterpoint, the Meta Raybans are the most successful display-less smart glasses developed thus far, with over one million units having been shipped (Counterpoint, 2024). As such, the covert integration of AI-enhanced smart glasses into educational settings raises numerous concerns; here, we focus specifically on the implications of commercial control within these spaces. Further, for this analysis, we consider the implications of smart glasses having technological capabilities and functions at least equivalent to the Meta Ray Ban 2s; namely, a connected wearable device with integrated cameras, a microphone, and AI features. Therefore, any subsequent use of the term in this analysis will imply a device with such capabilities.

Conceptual Framing

Governmentality, a theoretical framework introduced by Michel Foucault, provides a lens for policy analysis when examining the management and control of mobile phones and wearable devices within schools. Foucault's concept of governmentality broadly refers to the myriad ways governments guide, influence, and regulate individual and collective behaviour through indirect mechanisms such as institutions, knowledge, expertise, and technology (Burchell et al., 1991). Instead of governing through explicit control or punishment alone, governmentality as a conceptual framing, encourages us to consider how people internalize specific rules and norms as natural or desirable. And how this action, can cause them to govern themselves in alignment with commercial goals. It provides a critical framework for understanding the dynamics of power and control within educational systems and emphasizes how educational policies shape individual behaviour and societal norms. This is significant as smart glasses arguably violate established and global privacy and consent understandings yet are increasing being sold as a mainstream technology, just like eye wear.

Governmentality helps us to understand that the context we are interrogating is about understanding power not as something imposed from above, but as something embedded in everyday practices. It helps us to interrogate how 'eyewear' is shaping what we see as normal, acceptable, and valuable. Gulson and Sellar (2018) argue that data-driven practices and infrastructures in schools serve as tools for governing educators' and students' conduct, suggesting establishing norms for accountability, efficiency, and educational success. In this lens, we can question smart glasses as an infrastructure for commercial governmentality. Further, Ball and Olmedo (2023) discuss how neoliberal education policies shape teachers' identities, subjectivities, and everyday practices which allows us to interrogate how policy associated with wearable devices and mobile phones may be influenced by neoliberal agendas. Drawing on Michel Foucault's idea of governmentality, we can understand that neoliberal reforms in education operate not primarily through overt force or direct coercion, but rather by encouraging individuals, especially teachers, to become self-governing, self-responsible, and self-monitoring subjects. The 'smart glasses are innovative' rhetoric, aligns with teachers bringing smart glasses into the classroom. When applied to policy analysis, this perspective reveals how seemingly neutral or beneficial policies on technology in educational contexts could be infused with subtle power dynamics, shaping teachers' conduct, habits, and even their sense of self.

In education, policies regulating mobile phones and wearable devices, however, rarely consider teachers, to become self-governing, self-responsible, and self-monitoring subjects. Policy focused on mobile phones for example, is largely presented as a practical response to issues of student distraction, online safety, and educational efficiency (Selwyn & Aagaard, 2021). Yet, from the viewpoint of governmentality, such policies are not just technical guidelines; they represent deeper strategies through which educational institutions seek to shape responsible, self-governing individuals (O'Malley, 2008). For example, when a school implements a policy that bans mobile phones in classrooms, the policy narrative often revolves around student wellbeing, improved concentration, and academic performance – not the deeper underlying power relations between the teacher and commercial forms of AI tools. Rather than enforcing compliance strictly through punishment or explicit coercion, such policies aim for teachers to self-regulate and be responsible for managing their actions and interactions making the assumption that the impacts and implications of smart glasses is understood.

From a policy analysis standpoint, governmentality raises critical questions about consent, autonomy, and freedom. Governmentality as a conceptual lens, invites reflection on how policies related to mobile phones and wearable devices are or are not supported by broader discourses of expertise and knowledge. Gulson and Sellar's (2018) work illustrates how educational policies involving data infrastructures influence individuals to accept increased monitoring, measurement, and surveillance as both natural and beneficial. Similarly, Ball and Olmedo (2023) highlight how neoliberal educational reforms shape teachers' identities and subjectivities through subtle, indirect forms of governance. That is, while teachers may appear autonomous, making their own professional choices, governmentality as a lens, suggests that these decisions are deeply influenced by external market logics, norms, and expectations. Arguably, if notions of consent, autonomy, and freedom are explicitly foregrounded through policy awareness including smart glasses, neoliberal governance structures in education can be made tangible. That is, rather than policy gaps simply reflecting oversights or unintended omissions, governmentality suggests these gaps can be commercially strategic or structural, aimed at reinforcing behaviours, identities, and values at the expense of others. By making visible how policies prioritize practices, such as data-driven accountability or market-oriented performativity, governmentality reveals that the absence of alternative policies is not neutral but indicative of underlying power relations.

To give a name to this underlying power relation, we draw on the notion of spectral presence (Vicars et al, forthcoming). *Spectral presences* or the forms of power that appear to be absent in policy discourse yet remain influential in their impact, interrupt the discourse that there is a 'policy gap'. Or that there is simply 'nothing there yet'. We draw on this concept, as the illusion of smart glasses being absent in policy masks the persistence of commercial power. Through a lens of governmentality coupled with the notion of spectral presences, we report on a policy analysis to illustrate the potential impact of spectral presences, in the form of commercial entities and Big Tech that strategically reformulate themselves to maintain dominance within the educational landscape. We draw on spectral presence, as it acknowledges that even in the so-called voids of policy, corporate and technological interests remain embedded, operating through new mechanisms that reinforce their authority while rendering their influence less visible. The conceptual approach of governmentality coupled with spectral presence, aids us in this paper, to examine and interrogate not just what policies explicitly state, but also what they exclude, to uncover the deeper rationalities shaping the educational landscape.

Method

This study adopts a two-phase qualitative research design to examine how Australian K-12 education mobile phone and wearable devices policy engages with emergent technologies like smart glasses. Phase one involved a desk-based analysis of twelve state and territory K-12 policies focussed on mobile phones and wearable devices. Phase two applied Bacchi and Goodwin's (2016) What's the Problem Represented to Be? framework to identify how the assumptions and power relations underpinning how smart glasses can be problematised.

Phase 1. Textual Analysis of Twelve Policies: A Desk-Based Review

A desk-based examination of national policies was conducted as an inclusion screening process. Twelve educational policies from each state and territory in Australia were chosen according to the following selection criteria. First, the policy was presented as the state or territory's policy on mobile phones, and / or and wearable technology when searching for 'Mobile Phone' on the government websites. Second, the documents were sourced from these publicly available websites during January to March 2025. The policies and justification for their inclusion are listed in Table 1. The twelve policies were then coded according to a set of guiding questions developed by the researchers: (1) Does the policy explicitly mention smart glasses or other wearable technology? (2) Could wearable smart glasses fall under the existing definition of mobile phones? (3) Are there provisions that allow schools to extend the policy to other smart devices? (4) Could wearable smart glasses be exempt under specific conditions? (5) Does the policy account for privacy and security risks associated with smart glasses? and (6) Does the policy allow for future technological advancements? This choice of questions allowed us to trace how smart glasses were or were not incorporated into the rationalities of governance, embedded in everyday regulatory language. The findings of the desk review are presented as a summary, in Table 2. 'Policy Gaps Summary'.

We acknowledge that this design is limited by its reliance on publicly accessible policy documents, that policies may use broad or ambiguous language that obscures their relevance to specific devices such as smart glasses, and our focus on state and territory-level documentation excludes school- or system-specific policies that may vary significantly in practice. To mitigate these limitations, we employed a transparent and replicable inclusion process, and developed a structured set of guiding questions to enable consistent analysis across diverse policy formats. The aim was not to produce generalisable findings across all relevant policies, but rather to present a representative snapshot that anchors critical discourse on smart glasses as emerging mainstream technology in schools, providing the foundation for Phase 2's analysis.

Phase 2. Critical Reflections on Policy Assumptions Using Bacchi's WPR

Phase 2 involved a Bacchi analysis (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016), drawing on "What's the Problem Represented to Be?" (WPR). The WPR framework treats policies not as neutral responses to problems, but as active constructions that shape how problems are understood, governed, and addressed. In this study, the WPR approach was used to unpack the implicit problem representations embedded within the policy texts, specifically in relation to emergent technologies like smart glasses. The WPR analysis also foregrounded the role of policy in shaping normative expectations about students, teachers, and educational technology. It was chosen as an analysis method as it allowed us to highlight how problem representations shift responsibility for managing technological risks onto individual actors (e.g., teachers, students, or parents), thereby masking the broader structural or systemic dimensions of digital governance in schools. We also chose this method for the analysis to reveal how silences around innovation marginalise alternative narratives or uses of smart glasses in education.

Results

The following results do not treat the twelve policies as a static set of rules. Rather, the results report on the interrogation of how problems are constructed and who is positioned as responsible, offering critical insights into the broader implications of regulating emergent technologies in education. That is, policy gaps are likely to persist, and reactive measures may overlook deeper structural issues. What follows is Table 1., which summarizes key policy gaps concerning smart glasses across various jurisdictions, highlighting the extent to which existing policies address, or fail to address, the implications of wearable technology in schools. And secondly, Table 2. Which provides a summary of the textual analysis guided by the 6 questions above, presented as a Policy Gaps Summary. Following these tables, is the discussion which reports on the Bacchi analysis completed in Phase 2.

Table 1. Policies included in the comparative cross-national examination

State or Territory	Policy name	Policy link	Student mobile device permitted?	Mentions wearable glasses
NSW	Student use of mobile phones in schools' procedure Digital devices, services, and information – staff use	https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/pd-2023-0480-01 https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/pd-2002-0024	No – schools permitted to implement 1 of 5 "off and _____" options. Ex. Off and away, off and in lockers, etc…(no qualification for phones as assistive technology)	Appears to only apply to "phones"; no definition or reference made to other devices
VIC	Digital learning policy: Mobile phones: student use policy	https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/digital-learning/policy https://www.2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/students-using-mobile-phones/policy	"students who bring mobile phones to school must have them switched off and securely stored during school hours." Makes exception for health conditions, but need to be noted in student health plan	Definitions relate to learning applications: digital technologies digital hardware, software and resources used to develop and communicate learning, ideas and information. for the purpose of this policy, a mobile phone is a telephone with access to a cellular (telecommunication) system, with or without a physical connection to a network.
QLD	Student use of mobile devices policy	https://ppr.qed.qld.gov.au/pp/student-use-of-mobile-devices-procedure	"all state school students must keep mobile phones switched off and 'away for the day' during school hours. Wearable devices, such as smartwatches, must have notifications switched off so that phone calls, messages and other notifications cannot be sent or received during school hours." Students and parents need to apply for a health exemption	Note use of term "emerging technologies": for the purpose of this procedure, mobile devices include mobile phones, wearables such as smartwatches, handheld devices and other emerging technologies which have the ability to connect to telecommunication networks or the internet. Note this: this procedure does not apply to personal or school-owned devices, such as ipads, tablets or laptops, that are approved for educational use as part of the school's bring your own device (byox) approach.
SA	Student use of mobile phones and personal devices policy	https://www.education.sa.gov.au/policies/shared/student-use-of-mobile-phones-and-personal-devices-policy.pdf	"requires students in all government schools to keep their personal devices, including mobile phones, off and away between the start and end of each school day and while attending authorised school activities off-site" long term exceptions are required to be "exceptional"	Bolding is mine: for the purposes of this policy and the linked supporting resources, personal devices include mobile phones and any other digital devices with the capability of connecting to telecommunication and/or internet networks, such as smart watches.
WA	Student mobile phones in public schools' policy	https://www.education.wa.edu.au/web/policies/-/student-mobile-phones-in-public-schools-policy	"implement a ban on the use of mobile phones for all students from the time they arrive to the conclusion of the school day ("off and away all day") unless the student has been granted an exemption for the following uses of mobile phones" "require students to put their smart watches in 'aeroplane mode' so phone calls and messages cannot be sent or received during the school day" exception is for monitoring a health condition	Does not mention smart glasses per se: for the purposes of this policy, 'mobile phones' includes smart watches, other electronic communication devices, and associated listening accessories, such as, but not limited to, headphones and ear buds.
TAS	Bring your own technology policy use-of-mobile-phones-by-students-at-school-policy	https://publicdocumentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/library/document%20centre/bring%20your%20own%20technology%20-%20policy.pdf https://publicdocumentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/library/document%20centre/use-of-mobile-phones-by-students-at-school-policy.pdf	Subject to the exemptions set out below, students must have their mobile phones switched off and stored during school hours. • principals must determine an appropriate storage approach, in consultation with their school association. • principals must require students with 'smart watches' to set them to 'aeroplane mode' exemptions may be granted by principals for health conditions	
NT	Personal digital devices in educational environments policy Student mobile phones in government schools	https://education.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/258061/personal-digital-devices-policy-approved-june-2022.pdf https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/school-operations/student-mobile-phones-in-government-schools#:~:text=policy%20reform%20for%20mobile%20phones%20in%20nt%20government%20schools&text=from%20day%201%2c%20term%201,be%20switched%20to%20flight%20mode.	Students in preschool to year 6 will not be permitted to have mobile phones in their possession during the school day and smart watches must be switched to flight mode. Students from years 7 to 12 can have their mobile phone during the school day but they must be off and away all day – switched off, not accessed, seen, or heard during the school and securely stored. Smart watches must be switched to flight mode. Exceptions for monitoring a health condition	
ACT	Use of personal electronic devices policy	https://www.education.act.gov.au/publications_and_policies/school-and-corporate-policies/computers_devices-and-internet/internet-and-online-communication-services/use-of-personal-electronic-devices-policy https://www.education.act.gov.au/about-us/all-news-and-news-alerts/news-items/november-2023/new-mobile-phone-policy-for-act-public-school	Students in years k-10 at act public schools may not use or use personal communications devices at school, including recess and lunch, or during school authorised events. Year 11 and 12 students must turn off and put away any mobile phones and personal communications devices during class time. • Exemptions can be requested if a student needs their device/assistive technology: o To manage or monitor a medical condition o To help meet caring or family responsibilities o To support adjustments for students with disability o As part of an agreed individual learning plan.	

Table 2: 2 Textual Analysis of Australian Policy associated with smart glasses: Policy Gaps Summary

State or Territory	Explicit Mention of Smart glasses	Inclusion Under Mobile Phone Definition	Schools Can Extend Policy to Wearables	Exemptions for Assistive Use	Privacy & Security Risks Considered	Policy Allows for Future Tech	Conclusion: Smart glasses Adequately Included?
NSW	No	Unclear	Unclear	Unclear	No	No	No
Victoria	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Queensland	No	Possibly	Yes	Yes	No	Somewhat	Partially
South Australia	No	Likely	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Partially
Western Australia	No	Likely	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Partially
Northern Territory	No	Likely	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially
Australian Capital Territory	No	Possibly	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Not explicitly
Tasmania	No	Possibly	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Partially

The desk review found that no Australian state or territory explicitly mentions smart glasses in their mobile device policies, leading to potential for ambiguity and inconsistent enforcement. The textual analysis revealed that some states reference wearables broadly, potentially covering smart glasses, but others do not, creating policy gaps. Most policies allowed schools to extend restrictions to other technologies hence arguably could include smart glasses, giving schools discretion. However, it is worth noting that such ambiguity arguably adds to the administrative burden. That is, the lack of specific mention of smart glasses makes governing them unclear, leaving risks that may cause harm, unique to smart glasses, such as covert recording and facial recognition, largely unaddressed within mobile device policy. With only the Northern Territory noting these concerns. Acknowledging that these policies are situated within a suite of policy, and that other policies such as privacy policy would support the governance of smart glasses represented elsewhere, what follows is the findings of the Bacchi analysis to explore commercial governance that may be associated with policy that has gaps associated with smart glasses. The following discussion reports on Phase 2 of the study, presented as a discussion to explore 'What gaps exist for wearable devices in Australian educational policy?' through a lens of governmentality.

Discussion

The discussion examines how Australian K-12 educational policies on mobile and wearable devices construct a problem based on assumptions underpinning these policies, how they have evolved, what they leave unexamined, the effects they produce, and alternative ways to think about the issue. By analysing these twelve policies through Bacchi's framework, the discussion interrogates gaps in policy framing around mobile phones and wearable devices, to reveal potential consequences through the conceptual framing of Foucault's governmentality and Vicar's et al. (forthcoming) notion of spectral presences.

The *problem* with mobile device and wearable technology policy, is presented to be one of focus. The focus of such policy was found to be topics such as student distraction, inappropriate phone use (including cyberbullying), and a lack of social interaction due to mobile phone use during school hours. Other policy goals focused on student mental health and screen time, which aligns with widespread discourse suggesting that excessive technology use negatively impacts student well-being (Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016). Protecting the educational landscape from corporate interests that encourage teachers to be technological positivists or boosters (Bigum and Kenway, 1998) despite critical edtech scholars demonstrating increasing harms (Selwyn, 2019), was not found to be a policy goal associated with wearable devices. As such, the problem with mobile phone and wearable

technology policy, when considered alongside calls for teachers and schools to use and teach the digital tools and technologies required of the fourth industrial revolution (Schwab, 2015) is one of commercial power being present, but policy in mobile phone policy to speak to commercial power lacking.

This is not new. As Williamson (2022) has intimated, the 'problem' with networked devices (aka smart devices) is complex and contested. For example, Williamson (2022) argues that networked smart devices, such as those in smart cities, encompass roles as economic, political, and civic participants, as well as passive data sources exploited by governments and tech companies. The twelve policies we explored speaks to restricting mobile phones, so that schools can meet the goal of creating a more focused and socially interactive learning environment (Selwyn & Aagaard, 2021), and commercial influence in education is arguably covered (like privacy) beyond the limited policy we examined. However, the omission of commercial power from mobile phone policy aligns with broader mechanisms of governmentality (Ball & Olmedo, 2023). Where schools function as sites of discipline and surveillance, shaping student behaviour through regulatory controls (Williamson, 2023), we note that banning mobile phones in the classroom also limits the collection of data (as discussed by Arantes, in Selwyn & Aagaard, 2021). Arguably, by not specifically referring to smart glasses, the current policy landscape creates an open space for covert forms of commercial power to flourish and be mainstreamed in education, that fails to acknowledge the *functions of smart glasses in specific contexts*.

The context of traditional eyewear being part of the educational landscape is normalised. However, emerging smart glasses blur the line of normalising prescription smart glasses. While smart glasses can support learning through features like real-time translation and assistive functions for students with disabilities (Zhang & Wang, 2024), they also present a novel problem, as they can covertly record, browse, or communicate, making them disruptive (Bhargava & Rehman, 2025). Unlike traditional glasses, smart glasses introduce commercial interests and data monetization risks that current mobile device and wearable technology policies, by not explicitly referring to smart glasses, fail to address. Without explicit recognition of these harms, we risk normalising smart glasses as benign assistive tools, despite their potential for harm.

Spectral Presences, Governmentality, and the Silent Influence of Big Tech

The representation of this problem can therefore be seen to be that smart glasses blur the boundary between assistive eyewear and surveillance-capable devices, posing not only privacy and consent risks, but also covert commercial risks that arguably benefit from the lack of explicit detail around smart glasses in current policy. To interrogate the representation of this problem, we refer to the potential for spectral presences in the mobile and wearable device policy analysed.

Recognising the presence of spectral presences in the analysed policy, illustrates potential implications of covert forms of commercial neoliberal governmentality. Aligning with broader societal concerns regarding technology use in education (Selwyn, 2013, 2019), spectral presences in this context are considered to be associated with a focus on commercial technology as a distraction, rather than commercial technology as a form of covert governmentality. When considering the work of Manan (2024), who highlights how neoliberal governmentality governs subjects through self-discipline and market logics, it could be argued that smart glasses operate as covert neoliberal governmentality. Hyped as innovation, set at a price point achievable by the masses, yet fundamentally providing covert surveillance, data extraction, and self-optimization imperatives into everyday educational practices, current policy normalizes market logics and self-regulation through the acceptance of smart glasses. Further, as their design mimics traditional eyewear and allows for prescription lenses, smart glasses evade the visual cues of being networked that AR headsets may do. Thus, enabling them to bypass social and policy scrutiny to enter educational spaces largely unnoticed. This inconspicuous form facilitates a spectral presence that advances neoliberal governmentality by embedding surveillance, datafication, and self-optimization imperatives into everyday schooling without provoking regulatory alarm. As such, what is left unproblematic in this problem

representation is that existing policies for mobile phone use in schools reflect a disciplinary approach to governance of student behaviour, but not to commercial power.

The silent influence of big tech is a significant space to problematise, as teaching is a *relational* profession. Much of the day-to-day practice of an educator depends critically on reciprocal networks of trust developed over time between teachers, learners, and caregivers. As such, leaving neoliberal governance structures associated with smart glasses left unproblematic enables, omnipresent surveillance, while spraining relationality and responsibilisation. Ball and Grimaldo (2020, p. 301), in quoting Lemki, 2001 state "this 'a new form of responsibilisation', a responsibility begets 'new forms in which the governed are encouraged, freely and rationally, to conduct themselves'…[which is a] a dream scenario within the neoliberal imagination – a condensate of profit, governance and reform." To shift the burden of monitoring privacy, consent, and ethical use from institutions to individual students and educators through smart glasses, reinforces neoliberal logics of self-regulation and accountability. As such, we may ask, will the concept of *relational trust,* which is central to a teacher's professional practice, be compromised by the presence of smart glasses in schools? And how are we to reconcile such risks with the potential benefits of this new technology, should smart glasses prove useful as assistive devices for people who are hearing or vision impaired, or as accessibility tools for overcoming linguistic challenges in learning? Moreover, who has the right (and burden of responsibility) to decide the answers to such questions as smart glasses are mainstreamed into our learning environments? Such questions, prompt us to rethink assumptions and consider the analysed policies through notions of responsibilisation.

Rethinking assumptions: Can the problem be thought about differently?

The assumption that existing definitions of mobile phones and smart devices are sufficient to regulate new and emerging technologies is a problem to be thought about differently. There is considerable variation in how mobile phone and smart device definitions are constructed across policies. When examined through the lens of responsibilisation, these inconsistencies reveal how regulatory gaps, such as not explicitly referring to smart glasses in wearable device policy, shift the burden of governance onto individuals. By doing so, policy is arguably allowing technologies like smart glasses to bypass scrutiny under the guise of normative, self-managed device use.

For example, in our analysis, Western Australian policy referred to "other electronic communication devices" in its mobile phone policy, while Queensland referred to "emerging technologies" without defining what this entails. South Australian policy took a broader approach, defining personal devices as any with telecommunication or internet connectivity, which could arguably include smart glasses, yet these remain unaddressed explicitly leaving the covert nature of seemingly traditional eyewear to be negotiated by the school and teacher. If we conceive the lack of specificity around smart glasses' form factor (as seemingly innocuous eyewear) in policy analysed, as enabling a spectral presence of neoliberal governance in the classroom, it becomes possible to interrogate them through the lens of governmentality which invites a critical rethinking of why such absences persist in policy. And what effects they produce. Allowing us to ask how this problem representation is constructed, defended, and how it might be disrupted or reimagined.

As the boundary between regular prescription eyewear and AI enhanced smart glasses is blurred, covert forms of neoliberal governance and responsibilisation become normalised in educational spaces. This has been discussed in previous research. For example, this problem can be thought about differently when we recognise, as Amiel et al. argue, that seemingly 'non-onerous' technologies like smart glasses risk obscuring the deep entanglement of public education with corporate interests, enabling a quiet platformization of schooling under the guise of affordable services. Second, Zomer (2024) highlights the ways that engagement technologies silently reconfigure pedagogical values into quantifiable metrics, allowing EdTech platforms to shape teacher behaviour and classroom governance in ways that obscure the nuanced, relational, and affective dimensions of learning. Given these insights, a critical interrogation of how smart glasses operate as socio-cyber-physical systems helps surface the spectral presence of neoliberal governance in education enabled

by mobile phone and wearable tech policy that does not explicitly consider smart glasses' form functions

Rijswijk et al. (2021) argue that responsibilisation is a process whereby moral and operational accountability is disseminated across system actors through digital transformation. When applied to smart glasses in education, this framework highlights how the spectral presence of neoliberal governance in the policy analysed enables a quiet redistribution of responsibility, where teachers, students, and schools become de facto custodians of smart glasses harms. Drawing on Parth et al. (2021), we can see how this mirrors digital consumer responsibilisation, where platforms cultivate moral–material identities and shared accountability without systemic safeguards. In schools, smart glasses, if introduced without explicit regulation, could be defend by effectively aestheticizing surveillance while obfuscating institutional accountability. This encourages an 'individualisation of risk' that aligns with market logics, where teachers must manage both technological and emotional consequences, while policy ambiguity allows technological adoption to proliferate under the guise of innovation. Both cases illustrate how responsibilisation through digital means functions not only as a governance strategy, but as a mechanism that normalises the erosion of collective, structural protections. Together, these examples illustrate how the failure to explicitly address smart glasses within mobile phone policies permits the spectral presence of Big Tech to remain agisted in education.

This is significant, as the policy around mobile phones that was analysed is currently presented as a problem of distraction or bullying, yet smart glasses through this analysis present a clear problem of commercial influence. To reimagine the problem, we focus on education as a collective process that is underpinned by relational trust, where responsibility is a collective effort. This framing bypasses structural critiques of the marketisation of schooling (Komljenovic et al., 2023; Perrotta et al., 2021; Williamson, 2023), to relocate smart glasses as a means of challenging the deeper logic of commercial surveillance and its impact on educational relationality.

To reimagine the problem of smart glasses, the work of Komljenovic et al. (2025) suggests that simply updating broader policy such as privacy and consent, could in fact serve as a commercial strategy that obscures deeper systemic concerns. Komljenovic et al. (2025) identify the assetisation of education, where technologies like smart glasses become embedded not only as tools but as rent-bearing assets governed by opaque contracts, operating under the surface of educational policy. Reimagining existing mobile phone and wearable device policy, which does not explicitly mention smart glasses nor how their form factor brings about novel forms of neoliberal governance, as *covert affordable networked educational devices* provide a means of considering any emergent technology as rent-bearing assets in education. This reimagination of policy guiding teachers and schools, speaks directly to the responsibilisation associated with innovation. Whereas policy in our analysis considers mobile phones, wearable devices, and devices connected to the internet and lists devices such as smartwatches, phone and tablets, we argue that there is a need for policy to consider the assetisation of education through *covert affordable networked educational devices.* By failing to address explicitly consider smart glasses as covert affordable networked educational devices Mobile Phones and Wearable technologies will continue to allow the spectral presence of neoliberal governmentality to flourish in the classroom.

Concluding Remarks

Smartglasses represent more than a novel innovation; they are, quite literally, a phone on your face. Smart glasses embed commercial surveillance, AI biases, and data extraction into everyday prescription eyewear. Yet, as this paper has shown, current Australian educational policies remain grounded on notions of mobile phones as distractions, failing to anticipate the sociotechnical complexities of wearable devices. Through a lens of governmentality, we have revealed how these policy silences enable the spectral presence of Big Tech in classrooms, suggesting a commercial strategy is at play, shifting power away from educators and learners. Crucially, this suggestion is strengthened when considered as yet another form of the assetisation of education. In a near and probable future where covert, networked devices transform classroom interactions into rent-bearing

data infrastructures, there will be a need for researchers to critically examine how emergent technologies such as smart glasses might reconfigure educational governance, commodify student-teacher relationships, and embed platform logics into school systems.

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