It sounds like a sci-fi movie: altering behavior and personality by surreptitiously embedding psychologically manipulative messages into a computer platform. But according to *Education Week*, that's what mega-publisher Pearson did in 2017 to over 9,000 unwitting college students. And this episode foreshadows what's coming soon to a K-12 classroom near you.

Pearson's project used "social-psychological interventions," which roughly equate to the "social emotional learning" (SEL) being implemented at breakneck pace in K-12 schools. Rather than putting more effort into teaching genuine academic content (which might be recommended in light of the wheel-spinning that's occurring with student achievement nationally), many schools – plus the global education establishment – are concentrating instead on probing children's personalities. The students can then be shaped into the kind of people the government thinks they should be.

As an experiment in people-shaping, last year Pearson "embedded 'growth-mindset' and other psychological messaging" into some versions of software used in college computer science classes. For example, the software might feed users who missed a problem a chirpy message exhorting them to keep trying. Pearson distributed its software randomly to 165 colleges and universities. The goal was to "track whether students who received the messages attempted and completed more problems than their counterparts at other institutions."

The minor takeaway from this experiment is that the manipulative messages had only modest effect (the guinea-pig students successfully solved somewhat more problems than did the control-group students, although the control group actually attempted to solve significantly more problems than did the guinea pigs). This is in keeping with research showing that schemes to instill "growth mindsets" in students have little benefit.

But the vastly more important questions are how a corporate researcher and its education-establishment cheerleaders can justify this type of manipulative experimentation on human beings, without their consent, and