

Building Sustainable, Democratic and Fair Futures? The Challenge for Education Institutions

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Before we start...

- How old will you be in 2035?
- How old will your typical student be in 2035?

The ideas we hold about the future are critically important to education

- *So make no mistake. Our future is on the line. The nation that out-educates us today is going to out-compete us tomorrow. (Obama, 2010)*
- *We can't go on like this. If we carry on excusing this kind of failure, we face a future of where [sic] our most stubborn social problems get worse, not better, and where our economy gets left behind, as countries out-educate and out-compete us. So nothing else will do: we need big change in the way we do education in our country. (Cameron, 2010)*
- *You have to fulfil your potential. What do you want to be when you grow up? Where's that going to get you in the long run? This is really important for your future!*

The educational contract:

**Invest in education now and the student (and society)
will be better in future**

We work and we borrow in order to work and to borrow. And the jobs we work toward are the jobs we already have. Close to three quarters of students work while in school [college], many full-time; for most, the level of employment we obtain while students is the same that awaits after graduation. Meanwhile, what we acquire isn't education; it's debt. We work to make money we have already spent, and our future labor has already been sold on the worst market around[...] What we learn is the choreography of credit: you can't walk to class without being offered another piece of plastic charging 20% interest. Yesterday's finance majors buy their summer homes with the bleak futures of today's humanities majors. This is the prospect for which we have been preparing since grade-school.

Wewanteverything (2009: US Student)

Well then, invest in education yourself then, why taxpayer's money needed to invest YOUR education? Will you pay back to the coffer after you graduate? Where your family's money going? Why you guys always ask for aid?

Anonymous (You Tube)

The capacity for our education institutions to guarantee individual and social wellbeing and security is being questioned

Perhaps this is because we don't take 'the future' seriously in education?

- **Tricky**
...I haven't got time to think about the future, I'm just trying to get through today.
- **Tacit and invisible**
...this is what's happened in the past, this is what we're doing now, I'll assume it'll carry on like that in the future
- **Tokenistic and rhetorical**
...'tomorrow's world will need X so students must do (whatever I wanted us to do anyway...)
- **Taken for granted**
... the future knowledge economy
- **Technologically determined**
'the university of the 21st century'

(building on Noel Gough, 1990)

Problems with these approaches to the future

- **Disempowerment of educators and students**
 - These approaches don't give anyone a handle on how change might come about and what they might do about it
- **Vulnerability to fads and gurus**
 - Overinvestment in single futures means we have to change each time a new one comes along
- **Lack of awareness of special interests**
 - If we're not imagining our own futures, we're inhabiting futures that are being designed for us by those with the resources to do so
- **No accountability to future generations**
 - There is no mechanism for examining how decisions made now will play out and have consequences over the longer term
- **No mechanism for considering how current provision will meet students future needs**

How do we have a better conversation about education and 'the future'?

- We do it by understanding what conversations about the future are already going on, what critical uncertainties and possibilities are being imagined
- We do it by thinking about how education could respond to those conversations, and intervene in the futures that are being imagined
- **www.beyondcurrenthorizons.org.uk**

TALKING ABOUT TECHNOLOGY FUTURES

Constant **connectivity** - to people ,
to systems and processing power,
and to networks - the personal
cloud

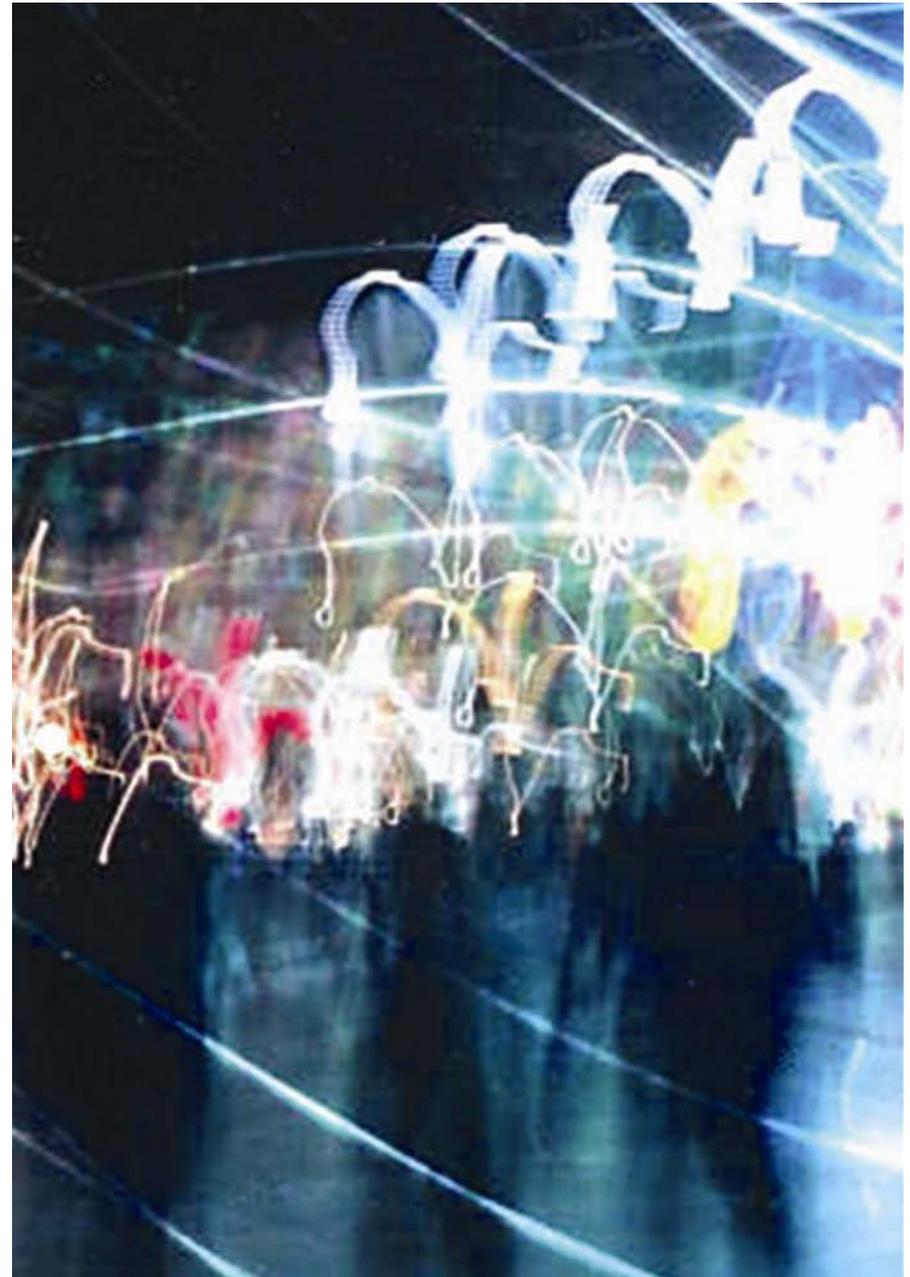
Accountability & security + storage
capacity = massive **data** sets

Merging **digital and physical** –
internet of things, pervasive and
augmented reality, prosthetics

Over the longer term...

Working and living **with the
machines** – automation, access to
NHLI & processing power

Rise of biotech – the biotechnical
in education (neurosci/ cognitive
enhancement/ genome maps)

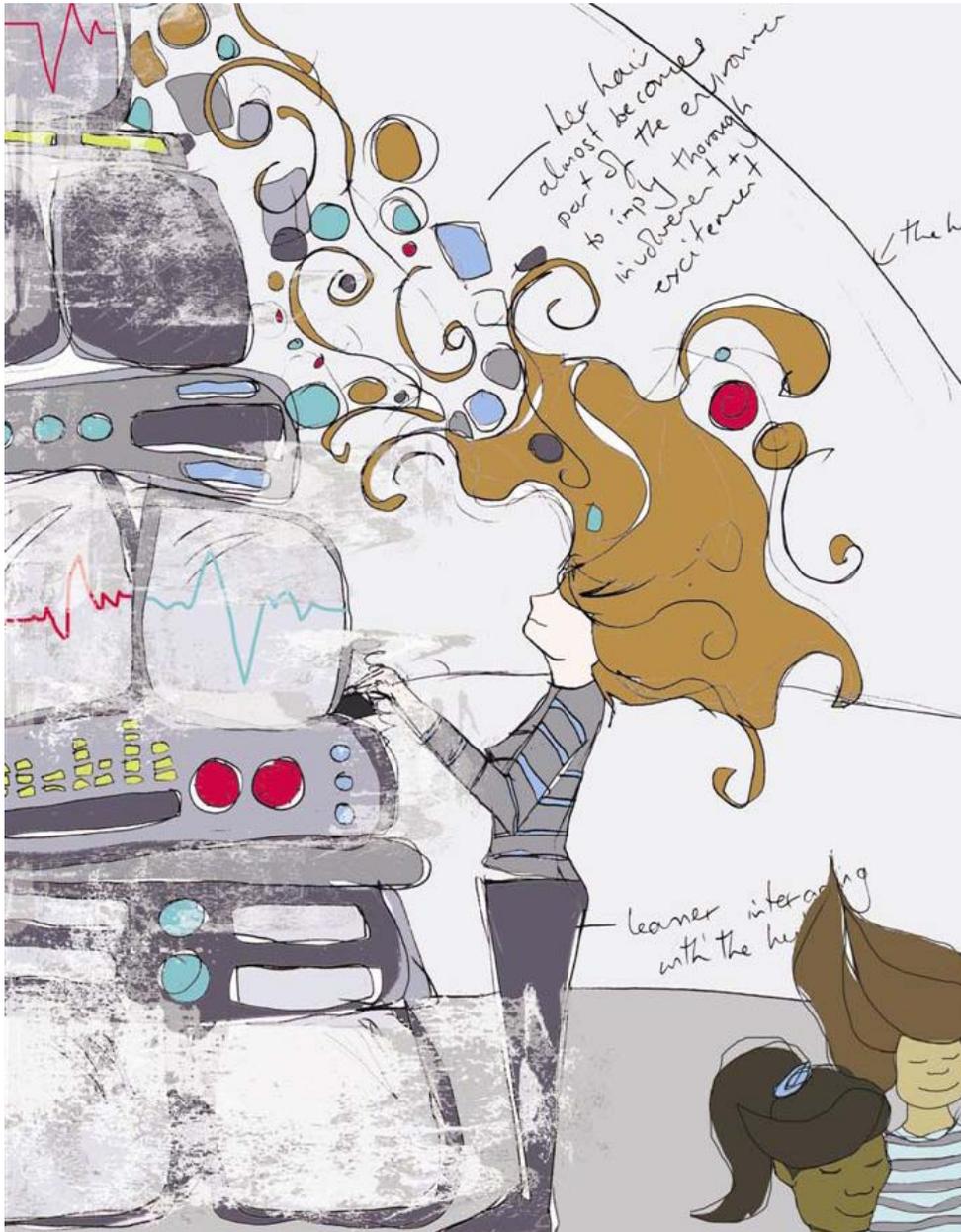


- Rise of biotech – personal genomes, bespoke medicine, cosmetic pharmacology
- *When asked whether healthy children under the age of 16 should be restricted from taking these drugs, unsurprisingly, most respondents (86%) said that they should. But one-third of respondents said they would feel pressure to give cognition-enhancing drugs to their children if other children at school were taking them.*

Nature, 2009

- How will universities cope with bio-technical diversity?
- How are we responding today to the connected learner?
- How are we enabling students to work with, manage, manipulate and share their own data?

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT KNOWLEDGE



Collective intelligence/global brain

= value in 'finding the place for expertise'

Embodied knowledge

= Modelling & the reconnection of mind & body, academic and craft skills

Dangerous knowledge

= biotechnical knowledge

= interconnected systems and interdependencies

- How is our education today helping students to participate in collective knowledge building?
- How are we building bridges between ‘embodied’ and ‘academic’ knowledge through modelling, gaming, making?
- What are the intellectual, ethical and moral resources that help students to deal with complexity and unintended consequences?

DEMOGRAPHIC FUTURES



By 2035 50% of population of Western Europe aged over 50,
with a further 40 year life expectancy, 25% aged over 65

Competition for public resources?

Intergenerational conflict?

Radical longevity

- What does multi-age education really look like?
- How do we educate students with more diverse life histories? What roles will they play?
- What is our responsibility for building and nurturing the intergenerational contract?

THE FACTORIES OF THE 'KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY'



Image by: H.I.L.T
Flickr Stream

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/29311691@N05/>

International competition for creative roles – high skills, low wages

Centralisation of creativity/autonomy in ‘global talent’ in major multinationals

Casualisation of middle class roles – crowdsourcing, freelance,
amateur/volunteer effort

Losing the ‘rungs on the ladder’ and potential for radical polarisation

- What should be the goals of education if knowledge work doesn't necessarily promise a secure and stable future?
- How can universities help students build economically sustainable futures that are less reliant upon the vagaries of the financial markets and big business?
- How can universities help to build economically sustainable communities, rather than simply successful individuals?

ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL DISRUPTION



Energy shocks and constraints
Climate disruption
Breakdown? Or Breakthrough? (new
democracies)

- What sort of education would help our students learn how to negotiate competing demands and significant disruptions in society?
- What sort of education will help our students understand their interdependence with other people, planet and resources?

Technological, demographic, knowledge, economic and environmental changes mean that we cannot count on a 'business as usual' future

How then do we fulfil the educational contract ?

Some inspirations and building blocks

- Lincoln Social sciences Centre (Co-operative) and Co-operative universities in Spain, Portugal and across the world
- Really Free Schools/ThirdUniversity/Omniuniversity
- Transition Universities – what does the university look like if it can't rely on international students travelling? What does the university look like if it aims for zero carbon production?
- Connected learners (Denmark's open internet exams)
- Students as researchers and knowledge producers with their communities (Lincoln, UWE & others...)
- Real public engagement (Wellcome Beacons, UWE, MMU) & democratic research (Appadurai)

Outside the university...

- Prefigurative play - [exploration](#)...

The 'future-building' university

- Recognises Change and Continuity and Complexity as the conditions we are operating within
- Provides the spaces and knowledge needed to participate in conversations about the future
- Acts as a site for experimenting with building alternative futures
- Recognises that **'we may not be able to control the future, but we can work together to tip the balance in favour of something better'**

The future-building university has the optimism and imagination to renew the educational contract

Pessimism is a luxury of good times. In difficult times, pessimism is a self-fulfilling, self-inflicted death sentence (Evelin Lindner)

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Learning Futures: Education, Technology and Social Change (Routledge, 2011)

THANK YOU

Acknowledgements & Links

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 - www.beyondcurrenthorizons.org.uk/outcomes/reports/final-report-2009/
- Images/photographs are attributed to their author where possible. They are used under Creative Commons license which means that they can be displayed elsewhere, but only with attribution, and they should not be modified in any way or used for commercial purposes. They were (almost) all sourced from Flickr
- The futures tools can be found as follows:
 - www.millionfutures.org.uk; www.visionmapper.org.uk; www.powerleague.org.uk;

Some ideas to follow-up

- Henry Giroux – educated hope (always a good, challenging read on the importance of the critical in education)
- Arjun Appadurai – democratic research (interesting international perspectives on why we need to support people to create strategic knowledge)
- Erik Olin Wright – real utopias (the case for challenging inherited futures and the need to create viable alternatives)
- Keri Facer – Learning Futures (published by Routledge, goes through many of the arguments from this talk in more detail)
- Jean Anyon – radical possibilities (the potential for local educational institutions to act as hubs for social change)
- Inayatullah, Slaughter, Dator – alternative educational futures (three of the big writers on educational futures)
- Global Scenarios Group/Tellus Institute – the great transition (a very useful set of future scenarios and the basis for the international transition movement)
- Danny Dorling – Inequality (v. interesting on myths underpinning justification for inequalities in education)
- Wilkinson & Pickett – The spirit level (a book that makes the case that more equal societies benefit everyone in them)