

4 Creative Schooling and the Crossover Future of the Economy

Earlier it was shown how the ideas underpinning some examples of the curriculum of the future are continuous with the ideology of securing future competitiveness in the knowledge economy. These ambitions have been reinforced in the wake of the global recession. This chapter goes on to explore more specifically how the curriculum of the future is being imagined and constructed through the work of the private sector actually working inside of public education. The future of the economy and the curriculum of the future are now being reassembled together through public-private partnerships.

The argument is that the curriculum of the future and the economy are networked together through all kinds of mergers of public and private and state and commercial sectors and objectives. In the twenty-first century, education systems are not controlled by a centralized government authority but through a decentered network of various authorities. A new kind of “polycentric” or “multipolar” educational politics is emerging in which education is done through hybrid mixes of public and private bodies, bureaucracies, and markets rather than by one

single center of authority.¹ Again, these are aspects of a new style of thought now used to explain the problems of the curriculum and to intervene in its future. This chapter asks how curriculum policymaking gets done in a polycentric context, and how this might affect the makeup of the curriculum of the future. What specific networks of organizations and individuals, and cross-sectoral and interorganizational connections, are involved in imagining the future of the curriculum, and to what purposes and ends?

Schooling to Work?

Sociologists of education in the United States and the United Kingdom have for many decades debated the links between the school curriculum and employment. Classic studies of the 1970s posited clear correspondences between the social authority of the curriculum, the socializing and sorting function of schooling, and paid work in the capitalist economy. Advocates of the theory of “human capital” argued that education should be thought of as “investing” in human resources that would later benefit the national economy, and therefore that curricular content should focus on preparation for employment and the needs of industry.²

In the context the knowledge economy described earlier these correspondences are harder to detect, but human capital theory remains a powerful political influence. In the knowledge economy, workers are required to be creative and “flexible specialists” who can adapt to fluctuations and changes in market demands. This makes quite a few new social, intellectual, and educational demands of employees and thus of schools. To reiterate points made earlier, both schools and businesses now speak the same

language of flexibility, modularization, componentization, competences profiles, soft performance, brainpower, problem solving, and so on.

For instance, the High Tech High charter schools network established in Southern California in 2000 was conceived by civic and high-tech industry leaders in San Diego, and assembled by the Economic Development Corporation and the Business Roundtable, to discuss the challenges of preparing individuals for the high-tech workforce. Its aims include the integration of technical and academic education to prepare students for participation in high-tech fields. HTH describes itself as an “open-source” organization that offers free resources and services for other educators. It “places a premium on retaining flexibility and agility,” and it emphasizes the importance of its “collective undertakings,” caring culture, and the preservation of the organization’s “soul.”³

It is clear that High Tech High, like other prototypical examples of the curriculum of the future, is concerned with students’ future employment and it adopts the flexible correspondence model that flexible learning = flexible labor. Particularly in light of the global recession, however, some of these arguments have been softened and programs like HTH have adopted a more “soulful” language of creativity. Both in its objectives and in its textual presentation, HTH mobilizes a high-tech language enriched by a more humanist organizational soulfulness. Likewise, Opening Minds, Learning Futures, and Quest to Learn are all compelling examples of new curricula that promote capacities for innovation required in a new economy through a discourse of “re-enchantment.”

According to this re-enchantment, the new economy of the twenty-first century is more socially responsive, ethical,

compassionate, customer-facing, fun, and informal. It is characterized by its nonconformist countercultural “cool” and a seemingly anticorporate “hacker” spirit of rebellion and individual liberty. Most of all it represents an “age of creativity” in which being creative is considered the highest achievable good. Relentless innovation, and 24/7 productivity are now the chief characteristics of the creative types who inhabit this age of creativity. The latest technological gadgets are enrolled in this anticorporate-capitalist universe of cozy techno-bohemian work-life balance. Corporate capitalism is no longer to be associated with the 9–5 businessman in the dark suit but with the restless creative entrepreneur dressed in black.⁴

In this creative universe “affective labor” takes place “in-person,” engendering “feelings” such as ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, passion and so forth, and distinctions between leisure, labor, domesticity, sociability, production and consumption become blurry.⁵ Affective labor and creativity in the digital economy displace faceless bureaucracies with a caring and sharing capitalism, or business with personality. In other words, we have now been “taught that corporations have a soul.”⁶ In this “creativity explosion” business culture values creativity over routine, and education seeks to promote in children the creativity required for nonlinear thinking and generating new ideas.⁷

The creative and affective reenchantments of the economic domain are mirrored, then, in the educational domain. Projects including Opening Minds, Learning Futures, and High Tech High are evidence of how the economic emphasis on effectiveness, efficiency, accountability, measuring, and so forth has been softened by a more cultural focus on empowering learners, eliciting learner voice, and paying attention to learners' emotions.

Keywords of the reenchanting vocabulary of schooling are “happiness,” “well-being,” “emotions,” and “self-fulfillment.” Effectiveness is replaced by “affectiveness” and by the “expressiveness” of creativity. The change is something like a shift from an “asset management” language of “bastard leadership” in schooling where students are treated as assets to the school—a form of human capital to be virtually exchanged for competitive performance table positions—to a new language of “affect management” and caring leadership. In the affect management style, schools are responsible for the monitoring, regulation, and control of students’ emotional selves. The aim of schooling is to produce well-adjusted emotional selves who can take ownership, feel empowered, be creative, and experience enjoyment of learning. This requires affective schools rather than effective schools, and the production of passionate, feeling, affective learners.⁸

Learning to Playbor

Consequently, another aspect of the reenchantment of educational language has been its appeal to young people’s existing digital cultures and their informal learning with new technology—lessons already learned by the leading “cool” companies of the new soulful economy. The successful “leading-edge ‘techy’ organisations” are already “tapping into the skills developed by a generation that has grown up with Nintendos, Xboxes, and more recently online multiplayer games.”⁹

For example, videogame companies have successfully recognized that the “work ethic” of routine, restraint, stratification, and deferred gratification can be replaced by a “play ethic” of “passions” and “enthusiasms” and “feelings.” There has been a thorough hybridization of the “playground” and the “factory”

in Internet culture and the interactive economy. The merging of play and work has resulted in “playbor,” a neologism that accurately captures the ways in which the affective elements of play have now been merged into the value-making tasks of the economy.¹⁰

Whereas the old model of schooling to work involved learning to labor, the curriculum of the future is concerned with learning to playbor. To illustrate, *Quest to Learn* focuses on playful systems and the important role of videogames in introducing players to the complex skills required in the twenty-first century. *Enquiring Minds* and *Learning Futures* both work with a “learner voice” agenda that gives young people greater autonomy and ownership of their learning. A booklet produced by the Learning Futures program in collaboration with High Tech High speaks of learning being “passion-led,” “fun,” “exciting,” “inspiring”—it should have “real-world” relevance, stretch students’ “intellectual muscles” as “expert learners,” and “ignite students’ imaginations.”¹¹

The expert learners positioned by these texts are creative playborers whose affectiveness, well-being, and creativity are understood to be essential prerequisites for economic reinvigoration. It is through this reenchanting explosion of creativity that commercial organizations have sought to expand their operations in education, not simply through traditional tactics such as marketing but by working inside public education itself.

Commercialism in the Curriculum

Commercial organizations routinely supply products as diverse as vending machines and textbooks to schools. But this form of commercial activity in schooling and the curriculum is just

a small part of private-sector participation in schools. Commercial activities include sponsorship of programs, sponsoring materials, promotion and marketing of software and technology infrastructure, exclusive agreements such as those made with textbook publishers, electronic marketing, incentive programs such as store vouchers, school facilities reconstruction programs, plus the full privatization and management of schools.¹²

Consequently, commercial activities may now shape the structure of the school day, influence the content of the school curriculum, and determine whether children have access to a variety of technologies. Commercialism represents an array of alignments between commercial organizations and education, or the entanglement of politics, education, and private finance in a new world of global for-profit education and knowledge industries. Public education, then, is big business and many critics find this alarming. “Edu-business” and privatization bring the normative assumptions of global market competitiveness into public education, arguably leading to a narrowing of what is seen to count as students’ learning. Some schools are even run like companies competing against one another in free markets. These developments are important considerations for anyone involved in understanding the design of the curriculum of the future.

Many major transnational corporations are involved in multiple sites of curriculum innovation. For instance, Futurelab’s Enquiring Minds program was funded for four years by Microsoft’s “philanthropic” arm Partners in Learning. Microsoft promotes educational innovation and sponsors many specific “innovative schools” worldwide. The Gates Foundation was a key partner in founding the original High Tech High charter school and supports New Visions for Public Schools, one of the

principal partners in Quest to Learn. In addition, Microsoft is a member of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, along with many other companies including Cisco, which also promotes its own vision of “connected schools.” Cisco commissioned and published a report on worldwide education innovation by researchers from the same think tank, the Innovation Unit, which also established the Whole Education network with which Futurelab’s Enquiring Minds project, Learning Futures, and Opening Minds are all affiliated. By tracing these links it seems that the future of the curriculum is a mobile vision that moves across commercial and noncommercial sites, crisscrossing national and sectoral borders and circulating among multiple agencies and organizations.

These connections are concrete examples of the reach into public education attained by commercial and private-sector companies in recent years, much of it accomplished through philanthropic and corporate responsibility programs and encouraged by the creativity explosion. While corporate philanthropy in education clearly has its merits, critics remain concerned that the building of public goodwill and positive brand image through corporate responsibility constitutes covert advertising and marketing in schools.¹³

Crossover Governance

Commercialism in the curriculum of the future is one specific aspect of a less visible and more complex phenomena in public education captured in the term “soft governance.” Simply put, there has been a shift from the “hard government” of legislation, regulation, monitoring and compliance to the “soft governance” approach of recommendations, education campaigns and strong

advocacy (although the extent of the transformation is debatable), leading to a blurring of the distinctions between the public institutions of government and the work of private companies. Public policy making has expanded to include individual actors, companies, social groups, civic organizations and policy makers that all interact with each other in a multilayered, multidimensional and multi-actor system to bring about collective goals. At the same time, soft governance has been accompanied by a shift from hierarchy to networks. The new networked or cellular relationships involved in education involve both public and private sector players as well as those located in between, especially non-profits, charities and other “crossover” organizations that crisscross, straddle, and bridge sectoral boundaries.¹⁴

The emphasis on networks in governance describes processes that are decentralized and characterized by fluidity in order to cope with rapid social change, intense societal complexity, and instability. Working through networked structures, the political center of government encourages cross-sectoral participation with nongovernment actors but retains a coordination or steering function over policy. The state tenders for contracts, outsources services, and monitors delivery, but does not necessarily manage education services directly. Within education policy, it is argued, networks serve as a way of trying out new ideas, getting things done quickly, and interjecting practical innovations and new sensibilities into education.¹⁵

The kinds of networks that now cooperate to get educational innovations implemented consist of nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations, think tanks, nonprofits and social enterprises, as well as global organizations such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic

Co-operation and Development, UNESCO, and the United Nations, and multinational private-sector corporations and their philanthropic initiatives. All these agencies draw their language of expertise increasingly from the logic of networking and open-source organizational models from the Web.

The emergence of soft networked governance has allowed new hybridizations of public, private, and crossover organizations and actors, connected via a range of cross-sectoral and interorganizational networks, to design and deploy a range of novel programs for the future of schools. Here it is possible to detect resonances of the reenchanting discourse of creativity, well-being, and personal affect that characterize companies in the interactive digital economy. Key crossover actors, agencies, and organizations have turned keywords like “creativity” and “innovation” into policy reform slogans and incantations. In the United Kingdom, think tanks like Demos and the Innovation Unit have been early adopters of such slogans. The future of education is to be recast in terms of learners’ individual passions, their well-being, and the purposeful creativity of youthful digital pioneers. The kind of innovations required is to be found in open-source hacker communities and in the rapid R&D culture of Silicon Valley.¹⁶

The curriculum experiments of centrifugal schooling are paradigmatic of soft governance through policy networks of public, private, and intermediary crossover actors and agencies. The Enquiring Minds curriculum project from Futurelab was the product of cross-sectoral networks and soft governance, brought together by a discursive emphasis on affective and creative learning to produce a “crossover curriculum.”

Enquiring Minds was intended as a study in curriculum change, where the curriculum is understood as the outcome

of interconnections between institutional structures, everyday practices, and policies rather than as a product to be implemented. The program was premised on the idea that teachers and students might be involved in decisions about the content and structure of aspects of the curriculum, and that curriculum making is an ongoing and complex process of constant assembling, disassembling, and reassembling of sources, texts, plans, and schemes of work. It is illustrative of how the curriculum is constituted, assembled, and materialized through a composite of discourses, texts, actors, organizations, interpretations, and diverse materials.¹⁷

The interorganizational network that produced EM is significant. The project was initiated and run by Futurelab, a not-for-profit educational R&D “lab” intended to support innovation in educational technology.¹⁸ Futurelab was originally established in 2001 by the National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts (NESTA) with funding from the government Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and later from the quango Becta (the agency with responsibility for information and communication technologies in schools). The vocabulary of Futurelab emphasized innovation, ideas, incubation, collaboration, user-centeredness, personalization, as well as a more technical vocabulary of open source, social software, and, of course, networks. The language of creativity was deployed to bind these entrepreneurial, technical, and learning elements together. Futurelab acted as an intermediary among government, industry, and academia. It deployed methods of educational and technological entrepreneurship and epitomized the social economy and social enterprise ideals of the nonprofit sector.

As already noted, EM was firmly connected to private-sector participation in education. EM was funded by the global

“philanthropic” fund of Microsoft Partners in Learning (MS PiL) that aims to “help educators and school leaders connect, collaborate, create, and share so that students can realise their potential.” In the United Kingdom, MS PiL has partnered with the devolved governments of England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, as well as with Futurelab. Microsoft is also affiliated to the Partnership for 21st Century Skills. Clearly Microsoft embodies commercial as well as philanthropic objectives in its interactions with schools and its sponsorship of a variety of programs trying to influence the future of education. Sponsorship of EM included a great deal of branding, including a glossy printed curriculum guide, a bespoke Web site, and an online tool for promoting inquiry. Not only did funding from MS PiL permit the research to proceed, it also permitted the Microsoft logo to be associated with a new curricular innovation working directly in schools: it positioned the brand within the curriculum.¹⁹

In terms of its public-sector connections, EM was supported by an advisory group consisting of individuals from the government-funded Qualifications and Curriculum Agency (QCA) and from the RSA program Opening Minds, academics concerned with researching ICT in education, the local government, and an advisor from a leading think tank and the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit. Further meetings were held with staff from a range of other government agencies, commercial companies, and cross-over organizations. This list of project advisors and other specialists is indicative of the relations across public, private, and cross-sectoral spaces that now contribute to curriculum design.

EM was also enacted as practice in schools. The original project was concentrated in two specific secondary schools in the southwest of England, but after dissemination of the curriculum guide to over three thousand schools the researchers

provided training to teachers in about one hundred schools. It went through a variety of localized or vernacular interpretations. Throughout, the project was characterized by tense exchanges and disagreements, contests and compromises, both between the researchers and the participating teachers, as well as between the researchers and its advisors and sponsors. The project was a site of continual negotiations and attempts to enroll other actors to make links between things and people, and to find consensus in order to acquire some long-term stability and durability.

In addition, EM was part of a UK movement in curriculum innovation that gave rise to Whole Education, an “open-source alliance” of projects dedicated to exploring the future of education through cross-sectoral partnerships and connections. Whole Education, and the projects, programs, and organizations it represents, forms a loose network within which the authority for curriculum planning has been taken up by a range of new sources of expertise that are not associated with the traditional organs of the education system. Instead, Whole Education consists of nonprofits, voluntary and charitable organizations, social enterprises, and think tanks, each supported by a plethora of public and private sources of funding, expert and business advisory groups, philanthropic sponsors, and so forth.²⁰

Quest to Learn in New York City, too, is the outcome of a decentralized network of interorganizational and cross-sectoral relations. Its “development process has included a range of partners who bring innovation and credibility to the work.”²¹ Its partners are positioned as expert participants rather than as sponsors. Q2L was commissioned by New Visions for Public Schools, which proposes that “educational improvement requires everyone involved—the public school system, government, businesses, community groups, parents and students—to

work harder and do better together.”²² Since 1989 New Visions has created over 130 new “small schools” and mobilized community groups, institutions, and businesses to support them; it has initiated a school creation program and improvement strategy that has been adopted more widely by the New York City Department of Education; launched a teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention program; and pioneered a principal mentoring program for over six hundred principals in their first year of service. New Visions became a New York City Department of Education “Partnership Support Organization” in 2007 and has begun opening its own charter high schools, thus positioning itself both within and beyond the formal education system. Some New Visions reforms have been replicated in other sites as it expands through the education system. Its funding comes from a mix of government, corporations, foundations, and individual sources. Rather than being seen as an isolated outpost of innovation, then, Q2L’s partnership with New Visions locates it in a matrix of interorganizational and cross-sectoral relationships and reforms.

In addition, the conceptual and organizational model of Q2L was designed by the Institute of Play, a games and learning nonprofit staffed by professional game designers and researchers in the field of game-based pedagogy, new media literacy, and the learning sciences. The Institute of Play has been funded by the MacArthur Foundation. Additional collaboration on Q2L has come from Parsons The New School for Design, particularly its mixed-reality lab, and consultation with curriculum and teaching experts, middle-school students, and selected academic experts involved in researching digital media and learning. The creation of Q2L is therefore the result of a network of participants and resources from government, business, community,

philanthropy, and academia. Its curriculum has been assembled from a heterogeneous network of elements working upon one another; it brings together, fuses, and freezes in one form a whole variety of voices, explorations, ideas, visions, concerns, conflicts, and alternative possibilities.²³

These examples exemplify how curriculum reform is now increasingly done through the “good ideas” of “policy networks,” consisting of nonprofits, think tanks, quangos, and social enterprises, plus key individual intermediaries, interlockers, and policy entrepreneurs, which straddle the public and private sectors. These networks build consensus about what works in education reform through explicit partnering and dissemination activities, the production of texts, in-house publishing, project Web sites, and online networks. They epitomize “entrepreneurial governance” through “ephemeral networks,” partnerships, outsourcing and contracting-out, marketization, and devolution or decentralization.²⁴ Futurelab and the Institute of Play are good examples of organizations involved in such ephemeral networks, and EM and Q2L illustrate how curriculum innovations can be produced in a networked policy environment.

What are the implications of cross-sectoral and interorganizational governance in the design of the curriculum of the future? Pragmatically, private-sector support and philanthropic sponsorship are at least a financial requirement for trying out new curriculum ideas. In addition, official government partnership or sanction helps to embed these programs within public education sites and spaces.

In terms of curricular content, crossover governance also endorses and produces new kinds of “official” knowledge. Q2L embeds in its curriculum forms of knowledge imported from computer science and video gaming, and it structures the way

in which learning takes place according to theories of situated practice, inquiry-based teaching, and complex problem solving that have been articulated in the learning sciences. Its academic domains are crossover domains too, with a great deal of interdisciplinary inquiry a major feature of the curriculum structure. There are strong cultural resonances with the high-tech geek culture of Silicon Valley.

Enquiring Minds draws from a slightly different repertoire of sources, based on a more sociological critique of the selection of curricular content according to social power, but it too endorses a collaborative inquiry pedagogy based on children's everyday cultures mediated through networked technologies. Its curriculum represents a crossover of children's cultures and school knowledge. These projects, along with others, reject the transmissive curriculum associated with academic content, the "visible" external products of learning, and graded student performance. Instead they advocate for a more acquisitive curriculum based on authentic experience and the "invisible" internal learning of the child.²⁵

Enquiring Minds and Q2L are both grounded examples of curriculum futures being constructed through cross-sectoral and interorganizational networks. They embody soft networked governance in action. In turn, soft governance promotes different forms of knowledge. Putting it simply, the centralized curriculum as governed by hard government puts the stress on the centrality of the conservative canon as it passes this on from generation to generation. The decentralized curriculum governed through soft governance stresses diversity of learner experience, authentic contexts, and personal or collaborative inquiry—learner competence rather than cultural canon. Knowledge from different domains, everyday experience, and different cultural

locations are all incorporated, criss-crossed, and interwoven into this vision of the curriculum of the future.

Governing the Curriculum

The switch from hard government to soft governance of the curriculum has begun to permit a greater diversity of players to participate in curriculum design. This changes the nature of the relationship or correspondence between schooling, economy and government. As shown in this chapter, the old model of schooling to work imagined curriculum as a direct mechanism for preparing students for work according to the needs of industry, and more recent work on school commercialism has shown how private-sector organizations have exerted influence on the curriculum. The turn to soft governance has now been shown to permit all sorts of agencies and relations across public- and private-sector interests as well as national borders and boundaries to participate in the actual construction and control of the curriculum.

These relationships and networks are lubricated by key intermediaries and crossover organizations and actors who crisscross traditional sectoral divides. The good ideas of these intermediaries are derived from an explosion of creativity discourse that is both linked to economic renewal—as embodied in cool, soulful capitalism and the affective playbor of the creative and digital industries—and to the everyday creative passions of young digital pioneers. The future of the economy is positioned as being dependent upon creativity and innovation that in turn are to be promoted and encouraged through new and innovative forms of schooling.

Soft governance, then, is not simply a new structurally flexible way of organizing education. It works into the very fabric of

the politics and values of the curriculum, as the new soft style of “affect management” in the curriculum demonstrates. Governance is about a new way of organizing public education that involves the private sector and other intermediaries and crossover organizations and individuals doing parts of the work usually done by a central education system, and it does so through promoting partnerships with seemingly neutral intermediaries or through encouraging philanthropy. The curricula of the future described in this report, then, are interlocking parts of a complex and decentralized series of changes in public education that will see an erosion of boundaries between public and private sectors and the takeover of public functions by hybrid cross-sectoral and crossover actors and experts. The curriculum of the future embodies in microcosmic form how a more polycentric, multipolar education system, or centrifugal schooling, might work.

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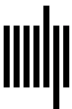
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