6 Globalizing Cultures of Lifelong Learning

Although a curriculum is often allied to political and economic objectives, it is also linked to culture. In the recent history of the curriculum, a conservative version of culture has predominated. Schools have been charged with communicating great cultural works, a largely Western-centric version of history and geography, and a canon of scientific knowledge. Alongside the official curriculum lies a "hidden curriculum" that stresses, among other things, the traditional values of family, elite culture, patriotism, and capitalist economics. All of this contributes to what schoolchildren see as "real" and important. As a series of selections from culture, a curriculum is a message about the future embedded in a particular vision of what real culture ought to be.

Any curriculum of the future is therefore involved in establishing what may be seen as real culture in the future. At the present time, many prototypical curricula are seeking to establish the culture of the Internet as part of the legitimate culture articulated via school. What kind of selection from Internet culture, therefore, is being worked into the curriculum, and what cultural visions and values for the future are being established as a "reality" for schoolchildren?

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Global Cultural Patterns

According to studies of culture and communication in the age of the Internet, we now inhabit a global communicative universe that is multimodal, multichannel, and multiplatform. Mass media such as TV and newspapers have converged with personal communication in the new cultural landscape of social media, bringing about a more participatory form of culture (rather than passive spectatorship) where consumers are encouraged to seek out information and make connections among dispersed media content.[1]

The convergence of old and new media has given rise to a new form of mass communication, or "mass self-communication" that prioritizes "my time" over "prime time." In the universe of Facebook, YouTube, and so forth, people are now enabled to communicate and interact on a previously unimaginable scale as "creative audiences." However, the massive potential of creative audiences to reshape, reproduce, and recirculate media—or to produce original content—is shaped and controlled by a concentration of interlocking corporate multimedia, financial trade, and government strategies that have permitted the expansion of for-profit entertainment and the commodification of personal freedom.[2]

In a convergent media culture, then, we see both a greater degree of control and creativity among audiences and consumers, and a greater concentration of ownership and commodification among commercial media producers. It's not simply a case of grassroots bottom-up media and the free culture of hackers winning over the top-down mass cultural model of the corporate high-rise, but of how they engage in complex conflicts and struggles, or conversely how they reinforce and reward one another. The interactions of creative audiences and commercial

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producers today are shaping the future of Internet culture specifically and popular culture more generally.

The result of convergence has included the emergence of four interacting cultural patterns. The first two are communal and the latter two are individualist: (1) cosmopolitanism: greater opportunities for engagement with global causes; (2) multicultural hybridization: the global remix and circulation of diverse (multi-) cultural products from around the world; (3) consumerism: the formation of a global capitalist market based primarily on branding in a commodified culture; and finally, (4) networked individualism: the construction of individual cultural worlds in terms of personal preferences and projects. Networked individualism is a culture that starts with the values and projects of the individual who interacts with others following their own choices, values, and interests, rather than by tradition and hierarchy. Networked individualism is the most prominent cultural pattern of the Internet:

> The culture of networked individualism finds its platform of choice in the diverse universe of mass self-communication: the internet, wireless communication, online games, and digital networks of cultural production, remixing and distribution. . . . The culture of networked individualism can find its best form of expression in a communication system characterized by autonomy, horizontal networking, interactivity, and the recombination of content under the initiative of the individual and his/her networks.[3]

The culture of networked individualism is not just selfish individualism. It can inspire social movements, based on the sharing of new cosmopolitan and multicultural values, that may become insurgent communities of practice. Networked individualism can also lead individuals to entrench themselves in the already-constructed values and branded identities of consumer-media culture.

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Although the Internet as a medium itself can also diffuse cosmopolitan, multicultural, and consumerist values, it is important to reiterate that the "cultural roots of the Internet" have been traced in "the culture of freedom and in the specific culture of hackers." A "cultural resonance" has therefore been established between the culture of the designers of the Internet and the rise of a culture of networked individualism and creative audiences that finds its way into the minds of millions of Internet users. Networked individualism, with its focus on personal choice, projects, and self-entrepreneurial behavior, is the globalized cultural expression of a set of Silicon Valley cyberlibertarian values.[4] Geek politics have gone global!

In other words, the cultural roots of the Internet now resonate through the popular culture of the Web. As Internet culture is increasingly directed into the curriculum of the future, a cultural resonance may be established between the Internet and education too. The consequence, it seems, is that the curriculum of the future is to be programmed according to the cultural aspirations of networked individualism and an emphasis on personal choice, personal projects, and self-enterprise implanted in Internet culture by the computer engineers and "geeks" of Silicon Valley. Does this mean that the geek politics of Silicon Valley has been embedded in the curriculum? How to design a curriculum to respond to the globalized cultural patterns of the Internet is now a key issue.

New! New! New!

The New Basics project in Queensland, Australia, emphasized cultural globalization as a context and a rationale for curriculum reform. The main text for teachers generated by the project

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team stated: "The New Basics are futures-oriented categories for organizing curriculum. Essentially they are a way of managing the enormous increase in information that is now available as a result of globalization and the rapid change in the economic, social and cultural dimensions of our existence."[5] The New Basics stressed a series of transdisciplinary curriculum categories, each framed by a question. These categories and their questions were: life pathways and social futures (who am I and where am I going?); multiliteracies and communications media (how do I make sense of and communicate with the world?); active citizenship (what are my rights and responsibilities in communities, cultures, and economies?); and environment and technologies (how do I describe, analyze, and shape the world around me?).

The New Basics is a clear example of a curricular response to the perceived changes of cultural globalization. It considers the curriculum as a selection or allocation of values, and recognizes that globalization has challenged the sorts of values that are to be imparted and reproduced by any curriculum. At the same time, however, the rather progressive focus on life pathways and active citizenship subtly reframes the more instrumentalist concern of how to shape workers for the competitive pressures of economic globalization.

As one study of the New Basics phrased it, the title "New Basics" appealed to a cross-section of the educational community, from progressives who liked the notion of the "new," to conservatives who liked its "basics." The project documentation is full of references to the "new." It mentions "new student identities," "new workplaces," "new technologies," "new times," "new citizenship," "new knowledges," and "new epistemologies" in order to construct its futures-oriented curriculum.[6]

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The discursive hybridity of conservative and progressive ways of thinking about curriculum captured by the title “New Basics” is continued in the thematic curriculum organizers. Weight is given to the importance of diverse family relationships, interaction with local and global communities, local and global economic forces, the historical foundations of social movements and civic institutions, developing a scientific understanding of the world, and working with design and engineering technologies. In these categories, family, locality, history, civic institutions, and scientific understanding are established as the basics or the foundations to which the new demands of diversity, global communities, global forces, and new technologies must now be added.

In the version of globalization constructed by the New Basics, a very cosmopolitan vision of curriculum is required. Cosmopolitanism represents the sharing of values on a global scale that transcend local and parochial interests. Such concerns are linked to the diversity of multiculturalism, changes in traditional family structure and everyday family life; to the expansion of notions of community and civic participation, powered by digital media, and its effect on the individual’s capacity for belonging; as well as to global economic and political forces.[7]

Besides attempting to reform the curriculum in order to develop the skills and dispositions perceived to be required by the knowledge economy and globalization, the New Basics curriculum is part of an attempt to reimagine community in the context of multiculturalism, global cultural cosmopolitanism, and the pressures these shifts have exerted on the national community. To an extent, then, the New Basics may be seen as a curricular extension of the major cultural patterns of cosmopolitanism and multicultural hybridization in a global network society.

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Everyday (Media) Cultures

The Enquiring Minds curriculum R&D project run by Futurelab in the United Kingdom also sought to address a changing perception of community in the context of cultural globalization. At the root of the project was an interest in the various communities now understood to constitute children's everyday cultural experiences. As the main curriculum guide documentation states, Enquiring Minds was not so much concerned with the improvement of pedagogy or with students' learning processes but with "the relationship between this and what they are learning," and it was intended to "explore the potential for students' own experiences, interests, concerns and lives to act as the starting point for creating a meaningful, relevant and engaging curriculum for young people. What has been ignored in debates on the development of effective pedagogy has been the question of how learning is intimately tied up with the question of knowledge, or of how we address the questions: learning what? for whom? and why?" The EM guide states that "the relationship between pedagogy and curriculum and between 'school' knowledge and students' 'informal' knowledge is central to the search for more effective and powerful educational strategies for the 21st century."[8]

In response to this challenge, EM offers a view of a possible future curriculum that puts everyday culture at the heart of the curriculum enterprise. It draws, again, on the radical pedagogy of Paolo Freire and a sociological explanation for the curriculum. The project recognizes that different curricular formats are produced by different configurations of social power that seek to produce different student mentalities, with academic bodies of knowledge embodying mentalities that are intellectual, abstract,

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and active while practical and vocational pedagogies may be associated with more concrete and passive mentalities. That is to say, different students' mentalities are built into the deep structure of the curriculum form.[9]

Enquiring Minds offered a curriculum format that "de-differentiated" students' school knowledge from their everyday or informal knowledge. It stressed students working with cultural knowledge—understandings and meanings related to specific events and objects—and with critical knowledge that would allow them to understand and critique the forces that shaped the world. Instead of fixed school knowledge, it advocated for "dynamic knowledge" to be the subject of a reinvigorated future curriculum. Dynamic knowledge is open to change; it is recognized as constantly in production, often contested, socially contextual, and transformed in reality. The EM guide stresses that "the development of the curriculum starts with students' interests, ideas and experiences," and that the task for teachers is to help them "explain, expand and explore further from that starting point . . . to illuminate or decode aspects of their experience."[10]

EM sought to promote a curriculum form that saw students' everyday knowledge and cultures as worthy of attention in the curriculum. Rather than setting up students' concrete cultural experiences as inferior to the reified knowledge of the formal curriculum, it understood culture itself to be a complex site of human activity in which knowledge is shaped, produced, and revised over time. It additionally saw students themselves as actors who, through a range of critical pedagogies and inquiry-based techniques and practices, might themselves shape, produce, and revise cultural knowledge by utilizing the "building blocks" of ideas and concepts from a range and blend of subjects.

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Moreover, EM acknowledged that young people's uses of digital media and technology offered a challenge to the curriculum. The approach of EM, however, was not to advocate for the kind of skills and competences that were earlier associated with a series of "soft openings" in curriculum reform. Instead, the rhetoric of EM constructed "the informal curriculum taught through media and leisure" as itself problematic, as the EM curriculum guide detailed:

> Media corporations have figured out their own 'pedagogies' and become modern society's best teachers. The corporate curriculum of consumer culture has, in turn, become a yardstick against which the school curriculum and its associated pedagogies are assessed. . . . However, consumer-media culture teaches particular sorts of knowledge, and these are based on affective pleasures rather than the more reflexive pleasures of knowing about and being able to interpret the world. Being a media consumer is one thing; being an informed and critical consumer is another.[11]

Pretty explicitly, EM offers a construction of a curriculum as a critical pedagogy of consumer culture intended to promote student mentalities of critique. It provided a response to the cultural pattern of branded consumerism.

However, in its cultural emphasis, EM also implicitly advocates for the curriculum as something that is both learned in school and out of school, lifelong and lifewide. Here the complexities of linking curriculum and culture are most clearly seen, because lifelong learning may be largely understood as itself the dominant informal curriculum form of consumer-media culture.

Lifelong Learning

A review of alternative curricula carried out by Futurelab at the same time as the Enquiring Minds project showed how projects

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and portfolios have become an essential pedagogical component in curriculum reform. Many new curricula include an "extended project" or "personal challenge" component that is seen as a means of ensuring that learning is meaningful and coherent, enabling development of learner responsibility and allowing learners to develop skills and competencies that could not be developed through other pedagogic approaches. Such personal challenges are characterized in the review documentation as "content-neutral," as taking place in "authentic contexts," as making a "contribution," and as enabling learners to "make connections across different subject areas and across in-school and out-of-school learning" supported by "specialists across and outside the school community": the boundaries between "specialist subjects" and "specialised areas of personal interest" are routinely punctured.[12]

Almost all of the prototype curricula gathered under the loose umbrella term "centrifugal schooling" feature a project-based element. Learning Futures, High Tech High, Enquiring Minds, and Quest to Learn all emphasize student inquiry through focused project-based learning. A similar model is that of "rich tasks" derived by the New Basics. Rich tasks are not short-term projects but problems that require "identification, analysis, and resolution, and require students to analyze, theorize and engage intellectually with the world" outside the classroom through transdisciplinary practice.

A document produced in a collaboration between the organizers of the Learning Futures and High Tech High programs outlines guidance for teachers in promoting extended, interdisciplinary project-based learning, which it describes as "designing, planning and carrying out an extended project that produces a publicly-exhibited output such as a product, publication or

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presentation." Moreover, it claims, "digital technology makes it easier than ever before to conduct serious research, produce high-quality work" and to "foster a wide range of skills (such as time management, collaboration and problem-solving) that students will need at college, university, and in the workplace." The text constructs project-based learning as a pedagogy that transcends classrooms and prepares students for all walks of life.[13]

The project pedagogies put forward in these programs can all be viewed as part of the same broad societal emphasis on preparing students for lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is here understood as the dominant pedagogy of a futuristic "learning society" in which learning is not narrowly canalized by a few educational institutions but dispersed diffusely into the very atmosphere of society. A learning society is both a planned society, driven by the need for governments to ensure their people are constantly equipped with the occupational competencies required to remain competitive, and a reflexive society. A reflexive society implies the capacity for everybody to learn new things in order to keep abreast of very rapid societal change in which the knowledge they acquire is no longer certain and established forever. Being reflexive means being constantly self-examining and having the ability to adapt one's own behavior to changed conditions and innovations. Learning in such a society is therefore a whole way of life that is continuous and nonstop.[14]

For example, High Tech High and Learning Futures both put the emphasis on learners producing an ongoing digital project portfolio, making links between their own out-of-school interests and the needs of their communities with the curriculum, and on preparation for the adult world. Rather than putting the stress on acquiring knowledge, the HTH curriculum stresses the development of a preferred model of adulthood as its outcome.

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The active, self-directed pedagogy of the lifelong project has also been idealized by research on online learning and the participatory cultures of the Web. “Shape-shifting portfolio people” who think and act in terms of their résumé, and who define their own personal projects in entrepreneurial terms as businesses or enterprises, have been imagined as ideal-type flexible, interactive, and constructivist learners able to continue learning and adapting, based on constant reflexive self-analysis, right through the life cycle.[15]

The personal challenge or project is the ideal pedagogic mode to promote the ability to be taught, continuously and lifelong, across school and out-of-school communities, throughout a “pedagogized future.” The emphasis on continuous learning is captured in the idea of a “total pedagogy,” which means a continuous disposition to be trained for the requirements of an entire life in a process that is permanently open.[16] The shape-shifting portfolio person is the perfect figure for a permanently open, totally pedagogized future. For many critics, though, the kind of pedagogized futures most young people can expect are also highly consumerized futures.

Consumer-Media Curriculum

Consumerization refers to the process of becoming increasingly consumerist, the growth of consumerism, and the action of making something more appealing to consumers. To speak of the consumerization of learning therefore recognizes that learning itself has become both increasingly consumerist and more appealing to consumers. The market is taken to be an educator in itself.

The “market-as-educator” approach argues that the commercial market of computers, TV, toys, and popular culture teaches

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children in informal ways that appear to "clash" with what they can expect from teachers and formal education. Children's existing consumer-media cultures have been identified as rich and seductive learning environments in their own right; thus a competition has been established between the competing resources of the global corporate curriculum of consumer-media culture and that of schooling. Commercial organizations, it is said, have been better than education systems at aligning themselves with the lifestyles, identities, and ego-projects of young people who seek to identify themselves as autonomous, pleasure-seeking consumers.[17]

Put even more critically, it has been claimed that today "the curriculum of our culture, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, is advertising." This cultural curriculum of advertising seemingly allows "corporations [to] deliver a broader ideological message promoting consumption as the primary source of well-being and happiness," and it positions young people less as "active citizens-to-be" and more as "passive consumers-to-be."[18]

Consequently, consumerism, commercial life, and the world of goods have been "naturalized" as a seemingly benign aspect of children's lives. Children are not as much brought into consumerism by adults, whether by caring parents or teachers, or seduced into it by media and marketers, as born into it through commercialized parenting pedagogies. Consumption is a lifelong activity with the life course itself commodified in relation to commercial interests, practices, and processes.[19]

Digital media are a significant source of the consumerization of learning. As digital media have become more sophisticated and increasingly accessible, the range of learning options catering to all tastes and interests, now waiting to be consumed, has proliferated. Learning activities have become consumer goods in themselves, purchased within a marketplace where learning

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products compete with those of leisure and entertainment. In the culture of consumerized learning, learning is central to lifestyle practices. The consumer needs to be always learning about new lifestyles. Consuming is learning and learning is consuming. Lifelong learning is now to become lifelong lifestyle learning.[20]

The point to make here is not that lifelong learning and project-based learning are somehow linked to consumerism or to the consumerization of the curriculum. It is to stress the importance given to lifelong "projects" as a cultural pattern of networked individualism. The personal project has become a new and continually ongoing state of mind in a "cut-and-paste curriculum" orientated by individual self-responsibility, personalization, and technology-based child-centeredness, with students encouraged to make "a planning office for themselves." Likewise, in the culture of lifelong learning, learners are to make projects for themselves in order to express their "educated" anxieties and aspirations. Through the language and practice of projects, young people are being sculpted and molded as malleable, shape-shifting, lifelong learners with the competence and capacity to be autonomous, self-responsible, and self-enterprising in both their choices about lifestyle and learning.[21]

Nowhere is the shape-shifting potential and networked individualism of learning more forcefully advocated than in the resources of the Web. By shifting learning outside of the school gates, and setting it free in a cultural landscape rich with multimedia, the practices of learning are hyperlinked to the curriculum of commercial culture, a culture that for some educational commentators is participatory and sophisticated yet for others ideologically regressive and aggressively commercialized, connected to highly ideological ideals of free market education without any intervention from the state.[22]

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Although Enquiring Minds assembles something of a critique of consumer culture into its curriculum framework, the researchers were left at the end of the project wondering if it had achieved anything emancipatory or simply enmeshed students more firmly into the consumerized contexts of their everyday cultures.[23] The difficulty encountered by the project has been in differentiating its discourse of child-centered inquiry and personal projects from the individualism associated with both the political right and with the networked individualism of personal autonomy most clearly found in the culture of consumerism. The discourse of Enquiring Minds is one of freedom and choice, terms that resonate with the cyberlibertarian, entrepreneurial culture of networked individualism and the market-as-educator culture of active consumption. In all, the individual is expected to pursue their own separate and autonomous development, to manage their projects and their portfolios. Their identities are being sculpted by a particular style of cultural thought that emphasizes concepts of do-it-yourself (DIY) self-shaping.

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