

7 Making Up DIY Learner Identities

This chapter centers on the issue of how a curriculum translates ideas about who students are and who they should be. The curriculum promotes and sculpts learners' identities, their minds and mentalities. What you know makes you who you are. Learning the content of the curriculum is not simply about acquiring and understanding school knowledge. It embodies learning how to think, feel, and act as certain kinds of students and as certain kinds of people. The curriculum of the future, as we have seen, is the product of a style of thought that draws on concepts and references regarding knowledge, networks, the economy, psychotechnical expertise, and the cultural patterns of globalization. What identities are promoted and molded by the style of thought underpinning the design of the curriculum of the future? What will the students of the future learn as appropriate ways of thinking, feeling, and acting? According to what future aspirations and objectives as described by what authorities?

As previous chapters have shown, the curriculum of the future is a hybrid of new learning languages, technological systems

and network-based discourses, new links with the economy and discourses generated by governance, and cultural discourses of globalization. Key elements of the discourse of centrifugal schooling and the curriculum of the future include networked and connected learning, psychological competence in inquiry and creativity, and the ability to make one's own projects as a lifelong endeavor. The identity promoted by this amalgamation of elements is that of a "DIY networked individual."

Prospective Identities

The curriculum is never simply a matter of passing on information from one generation to the next. It embodies learning how to see, think, feel and act. It shapes identities and mentalities. The construction of any curriculum therefore implies the making of kinds of people. It invents and promotes preferred kinds of identities and mentalities that, through ongoing study, students are encouraged to adopt as their own schooled identities. The emphasis on "human capital" for the economy, for example, is a clear case of purposeful identity formation.¹

In the case of the traditional conservative-restorationist curriculum, the kind of content that is taught stresses the importance of the past, as embodied in cultural canons, the ideal of universal knowledge, and so forth. The curriculum of the past promotes a "retrospective identity" through narratives of the past; through such identities it is hoped that the narratives of the past will be conserved and projected into the future. That is, students will carry on these narratives of the past into the future in their own mentalities and identities—the ways they see, think, feel, and act—and project them into their own aspirations. The curriculum of the future, however, promotes "prospective

identities” that are “constructed to deal with cultural, economic and technological change.” Prospective identities are shaped according to particular aspirations for the future, such as raising economic performance or installing new multicultural values. Through prospective identities, it is hoped that visions for the future can be stabilized. That is, students will carry these visions of the future into their own schooled mentalities and identities, learning how to see, think, and act in their own future lives in order to bring about the cultural, economic, and technological changes required.²

Neither retrospective nor prospective identities are naturally given. They are fabricated, invented, created in order to achieve the objectives of various kinds of authorities. Retrospective identities are usually associated with conservative cultural institutions and restorative ideology. In comparison, the invention of the curriculum of the future is the result of a diverse and heterogeneous network of authorities, actors, and organizations, all of which are seeking to project aspirations for the future of school. These aspirations are motivated by different objectives and visions. Some are economic, others more cultural, some concerned with technological change. Despite their differences, though, they do all promote new ideas, frameworks and objectives for the curriculum at a time of economic, cultural and technological change, and therefore they do all promote prospective identities.

Prototyping Identities

In the projects that constitute the curriculum of the future, new identities are being sculpted and “prototyped.” That is to say, these programs are working to shape and make up new kinds

of identities for particular kinds of future aspirations. Some of these prototypical identities are made very explicit in the various project documents. In the “new times” constructed as the context for the New Basics intervention, a particular ideal of the individual is created. As the project Web documentation states:

The New Basics categories capture various aspects of the person in the world:

- the communicator—active and passive, persuading and being persuaded, entertaining and being entertained, expressing ideas and emotions in words, numbers and pictures, creating and performing
- the individual—physically and mentally, at work and at play and as a meaning-maker
- the group member—in the family, in social groups, in government-related groups and so on
- part of the physical world—of atoms and cells, electrons and chromosomes, animal, vegetable and mineral, observing, discovering, constructing and inventing.

An accompanying technical outline of the theoretical underpinnings for the New Basics links its approach to American critical and “reconceptualist” models of the curriculum that, it claims, “can be built by envisioning the kinds of life worlds and human subjects that the education system wants to contribute to and build.” The person articulated in the project documents is a connected individual who, empowered by emerging network technologies, is able to move fluidly and fluently across “diverse communities and complex cultures.”³

There is something of a cosmopolitan identity imagined by the New Basics: the individual at home anywhere in the world. The objective for the New Basics, therefore, is with the remaking of certain sorts of people and cultures: the formation of a prospective identity based on a particular interpretation of

technological, cultural, and economic change that have been projected into a series of curricular aspirations and objectives.

The Quest to Learn high school in New York, as well as its sister institution in Chicago, also embeds a strong prospective identity in its curriculum framework. The project texts state that learners are imagined as “sociotechnical engineers” with “network literacy” and the capacity for interdisciplinary “systems thinking,” a “characteristic activity in both the media and science today.”⁴ These ways of knowing produce a prospective identity that can deal with complex technological change in futures that are going to be increasingly networked and require transdisciplinary expertise in the domains of media and science. The Web site for ChicagoQuest states very clearly its promotion of new student identities. It encourages “students to ‘take on’ the identities and behaviors of explorers, mathematicians, historians, writers, and evolutionary biologists as they work through a dynamic, challenge-based curriculum.”⁵ The prospective identity of Q2L is constructed for professional interdisciplinary innovation, though it also draws on young people’s cultural experiences as participants in networked publics and global communities.

Learning Futures reimagines the future of school as a “base camp,” a “hub that creates connections,” and the prospective identity it fabricates is one that is able to move fluidly across formal educational institutions, intermediate institutions such as families and neighborhoods, and wider platforms and tools for learning across informal communities. Here we have a prospective identity that is itself constantly moving through a network of learning opportunities at school, home, community, and online. Learning Futures constructs a prospective identity that is concerned with the community but at the same time imagines students as “proto-professionals.”

As the project documentation states, “Learning Futures schools are seeking to develop pedagogies which transform the identity of the learner from ‘recipient of information’ to thinking (and being) like a scientist, geographer, artist, entrepreneur.”⁶ Moreover, the project assumes that student engagement can be achieved through identifying and measuring “how students think, feel and act in school”: it identifies these three elements as

- Thinking/Cognitive;
- Feeling/Emotional/Affective;
- Acting/Behavioural/Operative.⁷

The Learning Futures prospective identity is, therefore, a networked, proto-professional identity that thinks, feels, and acts in terms of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral categories: it is both entrepreneurial and psychological.

It is important to restate, however, that the prototype curriculum examples being examined in this report draw extensively on arguments and ideas from digital culture. As a consequence, we need to take into account the resources involved in the shaping and making up of young people’s “digital identities.”

Remixing Identities

Put simply, identity is the answer to questions such as “Who do I think I am?,” “What do I think is my place in the world?,” and “Who do I want to become?” With the proliferation of digital media and networked communications technologies in many aspects of public and private life, our identity questions today may be recast as “Who do I think I am, when I’m on Facebook?,” “What do I think is my place in the world, in *World of*

Warcraft?,” and “Who do I want to become, in my *Second Life*?” Do we possess one kind of identity in the analog world, and yet another in the digital world—a kind of “Identity 2.0”? Are identities possible when they have been detached from their bodies?

In such contexts, human identity is no longer thought about in terms of its unity, but in terms of a multiplicity, heterogeneity, and fragmentation of “cyberselves.” The multiplicity of identity may be interpreted positively or negatively. The virtual dimensions of social networks allow for the fluidity and multiplicity of identity as an ongoing creative process of constructing “identities-in-action” and “work-in-progress,” but also permit the construction of fractured, confused and “half-real” reflections of a person. The digital identities permitted by seeing ourselves as “plugged-in technobodies” are flexible and multiple and decentered in different roles in different settings at different times.⁸

The potential of “DIY media” is understood to “empower” young people in a do-it-yourself ethic of creative collaboration; production and participation. It puts the emphasis on the autonomy, agency, and creativity of users, or, as they have been fondly neologized, “pro-sumers” and “prod-users.”⁹ However, this pleasurable and playful multiplication of identities is also intensely political. In linking the requirement for lifelong learning to the DIY culture of the Web, self-editing and digital identity management become key lifelong skills as individuals are required to self-adjust or constantly update and upgrade their identities. Individuals are encouraged to become perpetually involved in optimizing themselves through DIY processes of accessorization and upgrading, enhancing their social reach through network extensions and ensuring the credibility, trustworthiness, and reputation of their profiles through constant processes of

consumption. Put in these terms, identity is a performance that is social, political, economic, personal, and increasingly “*remixed* and *remixable*.”¹⁰ The self-remixing DIY discourse stems from the promotion of a specific new kind of reflexive social identity that is active in practices of self-responsibility, self-shaping, and self-mastery.¹¹

New hybrid identities are produced actively and reflexively as persons negotiate worlds that are both tangibly nearby and virtually dispersed. They are not given at birth but are the effect of constantly juggling multiple real-world and virtual identities, and working upon one’s self as a personal project. Perhaps even more critically, it has been suggested that social network sites have reduced people to “multiple-choice identities” as a result of “locked-in” computer science templates.¹²

Looked at in this way, the kind of lifelong learning identities envisaged in various curriculum futures is the educational outgrowth of a DIY culture in which individuals are encouraged to see themselves and their lifestyles as constant creative projects. Identities are no longer given but need to be assembled like flat-pack furniture. In a DIY self-driven culture, learning become endless, lifelong, and lifewide across the entire life cycle, as individuals seek out new experiences and hence more learning. Learning is repositioned by digital media culture as a lifestyle choice rather than an institutionalized process of schooling.¹³

Specifically taking up such analyses, the Enquiring Minds project in the United Kingdom focused on the “making up” of the child. The emphasis on flexibility and adaptability in the face of new uncertainties creates a particular type of person, a reschooled identity characterized in the EM research as a “flexible child” who is “response-ready” and “response-able” and lives constantly in an “unfinished” state of self-innovation.¹⁴

As a result of the new kinds of remixable digital identities young people are constructing for themselves, reconfigured identities are to be required within the digitalized classrooms of the curriculum of the future. New kinds of identities are to be lashed up and reassembled alongside the refashioning of educational priorities, objectives, and strategies, and linked to new ways of thinking about such things as human communication, online consumption, and digital lifestyles. In the digital era the prospective identities and mentalities of the school child are to be “mashed up” from heterogeneous resources rather than defined through grand curricular narratives of the past.¹⁵

In the curriculum prototypes of *Enquiring Minds*, *High Tech High*, *Quest to Learn*, the *New Basics*, and so on, new identities are fabricated and promoted. Instead of “schooled identities,” the projects promote a range of remixed and mashed-up identities, a kind of half-schooled/half-digital hybrid. These examples of centrifugal schooling represent a futuristic vision of education for the next century that suggests that networked individual identity building—rather than the acquisition of prepackaged “schooled identities” as embodied in formal curricula—is at the heart of educational modernization, innovation, and twenty-first-century reform. Centrifugal schooling extends the schooled identities of young people into an ongoing process of self-fulfillment and personal lifestyle creation that has now become the characteristic feature of lifelong learning in a modern consumer-media society.

The reconfiguration of formally schooled identities as fluid, self-fashioning digital learning identities also links young people more forcefully to changing working circumstances where the emphasis is on workers who can continually improve themselves, upskilling and retraining as changing job descriptions

require. The enterprising selves, permanently unfinished projects, and interactive social identities of reflexive, self-adjusting, lifelong learners are essential as the human capital required by the knowledge economy as well as by the new global community.¹⁶

The digital learning identities promoted by centrifugal schooling are “cyborg” identities, hybrids of humans with information technologies, which connect the bodies and minds of young people into the disembodied and deterritorialized spaces of the Internet. The firm disciplinary identities of linear curricula are to be disassembled by the more centrifugal dynamics and fluidities of the digital age, and instead digital learning identities are to be reassembled in relation to lifelong learning, identity accessorization, enterprise, and notions of DIY identity construction. Digital learning identities are expressions of increasingly centrifugal selves and the mashed-up identities being constructed through the curriculum of the future are, then, reticulated cyborg identities.¹⁷ The characteristics of cyborg identities are

- cyborg connectivity: being networked, connected, flexible, interactive, interdependent;
- projective competence: being psychologically self-competent, self-fashioning, self-upgrading, creative, and innovative, with the self as a personal project;
- prospective futures: being engaged in lifelong learning, problem solving.

Drawing on these clusters of cyborg connections, projective psychological competence, and prospective futures, it is possible to suggest that an idealized identity has been established across the range of curriculum prototypes examined. This identity is idealized as a lifelong networked learner with psychological eyes, or a DIY networked individual.

DIY Networked Individualism

In terms of lifelong learning, the DIY networked individualist prospective identity is constructed from a discourse of learning as an active and lifelong project. The curriculum may be understood as distributed across both formal and informal contexts, stretched lifelong and lifewide, with learning increasingly harmonized right across boundaries of educational space and pace. Rather than the educational spaces of schools with their classrooms and textbooks, learning happens in many formal and informal spaces, including home, school, community, and online spaces. And rather than the usual rhythmic pace of schooling according to timetables and the staged organization of curriculum, lifelong learning happens throughout the entire life cycle, in authentic contexts, just in time, and on-demand.

In terms of networked individualism, the prospective identity focuses on the personal projects of the individual. In the culture of networked individualism, the values, choices, interests, and projects of the individual are at the forefront. Individuals are now understood as having the capacity to be more active and knowing, to be participants in networked publics and creative audiences, with great potential for personal and cultural autonomy. This means that a culture of networked individualism can inspire project-oriented social movements and insurgent communities of practice based on the sharing of new values and the construction of new kinds of identities. But it can also lead to entrenchment in communities that affirm and ascribe identities, such as those provided by a seductive consumer media culture.

In the prototypical curriculum projects examined, the culture of networked individualism has been detectable in particular in the emphasis given to personal projects and portfolios.

The personal project has become a state of mind rather than simply an assignment. Students are encouraged to make projects for themselves that express their anxieties and their aspirations for the future, and they are encouraged to view their very own selves and their identities as ongoing DIY projects. The extended personal project embedded in many examples of the curriculum of the future is the ideal pedagogy for such a culture.

In terms of its psychological construction, the prospective identity associated with the curriculum of the future has been assembled according to psychological concepts (creativity, competence, cognition, affect, motivations, lifelong learning) rather than the academic and epistemological fields on which the subjects have been constructed historically by experts. The main sources of authority on the curriculum now are informed by an expertise derived from across the “psy complex” of disciplines. It is through psychological eyes and a “psy” gaze that the student of the future is being imagined by the reimagining of the curriculum of the future. Students are encouraged to think, feel, and act upon themselves psychologically as inner-focused persons with mental and emotional habits of mind and states of well-being that are to be sculpted in order to support an economy of creativity and innovation.

Moreover, in the interdisciplinary blending of psy discourses with computer science perspectives in the learning sciences, students are also being encouraged to see themselves as computer engineers see things. As a result, the prospective identity of the learner promoted by the curriculum of the future is shaped as a CompPsy hybrid. Of course, socially defined identities are never simply determined by external forces. But social identities can be promoted and sculpted in ways that position students in certain ways and encourage students to see themselves in their terms.

The expertise and authority of psychological eyes and computer science generate for students particular ways of viewing, thinking, feeling, and acting; not least for seeing, thinking about, and acting on themselves. In other words, students too are now being encouraged to identify with a particular style of thought, to think, see, and practice on themselves through particular types of concepts, key terms, references, explanations, arguments, and techniques. In line with the expertise of the CompPsy complex, students of the curriculum of the future are to be schooled to be self-activating, inner-focused, emotionally well, playful and creative, as well as experimental, innovative, transdisciplinary, entrepreneurial, and mentally flexible. Students are encouraged to see themselves as self-enterprising, autonomous, and creative individuals, taking charge of their own fates as a lifelong project. They are encouraged to attach themselves “prosthethically” via multiple networks, to “project” themselves through personal projects of the self, and to orient themselves “prospectively” toward the future. The curriculum of the future is not just a matter of defining content and official knowledge. It is about creating, sculpting, and finessing minds, mentalities, and identities, promoting style of thought about humans, or “mashing up” and “making up” the future of people.

