

## 8 Conclusion: An (Un)official Curriculum of the Future?

Changing ideas about the curriculum of the future show that what knowledge gets taught at school remains an important issue for debate. The curriculum acts as a microcosm of society, condensing what a society chooses to remember of its past, how it understands its present, and what it aspires and wants to project prospectively into the future. The curriculum prototypes analyzed here act as microcosms of where society wants to be heading in the future, and need to be examined not as socially independent or neutral bodies of content but in terms of their wider societal interdependence. A curriculum is not a disinterested, naturally predetermined or “given” body of knowledge. It is the result of an active process of engineering and tends to embody or mirror the political, economic, cultural, and social realities from which it emerges. Like many other complex things, a curriculum needs to be constructed, invented, assembled, or “made up.” The creation of a curriculum is also a process of remaking society and remaking people.

The prototypical examples of new curriculum programs examined in the report show how the future of the curriculum

is now in the hands of a great many varied individuals and organizations, many of them from outside the mainstream education system. These agents and agencies collectively constitute a new global curriculum design network with its own languages, techniques, and motivations that are constructed upon the basis of authority and expertise drawn from different professional disciplines, knowledge domains, and sets of political values. The curriculum of the future is the subject and the product of a particular style of thought.

The “official knowledge” embedded in each of these prototypical curricula is, therefore, the result or effect of complex ongoing processes, interpretations, negotiations, contests and conflicts, and compromises and agreements that have constituted the formation of such a style of thought. That is to say, these curriculum experiments are socially shaped. Every new curriculum has its own social life. Each of them represents a juxtaposition and a synthesis of ideas, aspirations, and objectives about such major societal issues as the future of the economy, the impact of commercialization and privatization on public education, changing notions of social expertise and authority, the cultural patterns of communalism and individualism on the Web, and the formation of young people’s identities, mentalities, and minds.

Defining what counts as worthwhile knowledge for inclusion in the curriculum of the future is not incidental to these issues: it is constituted by the way these issues are addressed. In conclusion, let’s review some of the main points from each of the chapters. Together, these main points constitute the new style of thought regarding the curriculum of the future: its key terms, concepts, references, relations, arguments, explanations, and the practical techniques deployed to modify or remake it.

*Curriculum:* The curriculum has, over the last couple of decades, been increasingly “harmonized” with a series of societal transformations linked to globalization and the political aspirations of nations to compete in a knowledge economy. The knowledge economy has become a preferred vision for the future of society, with the result that the curriculum has been put under intense pressure for reform. The consequence has been for reformers to put the emphasis on frameworks of skills, competences, “know-how” and other categories of “learning,” and an evacuation of content, knowledge and “know-what” from the curriculum. Close analysis of these developments shows how they are formed from an uneasy alliance of economic arguments about the need to equip students with skills for digital labor and educational ideals drawn from a long history of progressivist and constructivist learning.

*Networks:* “Networks” have become part of a paradigmatic vocabulary for the centrifugal future of schooling. Networks are proposed as the ideal organizational form in a “smart” lateral world that now values mobility, fluidity, and dynamism over all rigidities and hierarchies. People now work through networks; they experience culture through networks; they engage with diverse publics through networks; and they may be exploited through their connections to different networks. Educational institutions and systems have come under sustained attack for their incapacity to keep up with the dynamism of a network-based society, with the result that new innovations have focused on the development of more “open education” systems. The dominant emergent discourse is one of complexity, systems thinking, multiplicity, and dynamism. The Quest to Learn high school embodies how this discourse can be made into a productive curriculum framework. Other initiatives, however, utilize

the Internet itself to distribute educational opportunities into a cloud culture of learning beyond the boundaries of school. Again, these approaches incorporate a progressivist legacy into a high-tech paradigm to create a networked neoprogressivist hybrid ideal of the curriculum of the future.

*Economy:* The knowledge economy makes new demands of schools, especially how students are schooled for work. However, the correspondence of the curriculum and work has been challenged by a new series of links and associations between schools and economic interests. Cultures of playful learning, an explosion of creativity, and commercialism combined now appear to promote new ways of thinking, feeling, and acting in schools that are linked to “reenchanted” economic or market values. Authority for the content of the curriculum has been assumed by a new mix of private-sector and public-sector objectives working together through “crossover” alliances. Rather than the state operating alone, curriculum development increasingly consist of a messy mix of governmental and nongovernmental organizations, private-sector and commercial companies, philanthropies, think tanks, and social enterprises. Its emphasis for the future of the curriculum, both in terms of governance and classroom practice, is increasingly on short-term, fast-time projects, all linked together through the “reenchanting” policy discourse of creativity.

*Expertise:* Partly as a result of new forms of crossover governance, new sources of professional and theoretical expertise and authority are now becoming involved in shaping the curriculum of the future. In everyday life, “little experts” are now increasingly taking the place of traditional authorities, particularly in the culture of the Internet. In the educational domain, such little experts take the guise of intellectual workers who take big

abstract ideas and translate them into “vehicular ideas” that can be moved along quickly to get things done in classrooms. The curriculum of the future is partly the result of an explosion of expertise as new intellectual workers have begun to intervene in the education system from think tanks, corporate R&D labs, nonprofits, philanthropies, and academic departments alike. Their new expertise promotes new ways of knowing and acting in schools that derive from two main sources of authority: the psychological disciplines and computer sciences. In the psychological management of the curriculum of the future, great stress is put on learners’ self-actualization and active self-responsibility. In addition, the blending of psychological disciplines with computer science disciplines in the transdisciplinary field of the learning sciences has created a new “CompPsy complex” that aims to make up a particular kind of self-competent, inner-focused individual whose emotional well-being is important for innovation and the future well-being of the economy. The result is that “psychotechnical schools” are now being encouraged to act upon the capacities and competencies of individuals in relation to perceived political and economic objectives.

*Culture:* In addition to overtly economic and political objectives, a curriculum also represents what society defines as “real culture” (or what real culture ought to be). The culture of the Internet is increasingly recognized as part of the real culture of the present and is therefore articulated as part of the cultural world to be represented in the curriculum of the future. The cultural patterns of the Internet can be roughly divided into communalist and individualist. Some examples of the curriculum of the future focus on communal patterns of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism, while others are shaped and influenced by the ideal of “networked individualism” that understands individuals

to be responsible for their own “projects.” Curriculum projects also respond to the culture of branded consumerism and the growth of consumer-media culture as a seductive and informal curriculum of pleasurable lifestyle choices. In this culture of networked individualism, individuals are encouraged to participate constantly in active DIY projects of self-improvement and self-driven, lifelong learning.

*Identities:* In the networked world microcosmically represented in the curriculum of the future, new kinds of learner identities are promoted and shaped. In place of the retrospective “schooled” identities of students, young people are being sculpted and molded prospectively as lifelong learners with the competence and capacity to be flexible, self-adjusting, and self-enterprising in changing futures. Rather than linking learner identity to disciplinary knowledge, the curriculum of the future links identity to a hybridized learning landscape that cuts across formal and informal sites. The prospective identities of the curriculum of the future are lifelong networked individualists who see things through psychological eyes and comprehend them through computational thinking. Identities are increasingly considered to be a lifelong project that the individual constantly works upon. Instead of ready-made identities, all individuals are responsible for their own DIY identities, which they must manage fastidiously throughout their lives.

### **Toward an (Un)official Curriculum of the Future**

As we have seen, the curriculum of the future is being socially shaped according to quite complex arguments about learning and knowledge, networks and systems, economics and expertise, and culture and identities. Together, these arguments, and the

terms, concepts, references, and relations that underpin them, constitute an emerging style of thought regarding the curriculum. It is important to restate that these developments mostly remain prototypical and incomplete, and that much of the material covered is promotional rather than empirical. The final upshot of the analysis offered in this report is that the minds and mentalities of young people are subject to an emerging style of thought that seeks to shape, mold, and sculpt them as certain sorts of people in order to promote and enact a preferred vision of society. The extent to which things might happen as they have been imagined, promoted, and planned is a matter for further research on the ground.

The approach in this analysis has been critical, not out of aggressive critical militancy or a rush to judgment but out of an attempt to understand how changes being imagined in the content, form, and control of the curriculum are related to wider social, political, economic, and cultural matters. It is according to various social, political, economic, and cultural matters that any curriculum is made real and official; it does not just spring into existence ready-made but must always be assembled and made official as a representation of the past, a version of the present, and an aspiration for the future.

The visions for the future of society imagined by the various prototypical examples of the curriculum of the future all challenge the idea that a single, central, and official version of the curriculum is possible. Instead, they promote a much more centrifugal and decentralized vision of schooling. Centrifugal schooling, as the collective name given to the prototype curriculum projects, represents an emergent and unofficial vision of a curriculum of the future—a style of thought for the curriculum of the digital age. An empirical research program dedicated

to examining and understanding the centrifugal organization of the unofficial curriculum of the future would further seek to explore these emerging features in concrete settings.

*Centrifugal knowledge:* Any curriculum represents a selection of knowledge, a construction of a reality to be passed from one generation to the next. Research on the curriculum of the future needs to dissect and analyze the knowledge contained in such programs. It needs to look at the structure of such knowledge and track its definite social relations. Do, for example, transdisciplinary approaches in the curriculum accurately track professions and generate appropriate (proto-)professional identities? What are the social conditions and contexts that have generated the knowledge that is to form the knowledge base of the curriculum? What communities of specialists have generated it? On what theories does it rest? Or is the knowledge included in the curriculum of the future divorced from the real contexts of knowledge production? Finally, if curriculum knowledge is to be defined according to more horizontal or “open source” ideals rather than by vertical hierarchy, what will give knowledge its authority and according to what theories and accounts will knowledge “count” as worthwhile?

*Centrifugal authority:* What are the specific sources of expertise and authority involved in promoting new curricular visions? The curriculum of the future involves a variety of individuals, organizations, cross-sectoral connections, and sources of expertise all being enrolled together to form new decentered amalgamations of authority. The state is no longer the central source of authority, and even when it continues to mandate and prescribe curriculum policies it does so indirectly through mediators, catalysts, fixers, and intellectual workers who bring new ideas, new theories, and new sources of expertise to the policy



process. Further research on the curriculum of the future needs to trace the complex interorganizational and cross-sectoral processes, as well as the historical and political associations and networks involved in this amalgamation of curriculum authority

*Centrifugal identities:* In digital culture identity has been multiplied as individuals are permitted to perform their own selves in different digital environments. In the curriculum of the future, different identities and positions are promoted to students, with the idealized position being that of the self-actualizing, psychologically introspective networked individual and lifelong learner. This “cyborg” identity is prosthetically attached via networks, psychologically projected through projects of the self, and turned prospectively toward the future. Further curriculum research needs to examine through empirical analysis the ways in which students come to understand themselves and plan for their futures through different curricula. It needs to place identity in its necessary political context, as the human embodiment of political aspirations that have a preferred future vision of society and the remaking of learners’ identities as their objective.

