



Australian Council for Educational Research

Australian Principals Centre Monograph Number 17

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SCHOOLING THE YUK/WOW GENERATION by Erica McWilliam

INTRODUCTION

Working as I do in a university setting, when I talk to school teachers and school leaders I feel like I have come home. Teachers have seen wave after wave of ideas come through. Haven't we all. We've watched them arrive, and we've seen the initial excitement that comes with them. We maintain our passion for teaching, even though we have seen the failure of many of these ideas over time. We are sceptical, and we do not indulge in mindless optimism. I like good teachers' 'non-stupid optimism' and I like working in context, where that is possible.

Mind you, we have changed from the days when we thought that teachers had 'the formula' and 'the answer'. I remember an occasion, as a student teacher, when I was teaching with a teacher who was legendary. He would come into the room and say to the children "The name is Rogers. The subject is science. The method is force." And it was. We're not supposed to do that now! Now we are all wise. Now we understand that we don't do things that way, that we are facilitators, and that we are all life-long learners. And we have to be careful that we are not sentencing our learners to life!

THE YUK/WOWS

I want to talk about learning and un-learning how to teach. I want to do that in the context of teaching what I call the "Yuk/Wow Generation". The space between Yuk and Wow is the time that it takes a child to decide whether s/he likes something or not. I'm talking about a particular way of coming at the world. I am not trying to indicate that everyone is like this. Nor am I trying to suggest that young people have not been like this in the past. What I am suggesting is that if we think about the youngsters who ten years ago had the purple stripe in the hair and the three earrings, increasingly we cannot think of them as the 'lunatic fringe'.

We have to start to think about what it is that engages kids, and it won't necessarily be the things that engage us. I am trying to get a sense of what it means to us, to have gone through the era when we knew that every eye being on 'me' was the sign of a good teacher ... and, of course, a good Principal.

I remember Principals walking the corridors, in earlier times, with a whole vocabulary of their own, which the teacher had to translate. For example, at one time, we had a lizard tied up on the bag rack outside our classroom. The Principal came in and asked, in stentorian tones, "Who is the proud possessor of the saurian disporting itself on the school verandah?" The teacher said "Who owns the lizard?" This was the teacher's job, under the circumstances. The Principal was not to be understood. The teacher spoke to the students in his place.

Now, we have all eschewed that. We understand, these days, that this is awful. We are all about caring and sharing. We have taken on the role of facilitator of learning, but I am going to suggest that is time to move on from there too. Instead of being 'sage on the stage' or 'guide on the side', we need to be a 'member in the middle'.

I am arguing for a more interventionist teaching. No longer can we move from desk to desk, looking over people's shoulders like Florence Nightingale and telling students that their work is 'good' or 'great'. I am parodying this, of course, but I think that the Facilitator of Learning model has taken us about as far as it is going to.

The great enemy that we now face is passivity. We need students and teachers to connect in the middle somewhere, doing things together that may or may not pay off. This is not too 'sexy' an idea, of course, when everybody is wanting us to test everything and nail everything through the floor.

The space for risk taking is shrinking rapidly and we all know it. Let me make a case for risk taking, despite that. It is easier to ask forgiveness than to ask permission.

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I am not suggesting that the whole curriculum should be given over to risk taking. What I do suggest is that where you have a school with no risk taking, you may be protecting students from learning itself ... and that is really risky.

What are schools really for? Are they basically there for no more than 'custody'. I have big debates with my student teachers about this. They tell me that the core purpose is to 'build student self esteem' and help them 'reach their full potential'. I ask them "What if the children's self esteem is just fine? What if it's better than your own?" They find that hard to answer.

Schools are about more than custody. I believe they are there for learning. I know that's a bizarre idea but, even so, I hold to that view. They are for moral training and custody as well, of course, so that we know where our kids are at a particular time. Prisons and mental asylums serve a similar purpose. But, if you want them also to be about learning, you have the problem of risk minimisation on the one hand – don't let them move; don't let them cross the road; cover them with a blanket; have a panic attack; worry about litigation – while, at the same time, being told to innovate and experiment. Now, I think that is a very real dilemma.

I try to work through that. What does it mean to talk back to that agenda? How can we claim a space – not all the space, I repeat – for risk taking? We need it for the group of children we now have in our classes – the Yuk/Wows.

WHO ARE THE YUK/WOWS?

Who are these kids? From a distillation of what we hear from neuro-scientists, sociologists and other specialists in the field, it seems they are about

- stimulation and simulation
- here-and-now experience
- the next five seconds, and
- am I in the right space?

Listen to these kids using their mobile phones. They don't say "How are you?" They say "Where are you?". Because you might be somewhere better than I am right now; somewhere less boring; yuk, wow, I want to be over there as well!"

Here-and-now is what counts. They are constantly looking at where they are, and they round each other up. Notions of planning for the future don't figure in their thinking.

It's all about choice, speed and chance. It's about just in time, just enough and just down the hall. With that sort of agenda, it is difficult to take them towards any long-term sense of building some sort of foundation, in a gradual way. They are not seeing things that way.

In the university, at least a third of our students are now Churners, Parkers and Drifters. They come into Law, say, in the first week of the course and, in five minutes, have decided "Law's not for me!" They're out the door. "But you haven't really given it a go", we say. But no, "It's just not me", is the response, "I've had enough of an experience of it."

In the schooling experience, it is not enough to say that everything is fine as it is, and let's just get on with it. We need to ask ourselves where they are, while we are moving from desk to desk facilitating.

They are on about lifestyle, image and being entertained. They are screen-centred, rather than the book-centred. For most of us, the issue of sound and audio is peripheral. We think the basic assignment is about words, and that we just put other things around it to titivate it. We need to understand that for this generation, however, 'remix' is fundamental and the word is not central.

We can learn a great deal by valuing sound and image more than we have done in the past. A lot of students can do great things with sound and image, which they just can't do with words. This different way of thinking is particularly useful when we look at effective ways of teaching indigenous kids.

More generally, the emphasis on sound and image is interesting in a context where more and more of our testing is about testing words, in the traditional sense.

This has implications not just for how kids think about school and learning, but also about the sorts of career that they might aspire to.

END OF A TRADITIONAL LIFE NARRATIVE

We no longer have traditional life narrative – the kind that we have lived. Some of us don't live them either. There has been a shift from security in career, towards a more precarious world, where you are only as good as your last month's applications.



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A lot of us have been used to a more ‘public service’ style of living, where the cheque keeps coming each fortnight. By 2020, however, we estimate that around 20% of the workforce will be doing ‘collarless’ work, in portfolio-based careers.

This is why I am saying that the implications of my arguments do not apply only to the three kids with spiky purple haircuts. There have always been kids like that – the ones who always do something different to their school uniform and have us despairing; or the ones who carry big bunches of keys around on their belts. This is not about the fringe. It is now a central activity.

These kids will be doing their work in digitally enhanced environments, not bounded by place. They will be making cut-and-paste choices, from options about where they work. Their learning will not necessarily be transferable from one application to another. This is a ‘killer’ for us, as teachers, because it says that they will need to ‘unlearn’ as much as learn.

Fixed knowledge can be a real problem. What stops people taking risks, often as not, is their knowledge, not their evidence. If we think we ‘know’, we don’t take risks.

The issue of helping kids to ‘unlearn’ – to abandon what they learned last week because it’s not going to help them this week, or might even be an impediment this week – that’s a tough call. We all expect that we can build on our learning, starting from a foundation and going on from there. To throw this mindset out of the window doesn’t seem to be what we are on about as teachers. We like to think that learning might not be as ephemeral as that; it has a golden shelf life. Well, perhaps some of it will.

The kids in our classes will follow multiple pathways, with no linear transition from school to work. They will experience both in parallel, their experiences moving all over the place. There is no one way. Things increasingly will be mixed up.

family-based assignment for his/her portfolio. In the USA, the student might be fined for breach of copyright and get a criminal record. Now there’s an exciting risks for Principals! The point is, if you show these kids a new technology they’re on to it. That is not something to condemn or denigrate.

Racially and ethnically they are diverse. At least one grandparent is likely to have been an immigrant. Things are shifting around. The white picket fence is no longer secure.

They tend to prefer teamwork, in structured, experiential and technology-based activities. They are good at multi-tasking. They are plugged in and intolerant of delay. Particularly what they like is a combination of domain knowledge, cultural understanding (who are they) and techno-smarts – not just one of these. It is the integration of those three things that is really telling for these kids. It’s when we say that we understand the cultural place people are in and coming from, we understand the need to be continually updating our techno-smarts, and we value domain knowledge. So, the French teacher is not just teaching French any more. S/he is setting up chatrooms with kids in New Caledonia, and understands how to manage the associated processes and protocols, which will allow her students to tap into a culture just off our shores.

That is where we are heading. We are looking a combination of knowledge – not just saying “I teach Maths. Somebody else does those other things.” This is a real challenge to most of us because we have been so used to domain knowledge being separate. We knew we had to have some cultural understanding of where the kids are, but we never really mastered the integration of the three elements. That has been true for schools and, perhaps, even more so for universities.



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NEW ‘IDENTITY NORMS’

We are talking about young people who see new technologies as natural and normal, and who know how to cut and paste and assemble their world in ways that we do not necessarily value as central. In fact, often we criticise it. Think, in a somewhat extreme example, of a student who might want to put a Simpsons cartoon into a

FOUR KEY SHIFTS

Four key shifts are taking place. These are

- 1 from delivering content to building capacity. I am not talking here about content-free – remember what I just said about domain knowledge – but about a shift in emphasis. Whether the delivery is through worksheets, didactic teaching, instruction-led teaching, or preparing for standardised tests, building capacity is somewhere else. I am talking about integrating the domains. Why capacity building now, instead of content delivery?

Because we cannot just hope that somehow capacity will be built.

- 2 from supply and demand chains to value-add networks. Supply and demand chains? The Department gives you something. You pass it on to the teachers. They pass it on to the kids. Then the chain goes back up, with testing along the way. The results get reported to parents and the Department. We need to shift from that model to a distributed learning network. How do we see ourselves in terms of that shift, however? Do we still cling to the chain, with its predictable flow of work, tests and results going back and forth?
- 3 from setting curriculum to creating curriculum. This is what I characterise as part of the shift from being a 'Myers' teacher to being an 'IKEA' teacher. We all know that the package that arrives from IKEA is supposed to result in a fabulous construction. Well sometimes it ends up that way, depending on how we go in the process. But not always. And not always without some difficulties. The point is, we can no longer rely on Myers-style, finished product curriculum, which is tied up with a bow and presented to the students with the admonition "You've got the lot, son!" Instead, we start with something, rather than everything, and say, "OK, from here on, we are creating the curriculum.. And we all need to understand that sometimes this will not work out the way we thought it would." That means having a space for non-assessable work, which is becoming very hard to find, in a world where more testing is seen to equate with more rigour and thence with better schools. We all know the myths about that.
- 4 from book to screen and from desktop to hand. I was interested to read, recently, that for the first time laptops are not selling. They reached a peak in sales and have started to decline. People now want access on their bodies. They want to wear their access. Just-in-time is easier when it feels 'part of me'. They don't even want to invest in things on the table. That shift, from the desk to the body, is worth thinking about in terms of what we do with technology in classrooms

Let's look at each shift in a little more detail.

Shift 1: Content delivery to capacity building

Again, why this shift to capacity building now? Because we have never been more ignorant (Leadbeater, 2000). And the chasing of endless content is actually not helpful. People like Leadbeater are not writing specifically about education. They are writing more about the future of ideas. Perhaps we can think a similar way. Perhaps we can learn more by moving out side of education and the assumptions that we have about it.

Leadbeater is saying we are ignorant because we have never been so far from the technology that's around us. I don't have a clue what is happening when I move the mouse on my computer. I don't understand the workings between my laptop and a data projector. If any of it breaks down, I have no idea how to fix it. I use my mobile phone but I have no idea what is inside it. Most people would be in the same position. Compare that with our grandparents, who could have fixed almost anything in their environment. They could make a lot of the things they used. They were very knowledgeable in terms of their context.

For us, however, just to keep thinking more and more content, when we are more and more ignorant, is bizarre. It doesn't make any sense. We have to come to terms with our relative ignorance and not think that gathering more knowledge to ourselves is, *per se*, a sign of human progress. It's just not true.

Guy Claxton (2004), writing about building learning power, argues that we have to help kids not to know everything, and not to know how to pass tests, but how to know what to do when they don't know what to do. He says this is the most valuable type of learner. He did some testing with high-achieving, female maths students in Canada, where he gave them a paper to complete. In the middle of the paper he put four questions that the girls could not do. They couldn't even jump at the questions. What happened then? These high-achieving university students fell apart. Not only did they not answer the four questions; when they went back to the questions that were easier than the ones they were stuck on, they couldn't do them either. They had lost the plot, were not resilient, could not bear not knowing what to do. In Guy Claxton's terms, the successful learners of the future will not be like these students. They will know what to do, when they don't know what to do.



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There are classrooms now where teachers are working with these ideas. Claxton has been working with some in the UK, I believe, and there are others in Singapore. The participating teachers are working to develop this capacity right from primary school.



Being able to retain and cling on to knowledge may actually be antithetical to the new learning that is needed.

Put yourself in the child's position. Ask yourself "When we don't know what to do, what can we do?" And the first answer is not "Ask the teacher." We have to develop that capacity in ourselves as well as the kids. What if the highest achievers that we produced were not our best learners? That is a real moral and ethical issue for us all.

I have been talking to some school councillors, who say things like "Once upon a time, the kids I saw were the kids who were 'down the bottom' or 'failing'. I am now seeing kids who, if they don't get an A+, go completely to water." In addition, the parents are so achievement-anxious that they get stressed, some to the point of nervous breakdown, if their starts to child to get anything lower than top marks.

We know about some of the causes of this anxiety, including the physical and emotional investment that parents put into their children – especially since families have become smaller. We know about the coaching that goes on in some homes. It's become quite an industry. We also know about the more informal help that parents provide, helping out with homework. How much time is this taking? How much of a family's resources? How much of some children's learning management is going on in the home, and more generally beyond the school walls? How does that fit with a model where teachers set a linear task, say "That's where we're going", provide a criteria sheet, marshal the students, get them to the starting line, and fire the metaphorical starting pistol?

What is going on here? Are we so fixed with the concept of 'achievement' that we are losing contact with what it means to learn – if that means to fail without shame, or to experiment and have that experiment fail?

The cure for cancer will eventually be found. It will be found through failure. It will be found through experiments that don't work. Knowledge is produced from failure, not endless A+ marks. This is a crucial idea for us now, about what it means to know things.

So, when we talk about tests, and achievement, will that also mean we can be sure that the people who top those tests will be our best learners? I would want to have that openly debated, before we rush to the next set of tests.

We are not living in a routinised world any more, where habits and adaptations were enough to get by. Bauman (2004) says that we need to work with students on how to 'de-learn' – being able to say "I used to think that this worked. I now have to discover another way to do it. I will throw it all in the bin. But I can't afford to throw my self-esteem with it."

This is a challenge, and it's certainly not going to be easy for us, taking risks and being prepared for it not to succeed.. We are talking about classrooms without shame – where the reason for a student putting a hand up is to say "I want my problem – what I'm really struggling with over here – dealt with next", rather than "I have the answer, or I know." That's a long way from where most of us were, when the inspector came round. Being able to retain and cling on to knowledge may actually be antithetical to the new learning that is needed.

Shift 2: From supply chain to value network

What about the shift from supply chain to value network? There is a lot of work being done in business at the moment around what they call values ecology. You can think about this with regard to teaching as a kind of values exchange, with students working together on values creation. This is more like the IKEA idea of learning, which I mentioned earlier. Consumption is no longer essentially passive. That is why the Facilitator of Learning model may have had its day. The coach potato mentality of "Hit me with it and I'll just sit here and take it" no longer applies. Children are not passive, for example, when they watch television – and have not been for some time, whatever we might like to think to the contrary.

We have shifted from a chain to networks. The difference is that a chain is locked in. You can't bypass points on a chain. The network can go around, or exclude, anything that does not add value. In a classroom setting, if the teacher does not add value, the child will try to go round, or discount, that teacher, if this is at all possible. You might be in the chain, but not in the network.

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A value network is consumer-centric. Gregory Hearn (2005) says that it is about being able to “co-create value, at multiple points of exchange.” It does not operate according to a fixed hierarchy, rank or linear communication. Networks are about roles rather than positions. They tend to work well where there are flexible reward structures, a commitment to competency development and teamwork, and a shared vision of achieving quality outcomes for those involved.

Is it possible that many of our teachers are not in the learning network of their kids, who are effectively being bypassed or eluded, even if they are in the supply chain of curriculum delivery? Can you think of examples where this might be the case, in your own experience? We know what it looks like to have students who are totally disengaged. It is a sign that there is no value-added as far as the kids are concerned.

Shift 3: From setting curriculum to creating curriculum

If we move from setting curriculum towards creating curriculum, it does not mean everything is ‘up for grabs’. It doesn’t mean teachers don’t have to prepare anything. It actually requires more expertise than ever – a meta-understanding, if you like.

There is a teacher in Brisbane who goes into the class and asks his students whether you get wetter standing in the rain or walking in the rain. That is their assignment for the next three weeks. High-achieving kids wonder what’s going on here. Are they going to be tested on this? Are there answers in a book? How can they find the book? Or will Sir tell them? No, he won’t. Then they get angry – “You know the answer and you won’t tell us.” But he will not let them off the hook. They have to develop experiments, come up with a theory, and convince him. That throws kids. But he can’t do that without being pretty expert in science. Without domain knowledge he can’t set something like this, which is deceptively simple. It requires a meta-understanding of how science works, and the role of experimentation.

The teacher in that situation must be so comfortable when he walks away from the text book that he can stand with his hands in his armpits and wait to see how the kids handle it.

The kids are thrown by it and so are the parents, who frequently get called upon by their children to help work out the problem. They tend to send the kids back for more information. Then they

get on the internet, frantically trying to find the answer.

So, these things are unsettling. They are about habits of mind, or what has sometimes been referred to as the ‘creative ability of gymnastic minds’. The capacity to use their minds in this way is one of the crucial things about kids who can learn and unlearn. It’s hard for most of us, because it’s not something that we were ever asked to do. Learning wasn’t supposed to be like that. We weren’t supposed to be thinking of four things at once. It was supposed to be every eye on the teacher.

Recently, Philip Adams wrote about being in a film festival, where they had films going on at once: one at the front and two on either side. He says that almost everyone over forty-five was outside on the footpath within ten minutes. We can focus on one thing, but we find it difficult to make new understanding out of the three. We find it hard to skate over things yet engage in that way.

The kids I am talking about, however, have a broader attention range and a shorter absorption time (Rushkoff, 1996). That’s how this works for them. Basically, what they do is edit their world. They assemble and disassemble cultural products. That is an important feature of how they learn – not by opening up the tennis ball to see where the bounce is, but more by getting into a topic and creating and deconstructing, learning and unlearning, assembling and disassembling, experimenting and failing, wondering and discovering – what Bradley Haseman (2004) calls “editing through interactivity”. This is not a space that is simply susceptible to standardised testing. It is, however, a space for ‘IKEA-style’ learning. Maybe we should actually approach the company and see if they would be prepared to fund an IKEA award for creative teaching.

The point is, using this terminology, that the IKEA approach plus user is the value-add. It’s easy to walk out of IKEA with one of their boxes, but if you don’t end up, after the construction process, with something that looks like a sea-going tram, you might actually find yourself with a chair that really works.

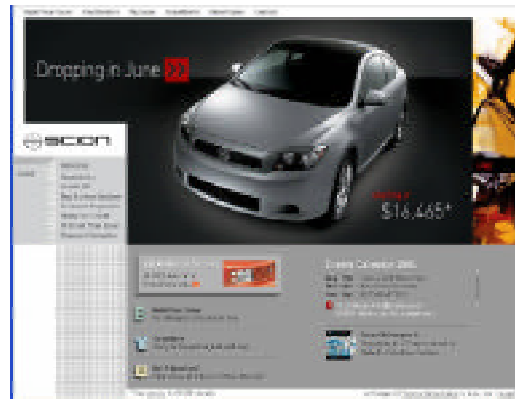
You will have started with a cheap alternative and turned it into a value-added product – given the chance that it could go wrong.

When you think you know

In the USA, there is a website called scion.com. The site is devoted to the Scion car, which costs



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about \$16,000, but it is not just about buying/selling cars. It's about what they call the 'scion experience'. The site has a very simple front-end platform, but the overall design is multi-platform and seems endlessly unpackable. Some of its features include:

- webcasting
- an installation Art Tour
- on-line chat
- desktops and screensavers
- graffiti tools and HazeRetrospective – graffiti artist
- urban "Scion music"
- a sound engine
- Scion Exposed, in a massive group photo
- a ScionSpy contest
- a range of Scionware merchandise, including shirts, pholos, pullovers, key chains,, T-shirts, skull caps, basketball jerseys, sunglasses and camouflage bags.

The site is designed to attract kids from the ten to twenty-plus. One of the interesting things about the site is the language that is used. For example, at one point, the words say "We relinquish all power to you." What does that mean? Well, the site allows you to assemble and edit your own vehicle. This doesn't just mean you can decide what colour you want, or what aerial you would like installed. You can do some quite fundamental things in terms of shape and style. You "make" the car.

Elsewhere on the site, you can arrange to test drive the Scion. There is no car yard in sight. The website will arrange for your test drive to be at a hamburger or fast food outlet if you like – somewhere "fizzy", where trendy people would want to be. Of course, they won't customise it until you have signed off but, along the way, they will allow you to make many of the decisions about what, where and when.

Look broader. What does the list of merchandise indicate? People who drive Scions will wear certain sorts of clothes and play certain sorts of

music while they are driving. The site provides appropriate opportunities for purchases to be made. People who drive Scions will probably watch certain sorts of film. You can book tickets on the website, for the trendy flicks that are showing on university campuses, for example.

Simplicity. Multiple platform. Opportunities. Links. These are important concepts when we talk about curriculum design in the new environment that surrounds us. Our current curriculum is so crowded, compared with the elegant simplicity of websites like scion.com – not that I am suggesting we should sell this kind of product! But we can learn from the example how to design unpackable curriculum, as well as how to identify and integrate things we haven't thought about this context before.

The scion.com designers have those skills. They invite their clients and/or kids to come in and meddle. No couch potato consumption here. There is active involvement in the associated work, succeeding or failing.

What does this mean for my audience of Principals and school leaders? I know you spend a great deal of your time doing anything but acting as Lead Teachers, but that is what you are. I empathise. In my university role I am now a Research Manager and I experience similar dilemmas and conflicting demands to those that impact on you. We spending our time doing everything but what we entered the profession for. However, what I am saying here is that we need to lead our teachers increasingly towards thinking about design rather than delivery.

Teacher as designer

What does it mean, to 'design' curriculum? In the university, we are facilitating this through dialogue with the creative industries, working closely with web designers, with people who specialise in making things look simple, in creating robust and attractive interfaces, or in developing 'evolvable' or parallel experiments and events – more so than we do traditionally as teacher educators.

Our profession is ageing – Principals and teachers alike. What we will be asking them to do doesn't all have to be brand new. We are also looking at ways of opening up the 'standard' curriculum. Here are some things that we might think of as part of a 'new New Basics'.



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New foci for curriculum creation The new foci for curriculum creation might include:

- portfolio career management
- project management and entrepreneurship
- techno-literacy
- project-based work in teams
- international engagement
- life-design
- capacity to navigate from entry-level jobs to wealth-creating destinations
- ‘learnacy’

‘Learnacy’ is a dreadful word – sounds too much like ‘lunacy’ to me, but it saves saying ‘learning to learn’ over and over again – as we have been doing for some time, without ever really getting our heads around it. It could be a useful word when we talk about curriculum creation, as opposed to “Give me the package and I’ll hand it straight over.”

Shift 4:

Book to screen and desk to hand

Remember the context. I talked before about the shift from book to screen and from desk to hand – the notion that we need to be close to things, wearing them, if we are going to talk about real interconnectivity. The kids, our students, live in digitally enhanced environments that allow 24-hour access. It should come as no surprise that, in the parallel universe of school or university, their demand is always to be plugged in. There is no place for delay. In universities, as in schools, if things do not come back quickly the students get very annoyed. They expect immediate response. They don’t expect or tolerate a four-day wait.

We still have lecturers who leave their doors open and say that their consulting hours are, say, between two and four o’clock on Thursdays. But if one of our students wants something at ten o’clock on Monday, s/he won’t be prepared to wait that long. The corollary of this is that some lecturers say students no longer come and see them. They say this shows that the students “can’t be bothered”. More often than not, this is not so. It’s about the fact that the student will be out the door before Thursday. It means we have to think again about what it means to provide service. For a lot of our staff that is very difficult – physically, practically and philosophically. But the fact that students won’t wait as they used to confronts us with a new set of dilemmas about what we can do, or what we are willing to do.

Can we take peer learning seriously in this context? I would say to the staff that in the scenario I have outlined, you don’t necessarily have to see the student on the Monday. But it could be that you might set up some peer learning with four other students within that time frame. Then, if the five of them still can’t work it out, one email to you might be useful. Additionally, I have found that if you put one mature-age woman in each of those peer groups, they might solve the problem!

A lot of people grieve over the loss of the certainties that they had, about role, location and availability, for example, but grieve or not, expectations have shifted. The kids don’t want those things any more, and we supposed to doing things for the kids of today and of the future.

NO-COLLAR WORK AND THE CREATIVE CLASS

I saw a job advertisement recently in the Sydney Morning Herald. It said

“POSITION VACANT

Team leader for exciting e.business.
Successful applicant should be disloyal,
break rules, resent authority, ignore
punctuality and flout dress codes. CBD.
\$150K + options ...”

That’s not bad money.

You could argue that such examples are meant to be a little ironic, but when we think about jobs like that, most of us would respond that our students would not fit the criteria. This is not what we are training our kids to be. We might not want to produce young people who are like that. But, increasingly, we do have to produce students who are going to be suited to collarless work. Not blue collar. Not white collar.

Collarless work will have kids and grown-ups doing all sorts of things, which are described with words like ‘crop’, ‘retouch’, ‘remix’, ‘burn’, ‘groove’, ‘compose’ and so on. It would be interesting to see some of those words turning up in our new curriculum design documents. They are nowhere near it, at present.

However, we have already changed the language we used to use. We used to say that we would ‘teach the students maths’. Suddenly that wasn’t the right terminology. Now we say things like “We will facilitate their learning and



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understanding of". We have struggled to make sure what the new words should be. It's time again to look at the limitations of our vocabularies. As we bring new sets of words into use, we can also bring in new sets of culture.

Again, this not about throwing out things that work. It is about finding spaces that allow for a new sort of engagement.

What will the collarless workplace look like? Richard Florida, author of *The Rise of the Creative Class* (Basics Books, NY, 2004), says that we are going towards

The casual workplace which replaces hierarchical systems of control with new forms of self-management, peer recognition and pressure, intrinsic forms of motivation (where we will) express identity through engagement.

That's an interesting idea, if you think about this in the context of the culture of your schools. He says that it's not just about technology. As a Harvard economist, he says that it is also about social betterment and wealth creation. These come from a combination of technology, talent and tolerance. He says that tolerance – or 'social justice' or 'equity' – is not up for grabs. Indeed, he argues that in the USA, where gay people feel safe, other minorities will gravitate to the same area, and those minorities are crucial to wealth creation and growth. This is not about advocating the decline of the Judeo-Christian tradition. It is about realising that if you want growth, you need to be accepting and inviting of all sorts of minorities.

Look at Silicone Valley. Indians and Chinese make up a very high proportion of the new people who are coming there to build knowledge and develop start-up companies in ICT.

Florida also argues that George Bush is damaging the US economy by being anti-gay-marriage and by fortressing America. The great thing the USA had going for it in the twentieth century was that it was the place people wanted to come to. Florida argues that people no longer want to come to America. Certainly they are not getting the numbers of international students that they once did.

What are the lessons for our places of work? Talent, tolerance and technology – how are we fostering them?

Richard Florida's work is important for us in that regard. It means there is no need for us to bleat that "of course" social justice is a human right. We can now come out more confidently and argue its value at all levels; not just that it is a nice, moral thing to do. We can talk about changing our schools based on a balance between culture, technology and domain knowledge.

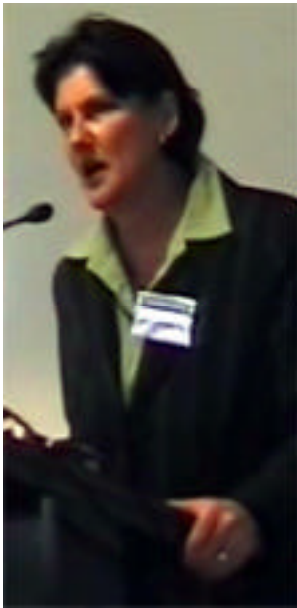
He also talks about the importance of an experiential life style – a way of life built around creative experiences rather than foundational learning courses. We should be demanding and providing opportunities for our students to live their learning in this way.

We should be remembering, as we design those opportunities, that the kids have a hierarchy of "consumer desires", with entertainment at the top.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Given the scenario I have outlined, what is actually going on? What is the status quo that we are dealing with?

- Testing is a major feature of what we have, and I think we are going to see more of it, particularly coming out of Canberra.
- There is a risk minimisation climate, with testing through the floor and everything nailed down. The kids can't move and we are burdened by factors that vary from risk management to the loss of male primary teachers in large numbers.
- We are still focussed on sorting and credentialling through work that is highly individual, even though we know that teams provide ways for powerful learning to occur, and that they constitute the way in which students prefer to work.
- We still have an enormous gap between achievement and learnacy (Claxton, ???), as we force-feed the kids on the scripts they will need to pass the tests. That is exactly the opposite direction to what is required for the sort of learning I have talked about.
- Increasingly, we are seeing parents enrolled as coaches, managers and lobbyists, and teachers as marshals and check-starters (Taylor, 2005). I am not suggesting that parents shouldn't be getting involved. It's interesting, however, to see a new pedagogical contract, about who is to do what. The child



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sits in the middle of that. We need to understand more about the implications.

- We see an increasing emphasis on copying and downloading of material for classroom use, often on a fee-for-service basis.
- We are also seeing an aging workforce of teachers, and some very stressed staff members.

IMPLICATIONS AND COMMENTS

As I have argued, while all this is happening, other factors will impact increasingly on schooling.

- ‘Unlearning’ and ‘useful ignorance’ will actually be more valuable than sure knowing.
- Participative, interactive and team-oriented activities will be more useful than recall.
- Open, risk-taking and experimental environments (including technology enhancements) will be more useful than closed environments.
- Uncertainty and fluidity will be more useful than surety and dumbing down.
- Coping with complexity will be better done with simple rules and clear goals rather than with complex rules, systemic arrangements and the endless piling up of more and more crowded “stuff” in our curriculum.

We could ignore all this and hope it will go away. The fact that Principals and other school leaders come to hear things like this at conferences means that’s not the way you want to go. At the same time, it is absolutely appropriate, in a context where you have so many people talk to you about what you should be doing, for you to think about where this fits in terms of all the other demands and requirements that you face.

What I want to ensure is that we keep opening up a space where we ask “What does good teaching mean now?” I know that as good Lead Teachers this is a space you want to work in as well.

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