



For crying out loud

A think piece from the EMLC and NCSL Futures project

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This think piece reflects a conversation between Peter Roberts, Managing Director, Collis Engineering and Paul Aspinall, Headteacher, Leamington Primary and Nursery School, Sutton-in-Ashfield, Nottinghamshire, as part of the EMLC and NCSL Futures project.

The views expressed are personal and do not necessarily reflect those of either organisation

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Introduction

The Futures project

The Futures project is a joint venture between EMLC and NCSL. A key outcome of the project has been the generation of a series of think pieces designed to support the development of futures thinking. This first series has been developed by headteachers in dialogue with senior business leaders. In the future, we propose to undertake similar work with moral, political, community and cultural leaders.

The aims of the project are:

- to stimulate debate
- to give local leaders a voice in shaping education for the future
- to provide materials and processes to help schools think about and plan for the challenges of the future

The work of the project builds on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) scenarios for the future of schooling and FutureSight, a major NCSL initiative to support futures thinking in schools.

Our next steps are to develop tools to help stimulate debate in our school communities, supported by seminars and online materials. For more information please visit www.ncsl.org.uk

The think piece format

To give consistency to diverse views, the think pieces in this series use the same format which is made up of six component parts.

Key components

1. **Viewpoint:** who is talking
2. **Mapping the territory:** ideas and areas of debate
3. **Over the horizon:** a business leader's perspective
4. **A view from the bridge:** what the world of 2030 might look like
5. **Futures learning:** a school leader's perspective
6. **Pause for thought:** questions to challenge thinking

Key ideas for futures thinking

As educational leaders, we are firmly in the futures business. Our role, after all, is to prepare young people with the skills and personal qualities to live long, happy and productive lives. Lifelong learning, changing employment patterns, a world where our children are prepared for jobs yet to be invented using technology yet to be dreamt of – are all ideas we use to shape planning. Our national headteacher standards even talk about 'shaping the future'.

Futures thinking gives us a shared language and tools to step outside the present. To think about the future, we first have to try to understand the trends influencing the present. These are powerful and pervasive areas of change, gathering momentum like a stone rolling down a hill. Work by the OECD in the late nineties identified five areas:

1. **The nature of childhood and extended adolescence**
 - the protection and nurturing of childhood continues for far longer
2. **The knowledge economy**
 - instant global communication
 - shift to knowledge working in post-industrial Europe
 - new technologies
3. **Inequality and exclusion**
 - the proportion of older people in Europe rises and they become richer
 - young people are poorer. With this is the potential for alienation
4. **Changing family and community life**
 - nuclear and extended families are less prevalent
5. **Some broader developments**
 - wide and increasing disparity in global income brings higher levels of economic migration

Work undertaken in England by NCSL and others in 2002 applied a reality check to these trends. There was debate about their impact on schools across the country, but universal agreement that they represented powerful forces shaping the work of schools. At the time, headteachers involved in NCSL's Leading Practice work identified a shift in the location of values from religion and family to media and peer group. Further work has identified, for young people, important issues around the complex nature of identity rooted in location, ethnicity and religious belief and at its most extreme, radicalisation.

From present to future – tracking the trends

These irresistible trends impact on our work in schools each and every day. They span moral, political, social and economic analysis. Out of them emerge key questions, moral imperatives and contradictions. ICT brings instant communication but the potential for physical isolation. Where families do less to nurture, schools are challenged to place themselves at the heart of their community as a force for support, social cohesion and intergenerational learning. Children live uneasily in a highly protected UK society which also, paradoxically, condones their early sexualisation.

Challenges to shifting patterns of employment, continuing skill development and the need for robust interpersonal skills mean that schools have to be adept at helping children to negotiate relationships and difference. Economically and politically, there is a push for better functional skills and higher level qualifications to enable the UK to compete in the global market. Finally, there are pressures on schools to enable children to make more discerning choices about learning to reflect the flexibility of new technologies and in common with best commercial practice, to develop a personalised offer for every child. At its most extreme, this could involve the end of schools as we know them.

Identifying new trends

From a 21st century perspective, it's possible to identify new trends related to sustainability, values and personalisation. As a starter, it may be useful to debate and reshape these and to consider the following questions.

Pause for thought...?

- **Are these genuine trends, with the power to shape everything we do, or just contemporary issues and concerns?**
- **Are there other trends we need to describe?**
- **What the implications for how we shape education?**

- **Sustainability and environment.** The start of the 21st century has brought raised awareness that natural resources are limited. There is also increasing understanding of the impact of fossil fuels on global warming. From initial scepticism, there is now widespread, but not universal, scientific and political acceptance of climate change. This is a recent but powerful trend. Its potential impact spreads to every aspect of education and lifestyle. There is a growing awareness that new technologies need to be found and increasing political tensions as leaders strive to balance economic needs driven by demands for energy and growth with a wider responsibility to conserve and build for the future.
- **Identity and values.** Global mobility has also brought tensions over identity and related shifts in patterns of belief. These changes have the potential for long-term impact on what we value and how we live our lives. In northern Europe and in particular, Britain, the influence and role of the church has diminished. Personal values, once shaped by religion and family, are now increasingly formed by media and peer group. By contrast, in other parts of the world, religion continues to exert a powerful influence. For some citizens of multicultural Europe, our race, where we live and what we believe create tensions over identity. Where this is associated with other feelings of injustice and deprivation, it leads to alienation and radicalisation.
- **Personalisation.** A final trend increasingly recognises and focuses production on the uniqueness of the individual. This aspiration emerges from the capacity of new technologies in a competitive business environment both in products and services. This is a trend which is now increasingly impacting on education, with the potential for more flexible provision or de-schooling.

Futures thinking in action

These ideas for futures thinking are explored in the series of think pieces produced by the Futures project. Out of such analysis, future thinkers identify possible, probable and preferred futures. They also develop scenarios. These are powerful tools. They allow us to walk around in the future, experience how it feels to be a student, a teacher, a facilitator of learning or a parent, in such a world. These spaces do not so much allow us to predict the future as to take the time to pause and think a little. At best such experiences empower us to identify our preferred future and work together to make it a reality at school, regional or national level.

Chris Williams, 2007

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Peter Roberts in conversation with Paul Aspinall

Viewpoint

From 1970 to the present day, Collis Engineering has grown from a three to four person mining engineering company into a business with 125 employees and an annual turnover of 7.5 million pounds, all of which form the Signal House Group. The range of products relates to the railway industry and includes the manufacture of signal heads, rail points equipment and steel structures to carry railway signals including large gantries. Due to expansion, the company has two sites in Alfreton including the group head office and a further manufacturing site in Leighton Buzzard. A key company aspiration is development through innovation, which in turn, will promote growth, the meeting of obligations and increasing profits.

Mapping the territory

This think piece offers a perspective from a company developing successful and innovative ways of working in traditional heavy industry. It is an area of manufacture which spans well established technologies and the challenge of finding new ways of working if transport policy is to reflect national and international aspirations to combat climate change. It also reflects an insight into the qualities and skills which employers will need if they are to be successful, casting doubt on current thinking about curriculum. Finally, the piece explores the shared personal development of school and employment which underpins our future health and well-being.

The think piece focuses on one of the scenarios identified by OECD – the future role of schools as ‘core social centres’ and the parts to be played by families and community including industry, in counteracting the following trend:

Within the English-speaking world lie the highest levels of depression, unhappiness, lack of personal fulfilment and mental disorder – in direct proportion to wealth, materialism, social and personal ambition. What you have, not what you are, defines your social position and directs your movement along the tightrope which separates perceived success and failure.

OECD, What Schools for the Future, 2001

‘You are what you own’ says Oliver James in his recent book *Affluenza* (2007). Changes in family and community life are obliterating the safe havens of personal well-being and fulfilment. We learn to earn – not earn to learn.

Over the horizon – a business leader’s perspective

The impact of totally overloaded road and rail networks in the future is very high. Consolidation rather than expansion is more likely with increasing manufacturing overseas to maximise profits – a dangerous but possibly inevitable trend. Equally worrying for the industry is the issue of global warming, but there is a good level of confidence that new technologies will deal with this. Similarly road-pricing is seen as inevitable, irrespective of political stances. More night use of the transport system will become statutory. In 30 years time, the industry’s production processes will be more controlled with goods produced more cheaply through new plant and new technology; more ICT and less 20lb hammer. There will be less waste and greater quality with a reduced failure rate – six parts per million (6σ developed by Motorola Corporation in the 1980’s).

Futures thinking in the industry has been difficult historically due to political changes to rail ownership, but this situation has improved as a result of Network Rail’s 10 year plan and greater clarity in government planning. Investment in research and development is crucial. Innovation is the key to the company’s future – if we don’t innovate we die.

A major challenge currently for the company is finding the right employees with an appropriate education. This has significant implications for the future. We value life-long learning and have a strong desire to develop work experience and apprenticeships locally, but the education system is failing to equip young people with the necessary skills and knowledge. The current curriculum is seen as a barrier to success. Continuing into higher education is not appropriate for all and those moving directly into work on leaving school must not be regarded as failures. What they need is a less all-round, watered-down curriculum and more focus on the knowledge and skills appropriate for an industrial workforce. A feeling of personal success is more likely if young people feel knowledgeable and skilled with the ability to contribute – it helps to provide a personal identity and greater self-esteem.

Collis Engineering’s view is that its people are its greatest asset and employees need to feel that they are genuine stakeholders. In order to maintain good levels of work satisfaction and happiness in coming to work on a daily basis, the company employs a number of strategies to avoid depression and stress. Stress is the bad back of 10 years ago and it is in the company’s financial interests to

promote its social fabric. The working environment should be enjoyable, safe, sufficiently rewarding to pay the mortgage and develop employees as people. Good personal knowledge of the workforce is critical. We maintain a health and safety committee, improvement schemes and place alternative therapists at the disposal of our staff. Job rotation increases variety for those employed on tasks needing lower skills. Emotional health is important to success.

A view from the bridge

So, how will it be in the year 2030? In order to remain successful in the future staff will need to feel tied in to the company. The interdependence of work satisfaction and personal fulfilment must continue to be recognised and promoted. In the future, the company will be working to expand the capacity of individuals to do more out of less. To support these approaches, school leavers will need to have an education which is much less wide and which focuses on specialist skills and knowledge. We need practical people. The huge emphasis on ICT must not be to the detriment of other subjects. Creativity, innovation and invention will also be essential in the year 2030 if our country is not merely to be a service provider.

All of this lays down a huge challenge to schools and their leaders. If they are to provide a practical, skills-based education to meet current industrial needs – how do they prepare today's children for the jobs in 2030 which have yet to be invented? What kind of artistic, scientific or technological creativity and innovation should schools of the future develop?

Beyond the taught curriculum, of course, there are increasing pressures and ever-widening responsibilities and roles for schools. Systemic exclusion and self-exclusion both result from a perception of failure – someone else's or your own – and may lead to low self-esteem, poor emotional health, depression and social and occupational isolation. The leaders of Collis Engineering take a positive stance on the personal development of their employees, recognising that good emotional health is a pre-requisite of success. The motivation for learning is stronger. Schools are doing a better job on this front than they have ever done, but the taught curriculum is inappropriate.

It is within families, communities and social systems that the causes of so much poor emotional health are to be found. The American model of life has too great

an influence and in the future, certainly by 2030, we should have greater European integration; socially, industrially, educationally and culturally. Children should start their formal education later, and the early years should be a time for families and communities to engage in the personal, social and health development of their children. Future intervention into homes with inadequate parenting should come at a much earlier stage, preventing the long-term effects of emotional and psychological damage. We must develop our humanity, it is what makes us successful, in life and in business. In schools, we already know through assessments of children at age five that those who make most progress in personal, social and emotional development make most progress in the cognitive areas of learning.

Sir John Jones describes lives as stories with each chapter building on its predecessor. Families, communities and schools are the script-writers for children.

Futures learning – a school leader's perspective

By 2030, our growing knowledge society will continue to develop:

The very importance of knowledge in the 21st century may increase, not diminish, the need for the school to place a strong emphasis on establishing a healthy personal and social foundation in the young. It should give them the tools with which to cope with the complex, rapidly changing world in which they live, with many such tools about personal development and citizenship rather than cognitive knowledge itself.

OECD, What Schools for the Future, 2001

'The problem is that the education system still continues to spit you out feeling a failure and largely clueless as to your true intrinsic interests' (James, 2007). The challenge to our school leaders is clear. The focus of learning should give more explicit attention to non-cognitive outcomes. How to do this in an intimidating results-driven climate is much less clear.

So, by 2030 somehow, our national and international policy-makers, will need to understand the causes of record levels of depression and unhappiness. Educational and social policy will promote emotional literacy, children will consequently make better academic progress, and business and industry will welcome better qualified employees. Schools in the present form may well not exist. Children following their chosen route through personalised learning will keep appointments, with their parents or carers, at

the local Integrated Life Centre (ILC), funded jointly by central government and local industries. Financial credits will be awarded to parents demonstrating developments in their skills targeted at emotional health and well-being. The learning will have developed over a 30 year period building on present practice in Sure Start and Family Centres (real and virtual). Staff working within the ILC will be qualified in a wide range of child-family development strategies, with the ability to work within education, social services, and health. Teacher training institutions will become child specialist centres, their graduates able to pursue a flexible career within child and family development.

Systems for tracking and monitoring individual progress and development in these key areas will be statutory. By 2030, such records will have substantial histories dating back to the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (0-7) due for introduction into our schools in 2007. School sanity league tables will be published annually – Level 2b in smiling the required standard at the end of Key Stage 1...

Many of our current school leaders hear the cries of this trend daily – they are deafened by them – emotional abuse, physical abuse, psychological abuse. Their schools are often the only places of emotional nurture. They can less readily turn to the community as an educational partner. Problems have been aggravated precisely among those for whom schools are most responsible. 'Far from the knowledge society evaporating problems it may well be exacerbating them for the most excluded.' (OECD, 2001)

Everyone, it seems, has a claim on the curriculum. John Diamond, Chief Executive of the Mulberry Bush Residential School in Oxfordshire, emphasises the need to develop children from their current levels of emotional health. He identifies the importance of a balanced curriculum; emotional and cognitive development fostered concurrently. Peter Roberts, Managing Director of Collis Engineering, also places great importance on the emotional health of his workforce, but feels it would be better promoted by a narrower, more practical curriculum equipping individuals with applicable skills providing a sense of personal competence and self-worth – the same destination but a different journey. This is some distance from the strong undercurrent of personalised learning prevalent in national educational policy development at the present time.

The long-term success of Every Child Matters, through the adoption of an individual and personal approach, will be measured by the emotional health of both our school and our working population. The Centre for Child Mental Health (Islington) is currently advertising courses to learn methods and techniques to prevent children from 'hardening their hearts and losing their humanity', to develop defence mechanisms for 'emotional numbing' and for managing 'the burden of guilt and shame'. These children will be adults in 2030. They are someone's future workforce.

Pause for thought...?

- **How can we establish an effective balance of responsibility and accountability between the state and families for the development of children's emotional health and well-being? How can we build on Every Child Matters?**
- **Therapies to support emotional and social development through art, music, drama and pastoral care already exist (P2B, Oxford and Leamington School Art Rooms, Think Children, Schools Outreach etc.) How can we make these accessible to every child in every school?**
- **How will individualised/personalised learning incorporate the development of social skills – should it be a statutory element?**
- **Should all schools have a business link to share and better understand aspirations? How might schools most effectively develop and utilise this link?**

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