which way is forward?

change, politics and education

Bill Law
The **Career-Learning CAFÉ**

abstract

This monograph argues that education is overdue for reform. You're entitled to think that there's more than enough of a clamour on that subject. If this claim is to have any justification it needs to be distinctive. The argument is for...

    ... learning which enables people to find meaning, purpose, well being and fulfillment in their lives - learning-for-living rather than learning-for-testing

    ... learning as much gathered from friends and family and in communities as in education's institutions

    ... educators ready to learn from their students while their students learn from them

    ... a curriculum which is community property and must be returned to its owners

    ... reforms that need to be worked out differently in different locations

It therefore rejects some conventional wisdom, because it finds that there is...

    ... no call for commerce and government to tell educators what to do

    ... no need to re-organise the institutions where educators work

    ... no distinction worth making between academic and vocational learning

    ... no possibility of any ready-made agenda or last word on education reform

There are websites documenting the ideas and evidence that support the arguments. They are signposted in the monograph. The monograph itself focuses on the arguments.

That focus links argument to evidence, and ranges from ideas for educator-action to invitations to student-response. The monograph is designed with back-and-forth search in mind. Find what you can best use. The following page lists the contents in detail.

Following all this is a section distilling what students and educators can do, in their communities, and whether as workers, as citizens or as people whose interests are at stake.

Tags

achievement / aspiration / career / citizenship / commerce / competition / complexity / connectedness
critical thinking / curriculum / education / learning / narrative / policy / professionalism / well-being

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the links and the argument are organised in four parts...

1: issues - illustrating what students are thinking

2: change - facing accelerating demands on education

3: education - setting out what educators can do

4: policy - analysing how far policy is willing and able to help

contents

discussion panels

designed to invite
student responses
on significant issues

green focuses
attitudes

red focuses
ideas

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overview - stakeholders, educators and politicos

making sense of conflicting interests

What education needs from politics is much less control and a whole lot more imagination. I try here to say something useful about how things got this way. My conclusion is that the situation demands more than an adjustment here, a fix there and a re-launch sometime. This monograph examines what might be achieved by mind-boggling imagination, in support of learning-for-living usefulness, based on root-and-branch re-thinking.

stakeholder voices

Later sections will point to where you can find the evidence, but I'm beginning with an account of what is going on in and around our students' lives. It's not a happy story. It's certainly not hard to find reports that politics is remote from experience. People's life-and-work is changed for the worse by politicos claiming to be acting for the better. The people I'm thinking of are not only students, but also the communities where they and their families live, and their educators in schools and colleges and in civil society.

They are stakeholders; it's a term that includes shareholders, but reaches far beyond them. There's a lot here about stakeholder voice - how different people, in different groups, differently talk about their interests in education. Each speaks with its own authority of the sense people make of their experience. There's often more useful leads in what they say than come from designated leaders.

There are also more conflicts of interest. In this argument the most pressing interests concern how students navigate a path through accelerating change. It's a journey too-often signposted by manipulation, deceit and predation. Educators cannot ignore this. But stakeholder responses vary: some see market opportunities, some wonder what markets do for social well-being or personal fulfillment, and some argue for critical thinking to enable students to deal with whatever is thrown at them. I show how why politics takes an interest in some of this, promises but does not deliver on some, and largely ignores some. Educators should wonder why.

There's plenty here for you to disagree with - and plenty of opportunity for you to tell me why *via* the footer of each page.

Talk and meaning

But there's no quick-and-easy way to talk about education. Attempts often resort to abstract nouns. Various stakeholders variously call on such concepts as...

> *'achievement' - 'creativity' - 'fairness' - 'fulfillment' - 'progress' - 'self' - 'well-being'*

They're selected at random, you can think of another seven. But do you find them defined in ways that everyone accepts? If you do the evidence here might suggest that you're not listening to enough people. The terms are repeatedly redefined, get finessed and become out-of-date. It means that when they are loaded into a conversation about education reform, a person can get lost.

And, then, there are...

'aspiration' - 'career' - 'choice' - 'citizenship' - 'employability' - 'enterprise'

They're also pretty fuzzy concepts. Some are demonstrably meaningless. But some interests find one or more of these terms compelling - even compulsory.

When abstractions don't help, metaphors sometimes can. They substitute conceptual talk with talk of the tangible. Metaphors conjure images that can be visualised as part of a narrative. So it's possible to talk of education...

*As if it recounted 'a journey' – or running 'a race' -
and as if comes across 'a trap' – and finds 'a key'*

Images matter. And narrative seems to be the species' default way of making sense of what's going on. It gives voice to experience...

*he calls her his jailor - she won't stand for it
but he'll try to stay in front – fat chance, it's the doghouse for him -
me? I'd throw away the key*

There's no jail, no dog and no key, it all means something else. Ministerial pronouncements and stakeholder responses use metaphors. A narrative can illuminate, but it can also obscure - sometimes deliberately. The evidence requires a critical scrutiny of education metaphors. Some images are strong enough to lose touch with reality. The evidence also provokes questions about what a credible narrative for education reform would be like.

words and reality

Time was when it was possible to believe in progress, feel hope and expect fulfillment...

discussion panel 1
imagination and hope

*Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people sharing all the world*

John Lennon

Just imagine! John Lennon bequeathed hope, not least to young people. He sees them as moving on together, as if on a shared journey. He avowedly does not see them as captured, as in a trap.

It was written when the economy, culture and technology made western-hemisphere optimism seem possible & natural.

*students might usefully wonder whether hope has been lost
&, if so, whether it can be recovered - and how*

It was the western-world's narrative. Contemporary experience needs a different narrative - not least for students.

student voice

So what kind of narrative might resonate these days? Educators will get nowhere with entrapment stories. Racing imagery has more of a buzz - people can see themselves as winners...

discussion panel 2
winners and losers

> suppose students value education to help them be winners?

> so that they seek coaching? - to get ahead? - finding an inside track?

> might that mean that giving way to others is believed to be weakness?

> would it support a belief that losers have only themselves to blame?

> so that excluding others from the race is how the competitive win?

Evidence cited here shows that such attitudes are no more prevalent among students than among the rest of us. But the evidence also shows that such talk is no more 'hard to do' than John Lennon found his imagining. Stagnation, stress and disappointment breed this kind of competitiveness. It welcomes another person's loss if that means this person's gain. Well-being becomes a zero-sum game.

There's also evidence that commercial and political interests want the race-mentality embedded in a culture of education, accepting that some will be excluded...

discussion panel 3
exclusion and trust

> is learning valued for the advantage it gives to 'me', over 'others'?

> are relationship increasingly valued for their 'who's-worth-knowing' networking?

> who are excluded by this & who can they most count on when it matters?

> how do 'winners' treat 'losers' - worth talking to? - caring about? - or blanked out?

This is not what John Lennon meant by 'brotherhood'. More recent reports are of loss of eye-contact in competitive cultures – neighbours get not so much as a nod.

There are issues for education here. But they are not about what academic teachers think of as learning. They belong to another discourse. Progressive educators need to know what sense their students are making of their learning experience. This is two-way learning. It's also learning for an on-going life. And the evidence on that is that academic learning is lost

when it's no-longer used. All of this calls for a fuller conversation shared by students and their educators

And, then, there's John Lennon on 'possessions'? What happens if we look for that in the much-valued but socially-isolating possession of on-line devices?...

discussion panel 4:
possessions and status

>   what possessions are more valued than on-line devices? - like what?

>   what feelings for such things are there - fun? - contacts? - status? - what else?

>   would that be exciting? - impulsive? - dramatic? - extreme? - what more?

>   what contacts - people 'I like'? - are 'like me'? - what's to like? - more?

>   what status - expensive? - up-to-date? - look good? - feel good? - other?

An underlying question raised here are 'what value do people attach to education?'. The evidence finds no limit to the range of answers that people give – and what needs a hearing. Neither is there any limit to what anyone can do about it – and what needs reforming.

discussion panel 5
brave new infants?

There's plenty of room for imagination these days, but maybe not John Lennon's. How much of student experience is shaped by a 'me-now-&-fun' culture?

Some people say it shows traces of immaturity - even infantilism. And they're not necessarily talking about young people. Can old flakies be immature? Can young hopefuls be more mature?

So was John Lennon less of predictor than Aldous Huxley in his ironic imaging of a childlike *Brave New World*? Did anybody else foresee any of this?

And is this the end of it. If not, what's to do about it?   Do the infantalists have a point? What, then, can students - & their children & grandchildren children - expect to find waiting for them?

plenty for students to compare thoughts on here – and argue about
how has society changed? - & why? - & what more can people expect?
older people change & younger people come along - but who & what changes what & who?

educator voice

Voice uses words. Some - like 'empowerment', 'freedom' and 'choice' - are welcome. Others - like 'trap', 'impulse' and 'infantilise' - are not. Some progress thinking, some arrest it. Educators can't escape the need to figure which is which...

what enables?
what inveigles?...

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discussion panel 6:
education and government

> do we know how favourably-disposed educators are to government thinking?

> what if prevalent social-and-cultural attitudes encourage quietism?

> suppose government and commercial priorities become interchangeable?

> what if government's expert's and business's lobbyists set the agenda?

> do educators manage & deliver what power defines & hands down?

> is education on the way to privatisation?

> if educators do not speak up on this who will?

> what will come out of this for students' chances in life?

> will it serve some better than others?

Such questions have the makings of a conversation between educators, their theorists and trainers. But they run deep and wide - this is ethics. And, while ethical claims are not hard to make in mission statements, the real challenge is in demonstrating commitment when things are in crisis, interests conflict and action is needed. Like now...

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discussion panel 7
action on education

> are educators to treat art work and creativity as commodities?

> should history be a feel-good account of 'a great nation's achievements'?

> can uncomprehended 'nudges' replace education for understanding?

> are back-of-envelope 'tips' able to guide what educators do?

> are self-confidence & positive thinking the prime outcomes of education?

> does it matter when me-&-mine individualism displaces social attachments?

> can psychology be big enough to carry all the explanatory freight?

> should government systems shape curriculum?

> is it acceptable that community property has been captured by power?

Answering 'yes' or 'no' to such questions reveals what is thought worth defending in education. 'Yes' avoids the discomfort of thinking independently, taking responsibility for failure, making good use of bad news and engaging critical thinking.

It also allows that promises of 'freedom' might not be freedom as most people think of it. It is freedom for families to maneuver into high-rated schools, and for commerce to edge education towards privatisation. It's not freedom for families to get their kids schools they had thought of as theirs. Nor for independently-minded teachers to escape derogatory labeling. It's not the freedom that John Lennon imagined 'would make the world as one'.

This is the ethics of favoured interests. And there's no shortage of dystopias on that...

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discussion panel 8
who best imagines what is coming?

It's useful to engage students in comparisons with John Lennon's dream, Aldous Huxley's warning &, now added, George Orwell's nightmare?. Students have other titles to add to the list. And to say which they find most predictive..

Dystopias often speak of the way the powerful take control of a language, substitute belief for reality, and re-write history. They provoke a question about whether clever news management neutralises opposition by smothering it with press releases which are then cut-&-pasted by compliant journalists.

There are also movies. Norman Jewison's is about the game *Rollerball* (since disastrously re-made). It tells of a world where global commerce has taken over government. Commerce shapes and frames what people are to believe, value & expect. The instrument of control is the globally-transmitted game. The story is fast and extreme, where winning and losing has life-and-death consequences. And its control seems impossible to resist.

the best of these bad-news stories are not mere frighteners, to send us hiding behind some sociological sofa -
their imagery takes us to where we can recognise warnings concerning where we are -
a well-written dystopia is for grown-ups - however old or young they may be -
grown-ups are mature enough to figure how to make good use of bad news

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Students and educators are on the sharp end of persuasive tactics. The media are used to capturing attention. Popular demands for satisfaction make headlines. Educators get demands for action on issues beyond their reach. The agenda is set by politicos, their advisers and lobbyists. Some of it is a lie. And it is students who need the critical grasp of what the media claim. They are, and will be, in a position to take action on issues, which are not beyond their reach.

Students do not come empty-handed to the conversation. But neither do educators - engaging imagery, tracking sense-making and questioning meaning is what educators do.

But how many demands for such critical curriculum reform have you noticed coming from politics and commerce? The evidence takes us elsewhere to find those voices.

community voice

Politics and commerce make promises resting on a belief in the possibility of unlimited growth. But the evidence is that the economics of the belief is contradicted by the science of the cause-and-effects. Economics is particularly limited on the risks and costs of collateral damage, which does not appear on balance sheets. The damage ranges from the local-and-frightening to the planetary-and-catastrophic. Education policy needs to make new sense of the possibilities - based on sane beliefs.

It would be surprising to find that no teacher wanted to help with any part of this process. A tough test is the purest of all disciplines - maths. The most basic grasp of probability undermines the most plausible of bogus promises - in gambling, in statistics, in health risk and in political claims. This is learning-for-living - not a narrative which dumps knowledge into an examination, but which transfers understanding into a life.

There is also a backstory. Students need to deal with overload, confusion, deception and risk. And we don't yet know what else.   However much politics and commerce may wriggle, education is facing a challenge. It needs something sensible to say about why students learn, what educators enable, and when does community get involved...

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discussion panel 9:
education to do what?

> how pressing is the need to enable students for the navigation of a path through change? – compared to what?

> how much attention needs to be given to enabling students to interrogate claims, enticements & maneuvers? – instead of what?

> what level of priority should be given to personalised learning for individuals? – with friends? – in groups? – on-line? – in other ways?

> if interrogation is the outcome how is critical thinking best learned - in a dedicate course? - cross curricular? – by trial-&-error in real-time? - more inventive than that?

> what does any of this do to relationships with the locality? – policy? - commerce? – media? - religion? – the planet? - other interests ?

Not all educators will go with this, but this reform doesn't need all educators. The need is for enough independently-minded educators, in mutually-respecting relations with their students and able to get them buzzing - and with their ethics in good order. Every education institution has at least one.

The issues raised here are locally experienced, but they are globally generated. The planet is peppered with regimes that find it easier to nudge, entice, cajole and threaten people into compliance than to educate them into autonomy. They breed dependence on dominant

voices. They feed on conflict, fear and risk. They justify rejection of outsiders and try to breed docility in insiders. Education was never more deeply and urgently needed.

No script

Nobody is in a position to take on all of this, nobody should try. The argument sets out possibilities; it does not lay down a script. There are more ways of usefully changing things than any script can represent. This is because more goes on in teaching-and-learning than is commonly understood. Anyone who wants not to be bothered by complexity should stay away from curriculum.

The evidence here shows that the more ideas educators can take on board the greater their repertoires for action. It means that complexity is more likely to offer the solution than to pose the problem. It's simple-mindedness that is the problem.

Simple scripts lead to 'if-only' thinking. They colonise reform movements by zeroing-in on favoured ideas. Sometimes it's lobbying on behalf of an interest. It can be some influential person's whim. Often it's a yearning for closure...

If only we could get back to... -
there are programmes that...
we know what needs to be done

We don't know. There's no simple and universal thing to do. Not only can educators marshal a range of possibilities, they are facing an array of needs - in economy, science, technology, culture and security. The needs are accelerating in frequency, are radical in scope and on a global scale. They are invading not only educators but also their students and their communities.

It's not that academic teachers can't help students understand much this. It is that not all of them see opportunity for students to learn for their lives as well as for their exams. The links are broken so the transfer of learning is not made. But academic educators who make the links are no less academic for doing so. They are making academic learning more rewarding, more likely to be remembered and more useful in life. There's nothing non-academic about that.

But there's no 'if only' simplicity to come to anybody's rescue here. There could, however, be some 'what if' complexity...

knowing what we know...
and starting from scratch...
what if we...?

The answer to that question depends on what pressures the students are experiencing, in what locality, with what resources to activate, and what educators to show an interest, needing what range of abilities to realise what sort of gains. Ready-made ideas won't help. It's a narrative with no script.

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education, policy and changing attitudes

what education needs from policy

It's easy enough to trot out vague promises - 'more choice' is popular, 'empowerment' might get applause, and 'creativity' a murmur of approval. But they're pretty fluffy concepts. Do they camouflage more than they illuminate?

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discussion panel 10:
Bob Dylan and his hold on education

for the times they are a-changin'

Bob Dylan

This is not about acoustic & electric guitars. It's more important even than that. This is about change – ranging from the personal to the planetary. And the times they are a-changin' alright, but more than Bob knew. More than anybody could know.

He held out hope for a generation - but no generation gets the last word on anything.

Bob Dylan is not the only one with the right question - what's going on? -
plenty of room for educators to disagree about - what's important? & what to do about it? -
students have a right to be heard on change - so 'how do they get enough to go on?' -
'what can it mean to them?' - & 'should we be involving them in action?' -
Bob would say 'yes' to all that - but what do educators say?

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finding out

This section examines the consequences of how global commerce works and what that means for national politics. It signposts evidence on the way influence is exerted, how it fragments societies, how myths can posture as reality and why there are so few whistle-blowers?

It also examines the risk all of this poses to all of us, the disappointments, anxiety and stress that loads onto people's lives, and what needs to happen if growing fear is to be transposed into sustainable hope.

Educators are in no position to fix that. This section is about how students can be enabled to figure it for themselves. It is pragmatic, it signposts what can help.

moving on

The section moves on from an earlier discussion 'what education gets from politics'. If it feels a bit scowling-grumpy, ask yourself whether we've passed the limits of what smiley-nice can do.

This section is addressed to education's stakeholders. These are the families, educators, voluntary groups and social enterprises concerned for what students can gain from education. Each piece of evidence here is followed by an idea for a stakeholder agenda. Education doesn't need more shareholders looking for a pay-off; it needs more stakeholders probing who is getting what out of education, and what needs to be done about it.

I don't want to be unfair to Bob Dylan - I don't dare. But the issues are too troublesome for uplifting inspiration. The point is this: stakeholders need students to get more from education than they have so-far been given a chance to realise. So boundaries need to be pushed.

on influence

Do the interests of the rich-and-powerful prevail in all of this? Is it possible that the people who most need help are least likely to get it? Should we be surprised that there is so little resistance? Could people's lives be damaged in ways that are not fully acknowledged?

There are no simple answers, though the questions are worth posing. And educators should resist being bounced into compliance with anybody's answer. There is evidence, showing the consequences for how we live together. And how we don't.

evidence of influence http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloud/view/8484 and scroll down to...

policy interventions:	**section 1**
commercial interests	**section 2**
damaged lives	**section 3**

on fragmentation

'Fragmentation' refers to how we don't live together, part of what is colloquially called 'a broken society'. It conjures images of cracks and fissures.

Educators concerned for access to opportunity will ask how such separations are formed - and why. Some of the answers suggest separation between 'strivers' and 'scroungers'. The evidence suggests that it is also possible to talk about fragmentation in terms of 'predators' and 'prey'.

Evidence of fragmentation http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloud/view/8484 and scroll down to...

divisions:	**section 4**
income:	**section 5**
aspiration:	**section 6**

on myth-and-reality

There is some talk of parasite-people selfishly avoiding work, generation-on-generation. Has education failed them? Whatever beliefs, values and expectations the people display, such behaviour would amount to a counter culture. Counter cultures are not necessarily reprehensible; but it's not hard to provoke into hostility members of a mainstream culture that thinks of itself as deserving. Myths are born that way.

The evidence is that where a government goes that way people are disposed to believe it, and even revel in their role as abused heroes. But it is more complicated than that: there are always counter cultures, and the super-rich and the dirt-poor each cultivate their own.

There is also evidence that political interests can be served by unleashing mainstream hostility on mythical targets. Little can so seriously damage the relationship between education and the cultures it inhabits than a deceitful government. And it opens a countervailing question: 'can people unlearn what they think they know?'.

evidence of myth-and-reality http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloud/view/8484 and scroll down to...

'scroungers' or 'strivers'	**section 7**
economic causes and cultural effects	**section 8**

on simplicity

The phrase 'as simple as that' is a contemporary cliché. In education it's never that simple. Education is working with local, domestic and global influences. Social, cultural, economic and technological forces are at work. Their interactions are always layered, often volatile, and sometimes unpredictable. The word 'simple' does not apply.

The word 'chaotic' crops up. And students are increasingly familiar with chaos. The evidence shows the many variations on the need to find meaning in confusion, and to establish purpose in response. People need to attribute sense to confusion. There need be nothing wrong with that.

There are attempts to offer ready-made and falsely-reassuring answers to what students know are demanding questions. Such attempts deserve rejection. Indeed, they sharpen the need for educators to engage students in conversations that find no simple answers to complex questions.

The evidence argues that no informed educator can accept the prospect of entrapping student needs, or their own credibility, in simple-mindedness.

Evidence of simplicity http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloud/view/8484 and scroll down to...

simple messages on complex issues:	**section 9**
'icons' and their influence:	**section 10**
infantilised by popular culture:	**section 11**
simple error and complex reality:	**section 12**

on risk

Social, economic and planetary change focus everybody's attention on risk. The questions are troublesome: 'what can go wrong?', 'how likely is it?', and 'how bad might it be?'.

Versions of risk assessment are unavoidably a feature of how people incorporate education into their lives. Those questions are not entirely untroublesome: 'what is education for?', 'what good is it?', and 'what can I expect from it?. The evidence shows that the answers are different for different groups. For some, low-risk expectations are likely to be met. For others, making a mistake could have life-long consequences.

How is this to be managed by policy, by expertise, and by people who have learned to act for themselves? The evidence finds few current proposals have much to say about the enormity of the risk that contemporary societies face, or about the urgency with which education needs to engage with it.

evidence of risk http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloud/view/8484 and scroll down to...

> **opportunity and risk:**   **section 13.**
> **position and risk:**   **section 14.**

on fear-and-hope

An informal but widely-held script for learning is "tell 'em, and then they'll know". It's implicit in media claims about what teachers should do on issues ranging from love-life to bullying.

A slightly more sophisticated script is that education should pass on to each new generation 'the best that has been thought and said'. It sees students as vessels waiting to be filled with golden wonders.

The trouble with both theories is that students come to educators already full of learning. This is experience-based learning, and experience can be a convincing teacher. So whatever is taught must find a place, if it can, among what is already believed. And whatever comes out of that mix will not correspond with what the media or the élite think desirable. Neither will it correspond with what teachers try to teach - never exactly, sometimes not at all. It is a mistake automatically to attribute these discrepancies to lack of ability, they are sometimes the product of very considerable ability - students seeing through poor teaching.

The evidence here argues for learning as a back-and-forth process: educators wondering what students are taking from it, students wondering what it has to do with them. The only sense that matters is the sense that students make of it: 'what's going on and what can I do about it?', 'is this good for me, or bad?', 'do I approach, or avoid?', 'must I fear, or can I hope?'.

evidence of fear and hope http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloud/view/8484 and scroll down to...

> **about fear:**   **section 15**
> **about hope:**   **section 16**

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professionalism and progress

a salutary tale

The tale concerns an aspect of education fully enmeshed in the issues raised here. It features careers education and guidance. At its heart careers work is about who gets to do what in society. That makes it a critical part of education; much of what progressive educators do focuses on fair transitions between working and learning. I find it hard to think of a more important issue for civil society.

Careers work has more than a century of research-and-development to draw on. It assiduously canvasses policy support. The commercial world can be counted on to take an interest. It has had some kind of representation in most education settings. People who are used to taking on board expert advice still do so. Yet careers work is struggling to secure its own future. What went wrong?

The evidence is that careers workers and their leaders have expended most of their energy defended past achievements. They think of it as the defence of their professionalism. Yet the most pressing questions for careers belong to the future, not the past Trying to secure past practice in existing institutions quickly runs out of useful things to say.

Careers work's retro-thinking is framed by a psychologically-understood individualism, linked to economically-understood opportunity. It's true that the formula was, for a long time, convenient to both politics and commerce. But neither source is as firmly established in contemporary thinking as it once was.

And [too much has changed](#) since then: deference to élites is eroding, sources of help are expanding, intellectual life is reframing, and power is transferring from government to commerce. All of this has repositioned careers work in the eyes of government and students. It has surprisingly little to say either about a fragmented, polarised and damaged social world, or about its privatised, digitised and globalised context.

And so it has the feel not so much of inspiration as desperation. Some of the confusion has taken refuge in career-chaos theory. It argues that if little is predictable and confusion reigns then careers workers need to work with modest techniques drawing on personal constructs for what is possible. It's how students frame and make sense of experience. Maybe.

Personal constructs are narrower than the social constructs that people gather from families, communities and societies. And this is where people find much of the meaning and purpose that feeds into career management. And that needs more time and space than careers work has ever been able to find.

The implications are for careers work in curriculum. Little of what needs to be done can be done in careers interviews. This is not to say that face-to-face help is not necessary, but it is to say that it is not sufficient. The future calls for sustained learning programmes. Careers work has never found the need to draw on the full range of processes and possibilities available to a well-constructed curriculum. It needs to now.

There are few twentieth century answers to twenty-first century questions.

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what educators can do

their commitments, the outcomes and why they can't agree – with 'noises-off'?

Learning is as much for educators as for students. And educators include some who would not call themselves 'teachers' or 'lecturers'.

who are the educators?

Educators are for the most part in the public sector relying on government funding. Some are in the private sector, with its differently-aligned priorities. Others are part of what is called 'the big society', taking over from the public sector by families for their own children, and volunteers for other people's. There are also educators organised in the agencies of civil society, which acts independently of commercial and political interests.

It is important not to forget informal sources of learning - among families, acquaintances and on-line. Leaving that aside for the moment, what we mean by 'educators' is still a whole lot bigger than what we mean by 'teachers and lecturers'...

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discussion panel 11
being the educator I want to be

I'd rather leave the job I love than teach the government's propaganda

<u>the secret teacher</u>

The secret teacher speaks for himself; who knows how many other teachers & lecturers endorse this condemnation of curriculum abuse? There are <u>others</u> far from sure that they can value the work assigned to them.

And in every community there are local community-based educators. Schools and colleges call on them as sources of understanding about what's going on, and of help with how to deal with it. Schools & colleges organise these student & helper comings-and-goings.

School-&-college educators need to know what is learned from the exchanges. Without those conversation we are talking about an administrative chore - not a route to becoming the educator that anybody of substance would want to be. And community agencies need to know how their work links to what the school or college does. Without that they are as likely to become competitors as partners - some employment-based providers are.

The education profession and its contacts form a stakeholder group, working on what priorities are to be served & how the programme can best be developed.

*the most important participants in the process are students -
a useful understanding of their learning experience can't be gathered from before-&-after
tick-box worksheets -
it needs conversations timely-enough - & with time-enough - for students, educators &
their community to learn from each other*

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what are they dealing with?

Background thinking for education agencies and their relationships is set out in an <u>account of education and policy</u>. It examines influences on educators, the beliefs they call on, and the risks they experience. The evidence here probes how educators deal with those pressures. It examines how stakeholder groups give voice to an independent civil society and what kind of conversation that is. And that means teasing-out what different groups seek from curriculum, what commitments they each make, and what outcomes they seek.

The range is far-reaching. It entails a distinction between learning for success in selection and learning for personal and social well-being. Education for competitiveness is not the same as education for fulfillment. The term used here for that is 'learning-for-living'.

Curriculum development needs all the independent support it can find in schools and colleges. But an independent education may need civil society more than is yet obvious. Education is facing the probability that it will be privatised. The leverage of commercial interests looking for new markets is hard to resist. Thinking about the future of education needs, then, to grapple with all the possibilities - if not in the public service then in civil society.

It's a long-term project - longer than a parliament. It needs local communities to be free of arbitrary demands for unsustainable growth, and working for locally-valued outcomes. Progressive education pursues forward-looking possibilities.

on priorities

People can often answer to their own satisfaction the question 'what's education for?'. Everybody has some experience of what they got out of it, and what disappointed them. But agreement in a group is harder to find. Especially when each has a different experience of education to go on.

The evidence shows that some fashionable hopes for education are not credible. They are at such levels of abstraction as to be of little use for identifying priorities. Take the oft-repeated trotting-out of hopes for 'inspiration', 'confidence', 'empowerment' and 'creativity'. The evidence is that people may not agree about what such terms mean. In some cases they could just as easily be talking about 'impulse, 'arrogance', 'pushiness' and 'novelty' as about anything that can identify a priority. Words that attract can obscure more than they illuminate.

It's not easy, then, for stakeholders to take a hold of what's needed for action   They look for other ways to get to grips with priorities. It means dealing with a wide range of evidence-based claims, stretching between opposing priorities...

evidence of priorities http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloud/view/8497 and scroll down to...

between brand and reality:	**section 1**
between competitiveness and well-being:	**section 2**
between shareholder and stakeholder:	**section 3**
between structures and dynamics:	**section 4**

on culture

All education is socially situated: where it happens influences how it happens. That location may be seen as a neighbourhood, a locality, a region or a nation. The people of each location, big and small, nurture its culture: they make sense of learning in the place that they see themselves inhabiting. That sense is not fixed, but the evidence is that what education invites them to believe, value and expect goes down differently in different places.

For a good many the location is a neighbourhood, for some it's a workplace, but it can be a web-space, for some it's a region, for a few it's cosmopolitan. The beliefs nurtured in each speak of how things are, the values speak of what's worth doing, the expectations of what's thought possible. What people take, and don't take, from education is shaped by that cultural variation.

Whether street-level or cosmopolitan, each culture formulates its own voice. So when students and their families approach an educator they do not come with just an address, they're carrying cultural baggage. And the ensuing conversation is shaped and framed by what they believe to be true, what they take to be worthwhile, and what they expect...

evidence of culture http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloud/view/8497 and scroll down to...

for the arts:	**section 5**
for commerce:	**section 6**
for citizenship:	**section 7**

on institutions

Dealing with disagreements about commitments and outcomes paints a picture of a educators juggling with what they can do about what's going on. The story is about how they can be a useful part people's lives.

But it's not the backstory. Much of what is happening in people's experience of education comes from from higher-up and farther-away That backstory is about how those institutions becoming part of people's lives.

It is why we need a distinction between shareholders and stakeholders. Shareholder interests are rooted in commercial institutions. Stakeholder interests are local and culturally rooted.

Shareholder conversations speak of commercial interests and the governments those interest can successfully lobby. They can pull levers and push buttons way beyond the reach of local stakeholders. But students, their educators and other stakeholders cannot afford to ignore those goings-on. The task is to understand how, in the face of them, local needs can most effectively be realised and protected.

Different centres of gravity, different dynamics. There's a quite a range...

evidence of institutions http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloud/view/8497 and scroll down to...

on design

Educators need a scheme-of-work. Before they join their students in the group they need to ask 'what are they ready to learn?', 'why is it important to them?', 'what will attract their interest?', and 'what indications of success do we look for?'. Issues will also crop up, for example, about whether talk of 'inspiration', 'confidence', 'empowerment' and 'creativity' feature – or not.

The evidence here compromises what comes of that conversation as scheme design. Transfer-of-learning features for how what is learned in the scheme can be used in the life. Critical thinking means not just covering the ground but scrutinising what is found. And variability of local interests means that the scheme should be designed knowing that what works well elsewhere might not work at all here.

It all breaks down the division between academic and vocational learning. Academic coverage means learning a what-where-who-when-how-and-why of things. But here's the point: that coverage can be used in an exam, but it can also be used in a life. And a key decision in scheme design is not about the status but about the use. The most academic of educators and the most demanding of families can agree that learning for an exam is no more important than learning for a life. Apart from everything else it gives academic learning a relevance and interest that makes it more likely to be remembered in the exam. But the more important test of its success is its life-long and life-wide usefulness

Scheme design is about here-and-now facts becomes a basis for the now-and-later usefulness. And there is a quite range of design features to call on...

evidence of design http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloud/view/8497 and scroll down to...

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ideas, interests and noises-off

six thousand years of curriculum

Education theorist Gary Thomas has distilled a useful account of <u>curriculum thinking</u>. Read it through in an hour-or-so to be guided through a six-thousand-year history of education. It's riveting stuff, telling of a recurring struggle for command of curriculum. In the blue corner, an insistence on the need for formal and reliable facts. In the red, trust in an open and progressive process.

the curriculum mix

But, before the bruising starts, we should face the reality that this is a pointless match: have you ever come across an unprocessed fact? or a fact-free process? So you'd think that by now we would have a reliable consensus. But we don't; and educators and their stakeholders need to understand why.

Gary Thomas helps by taking a close look at ideas associated with pragmatism, constructivism and marketisation. And the evidence signposted here takes account of all that. But I can't help noticing that the he leaves out pretty-well all of what neurology, the social sciences and cultural theory bring to our understanding of how curriculum works.

And that raises a question: where are the clues to understanding the seemingly endless struggle for command of the curriculum? Is there something wrong with what somebody said? Or are the clues in something that everybody overlooked? Sins of commission or omission?

ideas and interests

It's omission. It's true that absence of evidence cannot be evidence of absence. But if we know that something could have be said, and wasn't, we're left asking who shrouds what? And, more importantly, why?

Things begin to make sense if we entertain the possibility that the debate is not about ideas, it's about interests. You'll find in the signposted evidence recurring accounts of conflicting interests. They are detectable in claims made, in research cited, and in policy announced. It all shows that content-driven and factual understanding of how things are suits some people. And things are framed to accord with those interests. A process-driven curriculum, favouring critically scrutinising the facts, suits other people. But setting up the processes upsets some apple-carts. Different interests favour different accounts of what's going on, and what needs to be done. Everybody has interests, but there's no progress to be made by treating shrouded interests as if they were declared ideas.

noticing 'noises-off'

And that means being alert to noises-off. These are the hard-to-decipher murmurs, favouring cleverly wangled maneuvers, some of which turning out to be lies. That vigilance makes it possible to challenge claims on the curriculum. Educators need to recognise what is signposted in this evidence: the glossing of unwanted findings, the avoidance of unpleasant conflicts, the nurturing or murky alliances, the underground lobbying for power,

and the suppression of inconvenient data. Much of the daily-news parades immediate events, short-term consequences and facile explanations. Much TV news assigns too little time and assumes too little attention-span. The exchanges are just long enough to accommodate evasive answers. The accompanying claims to openness and transparency are laughable. This is a backstory, and it's being pushed out-of-site.

Educators are not responsible for any of this, but they can't afford to ignore it. The account here of what they can do needs to be widely-enough framed to take account of the gamut of all interests and the reach of any exchange. The more educators take into consideration, the bigger the base for action. Education needs larger frameworks for awkward questions, demanding disclosing answers – and bringing on the noises-off.

politics, policy and performance

getting elected, doing something worthwhile and show-biz

The full on-line survey of how educators expand their bases for curriculum reform is set out in an account of what educators can do.

claims on curriculum

That account shows a lot going on, not all of it as 'open and transparent' as it claims, much of it based on little more than opinion, all of it fiercely contested. It shows how every school, college and community-based education outfit seeks to shape and frame the terms in which it wants to be recognised - a mission statement. So does every university.

<div style="border:1px solid">

discussion panel 12
not another nutty professor!

asked to suggest a university mission statement
a philosophy professor suggested
'analysing concepts for our region'

urban myth?

Philosophers reach the most basic of realities. It's a struggle, and it does not always come across to other at all well. The underlying questions are 'what's going on?', 'how do we know?', & 'why does it matter?'. These are questions that need answers before anybody does anything about something important. But the answers are not quick-and-easy, they come as what the professor calls 'concepts'.

Students can usefully go into asking whether the professor has a point? And if he does, does it matter? And if it does, why?

it's a matter of how do students get their say?
and how can that say be not just open-and-transparent but credible-and-convincing?

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Politicos lay claim to similar what-how-why questions - they need to say what they're doing, how they go about it, and why it's a good idea. This section takes a look at the opportunities politicos grasp, the connections they make, the options they find, the complexities they navigate, and the gains they make.

It can't be a quick-and-easy read; nobody can deal with it in one take. But nobody needs to. As in earlier sections you can scope the pages to find what your work can act on. Skip what looks as though it can safely be ignored. Then figure what sort of political support education on your patch needs. No two locations are the same. The more specific you can be the better.

But before you act there's this: one of the reason why proposals don't deliver is because something else needs to be done first – preparing the ground. And that sometimes means recovering what was at first set aside and now reconsidering it.

I somehow doubt that the philosophy professor's suggestion galvanised those bosses into reconsidering the organisation's mission statement. But educators need no such script, and this evidence finds starting points.

on mood

Phrases like 'sea-change', 'its time has come', and 'cometh the hour' reflect a belief in the importance of political timing. It's an ability to shape and catch a nation's mood. It is no less about 'what?', 'how?' and 'why?' to make a move - but it's also about 'when?'.

Good timing can be no more than piggyback opportunism - today's headline becomes tomorrow's 'what teachers must do!'. Politicians learn not to waste a crisis. Managed well, good political timing can transform a minority myth into a majority belief. This is not what progressive educators do.

However, clever political timing sees education as a happy hunting ground for claims that politics can improve the electorate's lives. Sadly, those claims often turn out to be ignorance of what has already been tried and discredited. Doesn't this mean that educators need to understand the mood they're dealing with? And what clever politicians might be doing to exploit it?

That can't mean following some socio-political consensus. The evidence-search here is for durable springs for sustainable action. Like philosophy, it is searching for underlying realities, for their reliability, and for their value. So how do we attract a mood's interested attention in that? The way things are changing makes it a pressing question for educators and their students - and vital to how they learn from each other...

evidence of mood http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloud/view/8527 and scroll down to...

starting points:	section 1
opposition:	section 2
opportunity:	section 3

on connections

If politicians' good timing can take education one way, then educators' good timing can take it another. Why shouldn't educators be as good at recognising opportunities in the comings-and-goings of events?

Timing connects what's going on to what needs to be done. There have been missed opportunities. An example is an exploratory brit careers-work programme called 'Connexions'. Influential professionals chose to canvas its imperfections. Its ideas were unfamiliar and unwanted. Habits-of-mind got dressed up as professionalism. But habit is a negation of timing. It was a lost opportunity which some careers-work leaders may want to recover – if they still can.

Well-timed connectedness moves professionalism on, by reframing the conversation. It pushes questions beyond 'what to do?' and 'when to do it'. It is now about 'whom do we listen to?' and 'who do we need to listen to us?' They are questions of trust. Distrust may feel like the safer bet, but there's no progress without trust.

To be trusted is neither a right to be claimed nor a privilege to be enjoyed, it is a reward to be earned. 'Nobody's listening!' is a common complaint in talk of politics. And everybody has a right to be heard, but nobody has an automatic right to be heeded. The claim that

'listening is what it's all about!' is a claim too far. What-it's-all-about gives us the right-foot and left-foot politics of the hokey-cokey.

It's all so complicated: customers are not always right; deals are struck over the counter and under it; wanting is not the same as needing; claims are not invariably justified; everybody demands a hearing; but not everybody can be heeded.

Framing the complexity of the connectedness of progressive education is what stakeholder groups are for. Their links range from local-and-informal communities to fully institutionalised organisations. Stakeholders do not just allow things to take their course, they engage in a tough-minded and deliberate positioning with those outfits. That links them outwardly to the experiences they serve, and inwardly to the expertise they marshal. At their best these are organisations for well-timed and appropriately-connected conversations. It's no pushover – not for them, not for their students...

evidence of connections http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloud/view/8527 and scroll down to...

stakeholders:	section 4
society:	section 5
settings:	section 6

on complexity

In theory policy is informed by expertise – truth to power. And there is a lot of psychology and economics informing education policy. Though the social sciences and cultural theory have lost ground. The evidence here is that the social sciences need to be reframed and reasserted. And that makes things even more complicated.

It's tough on politicians. But their response can make things more complicated for educators. There's evidence here of politicos making doubtful claims, maneuvering for position and ignoring troublesome facts.

All of this means that whatever you want to say about education Google can find a site. Some will support you with reliable information. Some will undermine you with plausible opposition.

And there's also this: there is too much going on in education for anybody to be able to say that some things will never work, and can be safely rejected. The null hypothesis doesn't work: in some locations some educators are some time finding black swans. Indeed, education is that search for what might be so. In the complicated conversation that is education there's no last word.

That's uncomfortable. We have evolved to make sense of things, and complexity makes sense hard to find. So, say some, 'let's call it chaos'. It pushes complexity aside and takes planning for education to be a waste of energy. A good many students would agree. Some have a point.

So here's the situation: most people from-time-to-time need to make sense of things. And they need to do it before the deadline arrives, while the offer is still open, or before things go pear-shaped. So why do educators invent prevaricating complications? Well, actually,

they don't; educators are doing no more than recognising the complication out there - mapped by economics, psychology, social science and cultural theory. What it needs is not chaos theory but space and time to learn how to find sense in confusion.

Confusing complexity will not go away. If you're not confused you're just not paying attention.   But confusion is necessary to learning. It's true, sometimes a person needs to do it now or lose the chance. But enabling the habit of sensing the difference between the plausible and the credible is what what educators to do.

And there's also this: the more complexity a person can deal with, then the more ways that person has of figuring out what to do. It's a repertoire - 'if this won't work, what about that?'. Repertoires have survival value; they make complexity a solution, not a problem.

All of this makes complexity a departure point, not a surrender. There's evidence that the discomfort of saying 'I don't know where this is going!' energises the pursuit of meaning, and gives purpose to action. But it means dealing with complications, not evading them

evidence of complexity http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloud/view/8527 and scroll down to...

facing conflicted confusion:	**section 7**
working with conflicted confusion:	**section 8**

on beliefs

Chaos theory draws on the science of prediction, risk and probability. With so many predictions of high-risk probabilities it's not hard to understand why short-term simplicities get more attention than long-term complexities.

But education needs to be convincing about long-term hope. Hope is a promise, and to break the promise is to invite rejection. That turning away can be to where people find their simplest beliefs confirmed. The simplest of beliefs are in the survival value of being quick in instinct, fierce in competition, and strong in retaliation. They can feel like models to emulate, it's then education which feels like the aberration to avoid.

The signals are visible in the classroom, from fidgeting with devices to gazing out of windows. If there is any hope it can seem to be out there where students live, not in here where they wait.

'Out there' is also where the media live. And the distractions it designs seem more compelling than the lessons designed by educators. Money is a factor. But, also, much of the media is populated by the famous, and filled with danger. So its promise is: 'we will take you closer to who you admire, and defend you from who you hate'. This is not a science of prediction, risk and probability; it's a culture of beliefs, values and expectations.

The reform of education needs to be at least as strong as the media, and a great deal more credible. Much of media management shapes what people believe to be true, worthwhile and possible. This is not good news for progressive educators: exasperated by the purveying of filleted news, in danger of labeling if they blow a whistle, dealing with the deadening effects of daft demands on curriculum.

Informed educators are equipped to deal with such unpleasantness. But they can hardly be surprised to find cynicism among their students. So, which way is forward? There's no shortcut; the evidence supports educators who can draw students into a conversation that starts from what students believe, value and expect. It suggests that curriculum can start that conversation from attitudes as desperate as impulse, suspicion and hate. And it points out a genuine conversations have no foregone conclusions.

Humanity has not evolved to waste energy on meaningless striving. Learning for living is far from meaningless. It needs educators who can join students in finding meaning in personal fulfillment, in claiming social membership, in earning economic independence, and in working for planetary well-being.

Once launched, that reform will mean that what politicians choose to believe will influence who gets into bed with whom, and who gets kicked out...

evidence of beliefs http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloud/view/8527 and scroll down to...

of persuaders:	**section 9**
of doubters:	**section 10**

on causes-and-effects

Political influences have been famously characterised by a UK prime minister as 'events, dear boy, events'. He also confessed politics to be 'the art of the possible'. His remarks display a genteel modesty concerning power. It was long ago.

But how do events and possibilities now figure in the causes and effects of politics? This evidence speaks of politics besieged by global commerce. Political concessions are made to those interests, some related to education. The evidence is of conflicts of interest and frustrations of intention. The politics of all colours sometimes seem to call less on genteel modesty than on panic.

Yet governments need to be able plausibly to declare that they can make a difference to people's lives. And so, where they find themselves globally weak, they claim domestic strength. Plausible politics therefore needs to keep things close to home. And education is close to everybody's home. Politics has a lot to say about education. Commerce waits in the wings.

Governments want to talk about education but they are not well-enough informed. Claims to be acting in everybody's interest do not stand up. The evidence is for causes and effects playing out differently in different neighbourhoods. A centralised policy may appear to be plausible, but too many turn out to be not credible locally. The evidence is that education-for-all may work well in some localities but be demonstrably damaging in others.

There is a backstory that probes wider and deeper. It tells of dissonance ranging from the personal to the planetary. In particular the position of the politically neglected is not well understood. A clamour of opportunistic politicians claim to understand poverty, exclusion and exploitation. They are reshaping the political landscape. Recognising the backstory lifts educators above their posturing press-releases. And it engages experienced, and informed sense-making.

It would be understandable if preoccupied educators were to overlook all this; but it would be a mistake. Politicians shape education in the interest of the constituencies whose support they rely on. The backstories expose and outflank that narrow-and-shallow ambition. Educators are needed to work with students on the backstories.

This section revisits the art of the possible and its events. There's no shortage of troublesome reports. The challenge is to make good use of bad backstory news. This section searches for how educators keep hope alive by working with credible causes of needed effects...

evidence of causes-and-effects http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloud/view/8528 and scroll down to...

<div align="center">

the causes: section 11
the effects: section 12
the voices: section 13

</div>

on results

Identifying mood, making connections, dealing with complexity, working with beliefs, and managing causes-and-effects need no conventional political approval. The centralisation of control is damaging. So are habits-of-mind. Progressive reform is best realised locally and it is a response to change. It works directly with students, their educators and stakeholders - in unscripted conversations.

The evidence is that the shock of change may, itself, provoke progressive responses. And cities may be best placed to manage them. Local action can certainly find more than one funding source. Progressive education reform is, then, within reach, but in terms that have not yet been widely understood. The days of conventional politics may be numbered.

The result would be an expanding and diversifying movement, rather than an institutionalised programme. Educators in conversation have more important work to do than follow the cues of government and commerce. Much of that work is in enabling critical thinking. All of it dismantles barriers between academic and vocational learning. It does not seek the many educators with no interest, it works through the few who are ready and equipped to take on the challenge.

Success is workers and citizens claiming their membership of society. They need to discriminate between what can be believed as facts, what must be understood as opinion, and what are demonstrably lies. The evidence points to gains for well-being and fulfilment. Those gains are made when students assign meaning to experience and engage purpose in action.

Any outcome is probed with three questions...

1   whose interests does it serve?

2   what voices should it heed?

3   how can stakeholders support it?

evidence on results http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloud/view/8528 and scroll down to...

outcomes: section 14

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the politics of possibility

nations, cities and action

This evidence reflects people establishing movements, posing questions and taking stands – all of it seeking ways in which their societies educate themselves. The evidence also signposts their proposals for reform and their strategies for realise them.

the people

There is a detailed account of what's needed from the people in '[provoking the imagining and realisation of new possibilities](#)'. That provocation, it says, is not run-of-the-mill. It argues that reform is obstructed by small-mindedness. So the provocation needs to be enough of a shock to be imaginative and live dangerously - outside shallow-and-arrow expectations.

It helps to explain a world-wide willingness to defy politicians. Governments are increasingly held in contempt. The surveys vary only on the vigour of that rejection.

But the reality is complicated. It's true, there are politicos merely angling for power. But I'd be surprised if you've not found any trying to get something worthwhile done. Politicos are not all the same. Some are razzle-dazzle-'em performers.

So should be reframing politicos in at least three groups? - politicians, policy makers and performers. Students and their educators would need to tell when they are looking at...

> ... electioneering politicians?
>
> ... serious policy makers?
>
> ... show-biz performers?

the stories

It's more complicated. Might a person find some politicos who have it in themselves to be all three? Those politicos can move there-and-back across a range of moods. It means that what they do is more like episodes in a story than categories on a list. Though, face it, some politicos don't move about very much.

Some politicos deserve to be dismissed, but not all. In the mood a serious policy-maker, of any political colour, can shelve electioneering in the interests of doing something worthwhile. Some of these are working on education. It would be good if educators were in a position to converse with them. They deserve to be heeded. They also need to be questioned.

the question

There is a growing political interest in raising working-class aspirations. Who could be against that? But, before the cheering starts, let's question. Are we rooting for aspirations to be a good out-of-work dad? Would we be in favour of aspirations to quit work and end the stress? And suppose it were an aspiration to oppose the blind economic growth that damages the planet and ruins neighbourhoods?

And, even if any of these get a political cheer, who would make sure that the neglected poor are in on this aspiration thing? A politician can win applause for promising 'justice available to all'. But there's enough argy-bargy among the sources cited here to show that 'justice' doesn't always mean what you think it means. Neither does 'available'. Nor does 'all'.

Aspiration is about people's chances in life - far too important to be left to politicos, least of all to show-bizz. It's not a lot of laughs, not in Sunderland, anyway. So, if anything can bring credible hope to Alice in Sunderland, it will be interrogated policy – 'in whose interests?' – 'heeding whose voices?' - 'recognised by what stakeholders?'.

the points-of-view

There are no simple solutions to complex problems. And a *Prospect Magazine* monograph, [Poverty in the UK](#), makes a good start on untangling issues for access to opportunity. I don't know how seventy pages could pack in more disagreement about what needs doing.

But, of course, things changed before *Prospect's* ink had dried. It's out-of-date on bishops and popes; and on what people do in the name of religion. Neither has it caught up with debt, on-line predators, and economic myths. And it's well behind the curve on the philosophy of 'what's fact?', 'what's knowledge?', and 'what's valuable?'. All the targets are moving. The monograph is longer on opinion than on evidence. But it bumps into most of the issues for Alice's chances in life.

the narrative

And it provokes a narrative that reaches from climate change to access to opportunity.   A narrative needs starting points leading to turning points. Like this?

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discussion panel 13
writing a narrative

> educators are critical sources for understanding how fast-growing technologies & unfettered growth are damaging the planet

> those same technologies also strengthen global commercial pressures on education & weaken what governments can do in response

> but there are ways in which commerce and its technologies are both helping & hindering students' access to opportunity, personal fulfillment & social well-being

> and the experience of on-line & social life is persuading students that their beliefs, values & expectations are liberated from control & wholly their own ideas

> but these changing cultural attitudes work out differently in different social settings & different backgrounds can make students strangers to each other

> the resulting group & family allegiances are arbitrarily splintering access to opportunity, so that what is favourable to some students is unfavourable to others

> all of this is making what people hope & expect from education are different in different settings, so a programme welcomed by some is rejected by others

> nothing is inevitable concerning how these hopes & fears are worked out, each resolution comes with consent, & withdrawn consent changes everything

the narrative must be recognisable to students -
which means working on a version which students are ready to recount for themselves

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It's a narrative if it tells of one thing leading to another. It's like a journey moving on - 'where now?', 'where next?', 'going where?'. Coming across a turning point often surprises – we actually need to be shocked enough to provoked change.

the shock

Are there professionals so convinced of the righteousness of their case that they believe government will be persuaded to ride to their rescue? You'd think educators have been stood up by governments enough times to know better. Hope that a neo-liberal government will restore a public-services is the latest scene in a sad saga of political unreliability. The stronger the hope the deeper the shock.

The story is the more shocking because the professionals' evidence is strong. State-supported education helps to maintain social stability. The evidence is that open and responsive public-service institutions are critically important to a society in just that way. But there are profits to be made from education; and, world-wide, national governments are not resisting privatising interests moving in on education's institutions.

Is this shocking enough to provoke 'the imagination of new possibilities'? And what possibilities could there be for finding more reliable support? The Royal Society of Arts (RSA) has a long-standing interest in education reform. And it now proposes city governments as better placed than national governments to offer reliable support to education. National governments are too big to really understand local damage, and too small to resist global commercial trends. Cities can be more alert to the reality and more agile in response.

the city

We are now required to rise above the show-biz clowns, world-wide, in charge of some of our cities. The RSA is looking elsewhere for what it calls The Power of Cities (journal #3). Its argument starts from the fact that around half the world's population is living in metropolitan areas. The numbers are increasing – Alice's Sunderland is among them.

In cities people learn to live with other people - all kinds of other people. City dwellers are visible to each other - less likely to be strangers. Cities each have their own account of how things are changing. People can grasp what's going on well enough to suggest realistic responses. And a city can readily canvass more than one way of responding to those voices. All of this is why RSA-chief Matthew Taylor (p.5) recognises cities as a promising new setting for developing education policy.

It is not flaky thinking. Political scientists (pp.20ff) find four kinds of gain. Cities have a wide-enough range of sources to draw on, a great-enough range of ideas to engage with, a willingness to let go of what no longer works, and an ability to integrate proximate but fragmented programmes. Cities thrive on each their own scope and complexity. The evidence here includes accounts of city displacement of shallow and narrow uniformity with rooted and innovative diversity.

This is more than rescuing local government. Every city has a hinterland of neighbourhoods, suburbs, outlying villages and settlements. Few locations are out of urban reach. Most

cities can develop networks of local stakeholder groups, each receiving support, identifying needs, and proposing action.

Cities look elsewhere for funding. Economists (pp.10ff) have tracked a their use of alternative funding from independent sources with fewer strings attached. Some business-world voices (pp.32ff) welcome the trend as independent of commerce and state and fostering change owned by communities and developed on a human scale.

The RSA reports positive results. Cities move quickly into locally-relevant crime-control measures, traffic-management schemes and health-and-safety programmes. They develop rapid responses on climate change. They are well placed to undermine international trafficking of both people and of drugs. And short lines of communication get rapid responses. If any policy sphere needed this kind of grasp and flexibility it is policy for education.

Metropolitan smarts hold out hope of dumping national politicking and outflanking global power. But Matthew Taylor advises patience. This is a long-term trend and vulnerable to capture. Market players are already trying to eliminate competition. But the RSA's proposals are not commercial, they anchor civil society in order to reach for deeper and wider possibilities...

discussion panel 14
a deeper and wider hope

> civil society is more hopeful than the big society - because it organises for coordinated group action

> stakeholder's interests are more hopeful than shareholders' - because they work with the people whose lives are directly affected

> citizen voice is more hopeful than consumer demand - because it works from shared memories, experience & imagination

> conversation is more hopeful than imports from think-tanks & consultancies - because it directly links expertise to experience

> learning for action is more hopeful than winning arguments - because it understands things in order to change them

there are citizenship, work-life & creative possibilities here -
deeper & wider questioning of civil society is a natural part of learning-for-living -
every curriculum has more than one place where tutors can engage students on this

None of it is a doddle. Reactionary interests, seeking to undermine the movement, need to be neutralised. Research-and-development on the backstory takes ability, courage and time.

But without the struggle there can be no progressive education. It makes the promises of education possible. They can be honoured with or without central-government support. And nothing about any of it need be inevitable. It is the transfer of educators' consent which changes everything. And, at its heart, that is an insistence that curriculum is not government's property, nor shareholders', nor educators' nor even students'. It is managed by stakeholders on behalf of communities. And it must be returned it to its owners.

Can Alice have any part in this if her educators take no part at all?

agendas for reform

framing and shaping action

Each stage in the arguments set out above calls for action. It's action to be taken by students, their educators and their stakeholder groups - working together.

In the on-line sources each argument poses three recurring questions...

...	to do what?...	action
...	why?...	justification
...	so that?...	purpose

That questioning is distilled here into a movement of ten stages...

The distillation, on the following pages, illustrate how action is necessary and possible. But there is no ready-made agenda for reform. Each way of answering will work out differently in different localities.

The pages are interactive. Their layout invites a prioritising of ideas-for-action in a particular locality.

stakeholders...

...taking account of all with an interest in education - students, families , neighbourhoods, educators & employers

doing what...

✔

yes maybe no

... engaging local people's remembered experience in useful reflection & in search of new ways forward

... introducing people who have become strangers to each other & enabling mutual comprehension

... developing a shared understanding how changing experience gives the community an identity which can now realise a new future

other action....

because...

... learning is both an individual & social experience & that means it can separate people but it can also connect them

... stakeholder networks are among the few forums where the future of education can be realistically examined & resolved

... stakeholders need to be in contact with both rich & poor so that any maneuvering by either is dealt with fairly

other action....

so that...

... people's rights concerning education are respected whether they are lucky or unlucky whether rich or poor or seen to be deserving or not

... local people are ready to develop a manifesto for how local creativity will manage central bureaucracy

... stakeholders enable the development of a future narrative for people as customers & as citizens & as workers & as ready-for-anything humanity

other action....

in neighbourhoods

taking account of where people are & how they can become aware of each other, in enclaves, villages, estates, suburbs & cities

doing what...

✔
yes   maybe   no

...   looking into into how global commerce impacts local lives

...   canvassing & making public local voices especially where their interests are neglected by central agencies

...   figuring out what needs to be done to win locally-informed trust in education & support hope for the future

other action....

because...

...   central attempts at control would do better to stand aside so that education's programme-developers can work with local stakeholders

...   local education does not mean scaled-up for marketing but scaled-down for usefulness

...   curriculum is community property & any action on it needs the permission of the community

other action....

so that..

...   education develops an effective role in people's renewal of quality-of-life in their neighbourhoods

...   a national democratic education system has local & informed organisations to take on its immediate management

...   educators can call on locally-rooted civil-society outfits offering a hands-on understanding of local needs

other action....

working with interests

taking account of conflicting interests among commercial, political, work-life, personal & neighbourhood perspectives

doing what...

✓
yes maybe no

... identifying conflicting interests concerning the educational well-being & fulfillment of local students

... gaining support for shared interests in the well-being of other people's children

... calling on educator-voices in working out educational resolutions to locally-identified conflicts of interest


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other action....
```

because...

... reform may expose conflicts between family & community & work-life & educators & commercial & government interests

... families sometimes see their children as differently-suited to education & want their own separated & protected from other people's children

... not reaching agreement comes from the different experiences & memories of education which shape different ideas about needs


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other action....
```

so that...

... education is made to be community property with no single interest-group taking control

... hidden motives & vested interests are surfaced acknowledged & examined so that conflicts are resolved

... stakeholders are clear about where to take a stand on the interests being served by local education reform


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other action....
```

developing independence

taking account of political positioning & of global commercial influence on policy for education

doing what..

✔

yes   maybe   no

... negotiating robustly with any business-world pressures on education which claim it should act on their behalf

... organising for local independence of unwanted effects of central causes

... identifying commercial & political moves shaped by hidden interests rather than declared principles

other action....

because?

... commercial competitiveness does not foster the well-being that families seek or reflect what are educators' prime purpose

... clever news management commandeers constructive language to defend what actually is for some a destructive programme

... political & commercial support for unrestrained growth is a long-term threat to the well-being of students & their future children

other action....

so that?

... local education can separate itself from central control where that offers no support for local needs & it can find support elsewhere

... stakeholders become their best in think-for-themselves representation rather than in doing-as-people-demand plebiscite

... doubting what democracy does is not anti-democratic

other action....

voicing needs

taking account of how all voices deserve to be heard but not all can expect to be heeded

✔

yes maybe no

doing what...

... working uniquely with the complementary voices of local experience in the community & expertise among trained professionals

... linking to on-line education commentaries which are channels for educator voice & part of a global trend for seeking reform

... enabling expression of the experience & needs of the neglected & excluded so that they are heard & heeded

other action....

because...

... people find that promises of competitive education do no more than corral work-life success for a privileged few

... few are better placed than educators' stakeholders to understand & give voice to local fears of displacement among vulnerable groups

... distrust can feel like the safer position but progressive education for living together need people to figure out who are trustworthy

other action....

so that...

... stakeholders are alert to credible voices coming from unexpected directions

... stakeholders give voice to useful & sometimes informal leadership at all levels in education's hierarchies

... stakeholders think deeply & widely enough to voice global events in terms of local experience

other action....

sharpening ideas

taking account of the research, reflection & creativity found and disseminated by education's stakeholders

✓
yes maybe no

doing what...

... identifying local programmes which implement credible producer causes & have relevant user effects

... establishing ideas which any critically-thinking educator can use & not just what can be squeezed into the edge of timetable

... framing & shaping transferable learning which reminds students of their lives so that their lives remind them of their learning

other action....

because...

... there can be no more important ideas for education than enlightened critical thinking

... education is at the crossroad between ideas which are no more than popular-and-plausible & ideas which are informed-and-credible

... society relies for its survival on educators enabling people to deal with change by calling on informed & thought-through ideas

other action....

so that...

... students can discriminate claims for work-life & citizenship which are useful & fair & which are unfair & exploitive

... stakeholders can call on credible ideas to bring an end to the pointless process of claim & counter-claim by the plausible & popular

... thinking is wide enough to connect & open enough to explain so that students & educators are imaginative enough to inform workable change

other action....

validating experience

taking account of the authority which comes from direct-&-shared experience of what's going on

✓
yes maybe no

doing what...

... monitoring how education policy does & does not help in the local experience of students & their families

... establishing congenial & interactive conversations between students & educators & stakeholders so voices are heard & can be heeded

... establishing a position which wins local trust in the stakeholder group & the conversations it sets up

other action....

because...

... some families avoid professionals who may be accurate but can feel alien while the people they turn to may be reassuring but misleading

... a bad experience in education can call up feelings running deeper & wider than can be fixed with psychological or skill-building techniques

... any understanding of a significant experience will be misleading unless it's first understood in that person's or group's own terms

other action....

so that...

... educators win the trust of all stakeholders especially the poor & the marginalised

... students in two-way conversations with sometimes out-of-date & baffled educators share their up-dated experience of on-line and off-line life

... students work with their families & their educators on developing future narratives for taking reliable control of their own lives

other action....

drawing on expertise

taking account of the authority which can come from reliable knowledge & enabling processes of educators

✓

yes maybe no

doing what...

... probing how central proposals do & do not draw on educators' expertise & bringing discrepancies into open conversation

... recognising & canvassing key qualities of educators' commitment, understanding & temperament for enabling learning-for-living

... engaging local educators in conversations for realising the mutual dependence of learning from experience & learning from expertise

other action....

because...

... reality is not understood in a social vacuum it is gathered from good teaching & compelling experience

... students learn less from teacher-facts than from student-discovery while working across the barriers between academic disciplines

... students engage from childhood in forms of critical philosophical questioning & they have a right to educators who can engage with that

other action....

so that...

... stakeholder credibility has expert sources capable of progressively contesting reactionary & popular assumptions

... stakeholders can work on research data in conversation with education institutions where research method & findings are understood

... educators' voices are heeded where the realities of change infiltrate political thinking whether central or local

other action....

setting up conversations

taking account of points-of-view among students, educators, stakeholders, local groups & communities

✓

yes maybe no

doing what...

... listening to the breadth & depth of what people say about how they navigate their journey through contemporary realities

... recognising how social differences are reflected in what people say & how what each says is welcomed or resisted by others

... facing up to conflicts & disappointment so that it can be reframed in ways that enable people to make good use of bad news

other action....

because?...

... academic knowledge needs to be made to speak of students' lives in ways which enable them to speak of it for themselves

... independent & critical thinking works better when it is disturbing & surprises or shocks than when it is familiar comfortable

... if learning is displayed only as looking-good performance what will people ever know of each other in terms that they can rely on?

other action....

so that...

... students recognise & resist arbitrary demands for compliance whether from political or commercial or religious or educational sources

... students engage with the big issues of contemporary living & recognise who & what can be trusted in those voices

... students can articulate & realise their own membership of their own society

other action....

getting results

taking account of what students, their educators, stakeholders & communities can act upon

doing what...

<div style="text-align:right">✓
yes maybe no</div>

... insisting that vocational training is an employer responsibility & offering education is the distinctive underpinning of all learning-for-living

... working with families & communities on inter-generational tensions & acknowledging experience which is neglected but credible

... setting up educator-student partnerships enabling life-long learning which is scrutinised for its meaning & shaped to a purpose

other action....

because...

... the simplistic manufacture of messages for the media makes for easy listening but neglects the complex causes which will cause damage

... people need to know when the experience of feel-good & self-esteem & confidence are rooted in reality & when they are not

... feeling scared & confused & unknowing is troubling in the short term but is necessary to realising long-term potential

other action....

so that...

... students & their educators & their stakeholders are transforming learning-for-testing into learning-for-living

... people grasp the range of what education can bring to a full & fulfilling membership of their society

... people are ready & able to hope for & find a best possible self in a best possible society moving towards a best possible future

other action....