



Tradable commodities

A think piece from the EMLC and NCSL Futures project

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This think piece reflects a conversation between David Arkless, Senior Vice President, Manpower Inc and Goran Hultin, Caden Consulting with Susan Tuck, Headteacher, St. John's Primary School, Lincoln, as part of the EMLC and NCSL Futures project.

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

Edited by Karen Carter and Chris Williams

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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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David Arkless and Goran Hultin in conversation with Susan Tuck

Viewpoint

Manpower Inc. is a world leader in the employment services industry, creating and delivering services that enable its clients to win in the changing world of work. The company offers employers a range of services for the entire employment and business cycle including: permanent, temporary and contract recruitment; employee assessment and selection; training; outplacement; outsourcing and consulting. The focus of Manpower's work is on raising productivity through improved quality, efficiency and cost-reduction across their total workforce, enabling clients to concentrate on their core business activities.

Mapping the territory

This think piece explores emerging trends that have the potential to change education and the world of work as seen by a specialist employment company. It explores two perspectives on education, either as providing the knowledge and skills to support individuality and diversity, or as providing the skills and competences demanded by industry to address nation-state competition in economic performance. In particular, the discussion considers:

- the impact of globalisation and emerging technologies
- recruitment and retention
- talent mapping

Finally, the think piece poses questions for educational leaders to use as a starting point to review how they might prepare their schools for the future.

Over the horizon – a business leader's perspective

The most successful businesses of the future will be those that have the skills to identify and address the greatest challenges. Employers will have a flexible approach to managing their workforce in response to the challenges of a competitive marketplace and a workforce which demands more control over where and when they work. 'Flexibility will be at the heart of the workplace of the future';¹ variable hours, part-time working, home-working, job sharing, and compressed working weeks will all be routine. Employers will need to consider the role of women in the workplace as they move into increasingly

responsible positions and also the role of men, who might have an increased role in sharing the workload at home. Good employers will learn to address the skills shortage by looking beyond their traditional labour pool and providing flexible working practices, which will be a major driver in improving staff retention.

Other major changes will emerge as employers expect employees to work beyond the current age of retirement. Company systems change every 10 years, particularly in technology and skills. This demands retraining, creating difficulties, particularly for older employees who are often unwilling to retrain. As a result, skill development of the workforce can soon become out of reach. The USA acknowledges that an individual might have different careers throughout their working life. In Europe, however, the social policy framework makes this more difficult although demography is a powerful means of persuading change. A proactive and energetic approach to implementing the right retention and recruitment programmes and identifying the appropriate training needs of the workforce will be crucial. All organisations will consequently need to take urgent steps to see that they have in place the processes and systems they need to develop a skilled workforce.

The challenge faced by business is ever present and growing. Key to success will be the ability to adopt these challenges as opportunities and to ensure that staff are aware of what will be required of them in the future. Technology will also change the workplace considerably over the next 10 to 20 years, with workers measured increasingly on their output, productivity and skills development.

A view from the bridge

Manpower has an eye fixed very firmly on globalisation and future trends. There is, however, no definitive explanation of how globalisation and work fit together, although the way developing countries are focusing on education as a means of increasing opportunities for economic growth is, at times, startling. In China, for example, Shanghai has been identified as an area for potential economic development. An audit of the skills required for business and industry in the area has been carried out and the skills and knowledge base of education changed to meet future employment needs. The Chinese government recognises that education is the means by which economic growth is realised and manufacturing will be moved around, sourcing labour and materials at competitive rates.

¹ Manpower Report February 2006

The focus on achieving good levels of education will bring increased opportunities to the global economy. Within this global economy, Europe will be challenged, unable to compete with growing economies rising from Brazil and India as well as China and the USA.

- **Businesses cannot produce the right levels of skills in Europe.** In Europe low-cost labour will not be available and European countries will only compete in the global marketplace by developing high levels of knowledge and skills. For Europe, higher value-added will be very important. Businesses predict that a 1.5 per cent growth in the economy will require a 0.75 per cent growth in labour. Analysis of current data indicates this is not happening and that Europe is suffering an education and skills meltdown. The way forward is to create a talent map outlining these skills, together with identified competences that will enable businesses to compete globally with a flexible workforce. Education systems should be developed and built around this talent map, in order to support global trends and opportunities to compete in the global market. The very nature of economic globalisation will lead to continued pressure and competition to bear down on educational systems and dictate not only the content of the curriculum, but also the way it is delivered. The need for quality vocational as well as academic qualifications must be addressed.
- **What we need are politicians who are not protecting national boundaries.** We will be challenged as nations and continents over how we split up what work is available. Decisions must be made on what can be off-shored and in-shored and everything that can be off-shored and in-shored will be. Trades that cannot be off-shored could be the highest paid professions, for example, hairdressing and plumbing. Globalisation will create problems for the workforce, which will migrate to where work is available and create competition on a local, national and international level. Although national borders need to come down, there are few incentives to break down barriers. Changes to immigration policies would help this. Nonetheless, we must be ready for a multi-cultural society and cultural acceptability. An additional impact of this will be the move away from social cohesion through collective care, the nuclear and extended family, church and state, to

greater individual responsibility and social isolation. There is no existing plan or proposal outlining organisation for migration, although it is needed.

- **The willingness to keep learning is a must.** The implication of globalisation for education is a move away from gaining life-long qualifications, towards life-long learning. Education systems must provide students with the necessary skills, equipping them to know how to learn. The willingness to keep learning is a must. This challenges the workforce at all levels, the young because the development of skills has not had time to mature and senior staff who may struggle to keep pace with systems that are rapidly changing. Frequent changes in employment, or job-hopping, will be the way forward, with workers progressing along the career ladder through continuous training and mentoring.

Futures learning – a school leader's perspective

There's a strong link between an organisation which helps companies develop their employees and schools which build the foundations for life-long learning. Yet, what is striking are the differences in perspective. From the analysis, workers will be more flexible, work longer and continue to develop skills. Schools will have to get the foundations right if we are to continue to be a successful economy. I'm struck by the need to balance this with young people whose education is founded on the values needed to give them the personal robustness to live life successfully.

If we consider the Shanghai model, the way forward might be to create a talent map in the following way. Following an audit to identify gaps in knowledge, skills and competences, the curriculum would be designed to meet future employment needs. This new curriculum would be dictated by global trends, with an emphasis on vocational as well as academic qualifications, flexibility and life-long learning. As a result of this, traditional schools might become a thing of the past. Instead there would be centres staffed by specialists who would deliver the curriculum in a work-based environment, where students take responsibility for their own learning, developing life skills that will prepare them for a future in which they will manage more than one career.

Should school leaders consider this as a model for their own schools or are there different values that should determine the future of education? In Finland for example, a recent report found the recipe for success in the education system was the amount of investment put into education across all age ranges. This is not just a short-term boost, but continuous investment, particularly in teacher training, concentrated on knowing the subject and how to motivate and inspire children. In Finland, there is an overarching progressive curriculum, involving business, but school leaders are given the freedom to develop the way in which the curriculum is implemented. Education is designed to open minds to become more adaptable to different situations, linking receptiveness as a person towards learning. General culture, sport, life skills are all part of a broad and balanced curriculum. School leaders are well respected within the community, standing alongside the police, church and others in authority.

We need to ensure the right foundations are being laid to prepare students for the workplace. School leaders must consider the impact of globalisation and how this might shape the future of education, by providing a curriculum that takes into account the knowledge, skills and competencies that individuals require to help them manage the changes they will face during their working life and support future economies. The challenge for school leaders must be to anticipate the issues and opportunities that the changing world of work presents.

Pause for thought...?

- **In the light of the analysis, what would a curriculum for globalisation look like? If we were serious about it, how would we go about its development?**
- **Should values such as personal growth, social cohesion and economic stability be reflected in education policy? If so, how?**
- **Does educational policy determined by economic efficiency lead to dumbing down and cultural degradation or challenge, opportunity and innovation? In what ways?**
- **Are students adequately prepared to take control of careers and job choices? How might this be encouraged?**
- **What role should schools play in preparing for a multi-cultural society, or establishing national values?**
- **How do we prepare students for a life built on continuous learning?**

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