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Volume 13, No. 1, October 2013

FUTURE NEWS

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Is a school a local institution meeting the educational needs of its community or a part of a national commitment to educating future Australians or both?

by Charles Brass, Chair futures foundation

Until very recently most schools in Australia were firmly embedded in a supra-local framework designed to provide a consistent quality of education within their particular constituency.

Australia's constitutional founders decided that schools were largely a state responsibility, and the majority of schools in each state have traditionally been run by a state education bureaucracy. Alongside state schools have sat networks of religiously affiliated schools, each of which was a part of a particular religion's community outreach. A relatively small number of genuinely independent schools completed Australia's educational landscape (but even these were constrained to at least be part of a state based tertiary entrance process).

Over perhaps the past 20 years this landscape has changed in a number of often contradictory ways:

State bureaucracies (and religious institutions) have actively explored the devolution of an increasing range of responsibilities to individual school communities.

while at the same time

National governments have sought to impose an increasing number of Australian standards on education systems and individual schools.

Schools have been encouraged to specialise to meet local needs, and a variety of alternative tertiary entrance pathways are being created and encouraged.

while at the same time

Attempts to standardise curriculum nationally increase in various ways.

Modern computer based technology is being universally embraced.

while at the same time

Experts bemoan the loss of so-called basic skills including reading writing and arithmetical calculation

Navigating these competing forces is just one of the challenges facing those running today's Australian schools.

Amongst other challenges, they also have to deal with:

- increasing numbers of immigrant children with an inadequate knowledge of English – in parallel with a demand to teach more foreign languages.
- a trend towards placing disadvantaged students or those with disabilities within mainstream communities – in parallel with a steady reduction in funds available for integration aides and other additional classroom resources.
- calls for national student testing regimes – in parallel with an increased focus on measuring the performance of individual teachers.
- an increasingly polarised debate about who should be paying for school education, the state or individual parents.
- increased emphasis on meeting the individual learning needs of each student – in parallel with calls for the curriculum to be more focused on reducing perceived national work skills deficits.

And these are just some of the challenges which have changed the landscape over the past 20 years. As well, schools are supposed to be preparing their students for adulthood over the next 20 years when there is little agreement on just what it will mean to be a functional adult in the future.

If we can't even agree on how schools should operate today, how can we possibly prepare students for life twenty years from now? In the face of these uncertainties it would be hardly surprising if those who run our schools feel overwhelmed and pummelled by competing forces well beyond their control. In the past, individual school principals might have hoped that institutional structures might insulate them from the vagaries of competing objectives and uncertain futures. Not any more.

The ability to manage uncertainty and changing priorities is now an essential part of

every principal's (and teacher's) toolkit, and more importantly mindset. While it is possible to learn to better manage complexity, the prime requirement for success is attitudinal readiness – an acceptance, if not expectation, that one's working environment will not stay stable for very long.

American philosopher Ken Wilber provides one way to assimilate this mindset in his book "A Brief History of Everything". Wilber popularised the term 'holon' to describe any entity (an atom is a holon, as is a person, as is a school) and then noted that every holon is simultaneously both part of a larger holon and a superposition of smaller holons. A school, for example, is both part of a larger education system and also comprises individual teachers, students, books etc.

Recognising this 'holonic' quality of every situation is one way to hold apparently differing perspectives simultaneously. It also helps structure one's thinking. Perhaps the situation can first be analysed from the perspective of the larger system in which it is inevitably situated, and then from the perspective of each of its constituent parts. Both these analyses will be 'true' and 'valid' and both will need to be accommodated in any proposed solution or action.

Another of Wilber's insights is also helpful and it follows directly from the holonic nature of everything. There is a natural tendency to search for 'the truth' in any situation and then to take action based on having uncovered this 'truth'. Wilber points out that all truth is inevitably partial and incomplete. He reminds us that there are always other possible ways of analysing every situation and multiple valid conclusions which can be drawn. Instead of searching for 'the truth' or 'the one best way' wise leaders acknowledge that any decisions they make, or actions they take, are partial, inevitably based on partial information. They do the best they can in the situation, always being prepared to re-think their decisions as new evidence becomes available.

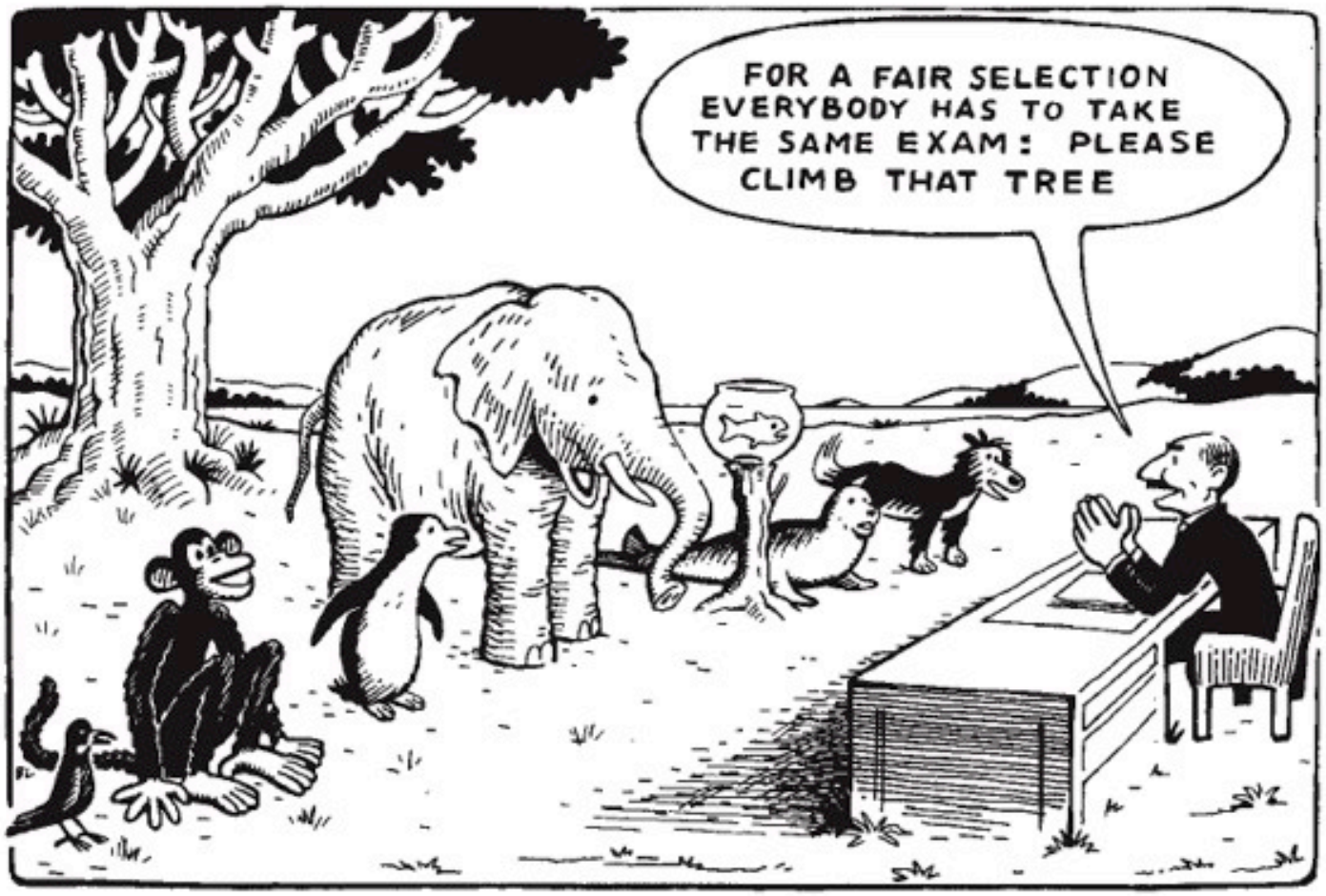
In a world in which those in charge are incessantly told they must always 'get things right', Wilber's philosophy might provide some comfort.

All of the competing forces affecting twenty-first century schools have some validity. All need to be assessed in terms of the resources locally available to respond to them. And all need to be responded to in ways which best meet local needs. Which inevitably means they will be responded to in different ways in different schools – which is exactly how useful diversity arises, and how we learn best.

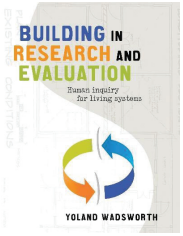
When something works well in one setting it deserves to be evaluated for what it might teach others. When something doesn't work somewhere it too should be examined so others learn lessons relevant to their particular setting.

Schools are arguably among the most important institutions in our modern world. Those charged with running them on behalf of the rest of us have a difficult task managing their complex unpredictable environment. But this is no more than their students will also face as they grow up.

"Never let the perfect become the enemy of the good" - Voltaire



failingtolearnbetter.blogspot.com - by Mike Gunn – reproduced with permission



Book Review

Our book review this month is a title which is increasingly being seen on the bookshelves of both school principals and community engagement practitioners:

"Building in Research and Evaluation – Human inquiry for living Systems", by Yoland Wadsworth – published by Allen and Unwin in 2010

Yoland Wadsworth

How do we know that what we are planning to do will make a positive difference? This question bothers all those, such as school teachers and government officials, who act on behalf of others, and it has bothered Yoland Wadsworth for nearly 40 years.

Initially a practitioner in a mental health setting, Yoland has expanded her interest in expanded her interest in what makes for better actions and interventions into numerous positions in government departments and universities, and into three books.

Her latest is an attempt not only to summarise what she has witnessed, and been part of, for all her adult life, but to advocate for a new approach to answering this question which she called 'human inquiry'.

Yoland began her working life as a researcher crunching numbers derived from various surveys, and her dissatisfaction with both the quality of her own conclusions and the design of most surveys has dominated her thinking ever since. When she began her work, research and evaluation were seen as the private domain of a small group of professional practitioners who were part, but never at the centre, of community service programs. Over the past thirty years these professionals (Yoland included) have developed and refined a wide range of tools and techniques for evaluating the impact of any community or business initiative. Yoland lists the major categories of these methods as interviews, focus groups, surveys, case studies, randomised controlled experimental trials, in-depth qualitative cultural studies, feedback sheets, ethnographies, and appreciative inquiry (p1) and she challenges us by asking whether all this professionalism has actually made things better. "Did anyone notice", she asks on page 2, "how we spent the 1970s and 1980s researching and developing a whole new range of essential human services in response to meticulously identified new needs only to see them get thoroughly defunded and dismantled in the 1980s and 1990s?". "Will we have to wait years more for the evaluations before we respond to the damaged generation of the decades of lost services?" She peppers he book with cartoons like this one which suggest that perhaps now might be the time to ask whether we: "just need lots more specialised professional research and evaluation projects, and to gather lots more data, statistics, evidence, observations and measurement? And write lots more policies, protocols, procedures and performance improvement schedules.....Or, like the fat man at the pie-eating contest are we risking feeding more of the same to a 'body politic' that is really something from something else altogether missing? Are we becoming something of a Tower of Babel with all the existing efforts clamouring without altering the patterns of injustice, exclusion, short-sighted reactivity and lack of compassion?" (p 2)

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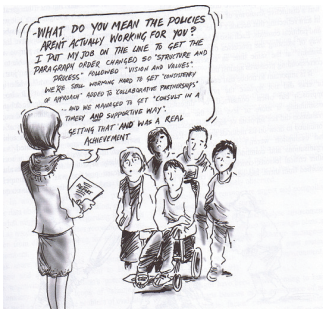
Yoland describes her book as "reaching out for … a new way of seeing – a new 'mental architecture' to 'scaffold' us to a different view of ourselves and each other" (p3). And she really means a new way, not just this kind of new way:



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Yoland proposes that we recognise that human systems are not like bicycles which can be dissembled, each part evaluated, and then re-assembled in order to understand the whole bike. Rather human systems are living systems in which the parts connect and interact with each other in unpredictable ways. Systems in which, in particular, research and evaluation (and researchers and evaluators) are integral parts of the system.

She begins by describing a sequence of three somewhat chronologically distinct and sequential historical eras in which emphasis shifted from research to evaluation and then to continuous improvement; and concludes that each of these are needed to be integrated into "full cycles of inquiry in a new era of 'living systems'" (p272).

She describes the elements of these 'full cycles of enquiry' as:

- remaining open to new feedback, input, ideas and beginnings
- supporting new clusters of ideas, activities, services and programs where their boundaries have been shaped around purposeful energies and values – while still nurturing the existing terrain
- continually testing the hardiness and resilience of everything we do
- both celebrating success and mourning losses and failed efforts
- allowing time for rest and recovery (p272-3) and much of the book not only describes in great detail how these elements might be respected, but provided numerous examples of settings in which they have succeeded (and failed).

She suggests that there are four key understandings which are needed if we are to embrace 'human inquiry':

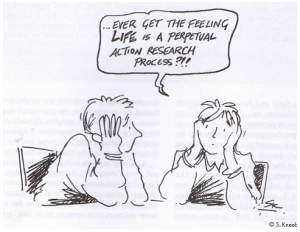
- the need to enhance everyday inquiry capability this is more than 'building-in' research and evaluation, it is empowering all participants to be their own researchers and evaluators and recognising that "every moment and every day begins with new inquiry" (p276)
- the need to create concrete ways for people to meet and inquire together
- the need to ensure ways to collect and share information, reflect on it, and generate new knowledge
- the need for ways to continue inquiry through action – and to facilitate learning about how to continue to inquire every more deeply and widely (p277)

This is not an easy book to read and act upon (though it does contain much distilled wisdom about how to act in settings where a broader community is involved),

It is very much the sort of text book one would hope to receive if one enrolled in a course on research and evaluation, which might suggest a way in which it might be effectively used within organisations.

It is, however, a book which deserves to inform all those who act on behalf of others, and whose success depends on the actions and reactions of others.

This is perhaps best encapsulated by one final cartoon from the book:



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FUTURISTS IN ACTION

Facilitating a HEPPP Conference

Late last year, futures foundation Chair, Charles Brass, was asked to help design and participate in a conference focusing on the future of one particular HEPPP partnership.

HEPPP is the acronym of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program through which the Federal Government has committed many hundreds of millions of dollars to support universities willing to link with low SES schools in innovative programs designed to get more students from these schools into tertiary education.

This particular HEPPP had been operating for two years and the conference was designed to plan for the second cohort of students who will enter the program in 2013.

The futures foundation was initially asked to provide an after dinner speaker who would "lift the eyes of the participants beyond the horizon", which is a very common reason for inviting futurists.

On the basis that futurists are trained in facilitating processes through which people more effectively engage with their future, we offered to become more involved in the design of the entire conference.

After some discussion, it was agreed that the conference would begin one lunchtime with a detailed review of activities over the past two years. This day would end with an evening dinner, at which Charles would be the guest speaker.

The final day of the conference would focus on the future, and would end with a series of commitments from each of the participants detailing how they would combine to create the two year long program in which the new cohort would participate.

This design is consistent with a fundamental tenet of all good futures work – before one ventures into the future, one should first seek to understand how we arrived at the present. Too often it is assumed that a shared understanding of what has happened exists and all agree on how the present situation arose. In fact, the past is most often just as contested a space as is the future.

In this conference, the organisers first provided an opportunity for the participants from each institution (three secondary schools and one university) to share their perspectives with their colleagues. Then the entire conference came together to begin to create a shared picture of the past two years. There was a deliberate structure to these sessions with participants being asked to consider, and share, what they thought had worked well, what could have gone better, and who else needed to be involved, among other questions.

As the bridge between the past and the future, Charles' after dinner presentation drew on his previous experience as a teacher in what was then called a disadvantaged school. He basically told the story of how one particular student had, rather serendipitously, overcome the many disadvantages she faced to create a very successful life. As part of this presentation, Charles reflected on the elements of this student's disadvantage which she had needed to overcome on order for her to succeed, and pondered what systematic changes might need to be made if this one girl's experience was to become commonplace.

The first session next day began in the future. Charles took the vision which the participants had created when the first began the program two years ago and turned it into a statement describing an actual state of affairs in 2030.

Using a foresight technique known as backcasting, Charles then invited participants to reflect on what must have changed in their world in 2012 if the statement of what their schools were like in 2030 had actually occurred.

Participants were randomly divided into small groups each of which was initially asked to consider only one aspect of a school's operations (leadership and administration, teachers, students, curriculum and relationship to the university). This session concluded first with a report from each team identifying the key themes which they believed needed to change if the 2030 situation was to become a reality; and then a discussion of what had surprised each participant.

Charles then left and the remainder of the day was devoted to creating an action plan for the next two years of the program.
By the end of the day, everyone had a list of tasks to which they had committed, and an insight into the changes which might need to take place at their school if this program was to be successful in the long term.

In their feedback evaluations participants commented that they felt that the conference process gave them an exceedingly useful way of thinking through their current situation and plan for the future of their program, and the organisers have asked the futures foundation to continue to work with them in the future.

BRIDGES TO HIGHER EDUCATION

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY · THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY · UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY · ACU AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY · University of Western Sydney Bringing knowledge to life

What Matters: How Kids Learn and Genuine Collaboration

The Holroyd High Success Story

There is nothing flash about this school. Dorothy knows that her school, like many others needs a massive capital investment (remember the BER was directed at primary schools) but her priorities are clear.

"With any extra funding that comes my way, I invest in people, not in stuff."

That approach has paid off in spades. Holroyd punches above its weight and sends an average of 45% of graduating students to universities. Many more make successful transitions into training or work. This from a school where a large percentage of students start high school with little or no English. Holroyd's value added results for ESL students are above the state average..

Experiential Excursions

A big effort is placed on 'experiential excursions' – small day trips organised by teachers to help expose students to the wider world of city life and its complexities. For new arrivals, it can be something as simple as how to ride on an escalator, how to fill out forms at Medicare, how to use public transport…

A Big Question

A bright young female student from Afghanistan [was taken] on a trip to Watson's Bay – home of our great novelist Christina Stead who knew a thing or two about families and culture – and all was going well until the young girl hit Dorothy with a question she never expected.

"How do these boats stay in the water?"

The twenty footers and the luxury cruisers weren't part of this girl's life experience but that question kicked off an extended tutorial that ranged over everything from water displacement, the design of hulls, modern shipping routes, and eventually took in the journeys of the great explorers of the 18th century, and eventually got around to the international law of the sea and the obligation of mariners to help those in distress.

Not a bad lesson and with no electronic whiteboard in sight. How We All learn
We all start to learn this way. As youngsters we are curious. We drive our parents nuts by constantly asking 'why'.

The best teachers understand this. They encourage the curiosity of their students, they fire them up about possibilities and a sense of wonder, and it's precisely this that Dorothy Hoddinott is embedding as best practice at Holroyd.

"We put students at the centre of everything. We consciously evaluate everything we do. Above all I want teachers here to think positively and expect the best. I certainly do. I'm constantly saying to students – you are intelligent, you have a gift. I expect you to finish your HSC. I expect you to go to university."

In 1995, Dorothy Hoddinott took on the stewardship of a school that she says had a 'negative culture and was balkanised'.

'Import High'

The school was known locally as 'Import High' a label helpfully reinforced by a group of teachers who referred to newly arrived migrant or refugee youngsters as 'imports' and actively excluded them from any of the schools specialist classes. Those unfortunate enough to be tagged in this way were not allowed near the Art room. Discrimination was overt and the right of all students to a comprehensive education was a notion that was simply trashed.

That's just the way things were at Holroyd High until Dorothy Hoddinott walked in the door and started her very own education revolution.

She put new structures in place, executed some significant HR change, tore up the school rule book (full of 'thou shall nots') insisted on transparency and evaluation, and set about writing a new code of behaviour around the concept of respect.

"Schools in areas of significant disadvantage need leaders who have the intellectual capacity to look deeply at the culture of a school, and to work hard on the issues that will bring about change."

Turning Things Around

Biting the bullet on the hard decisions, and doing it early in her tenure as a new Principal, has yielded big benefits. Staff morale has turned around, absenteeism is low, and there is now a stability at the school that was absent before.

Along with improved and measurable achievement for students, Dorothy also points to the non numerical indicators.

"We have seen a decline in littering, in petty vandalism, in graffiti, and we now have a very low suspension rate. This is a respectful place. Above all teachers and students have learnt how to negotiate."

And yes, the Art Room is now open to all comers..

The key levers for achieving change revolve around:

- clarity and understanding of an organisational plan for the whole school community
- close monitoring of student data
- teacher evaluation
- staff buy-in on the key goals
- a genuine collaborative approach to learning from each other

Extra Dollars Do Help

Courtesy of the final round of the National Partnership funding, Holroyd now has a HAT (Highly Accomplished Teacher) who works in an intensive way with classroom teachers to help with pedagogy and innovative learning approaches. Rebecca Mahon has taken on this role at Holroyd and is one of the reasons that the HATs are a major NSW success story. Pity no-one talks about them.

Summing Up

So is this a story of one gutsy woman defying the system? In part, yes.

But there is nothing magical about what has happened at Holroyd. It's taken a lot of time, a lot of smarts, a fair bit of heartburn and it's probably even taken a few years off Dorothy.

But Dorothy and her teachers have got the important things right at Holroyd.

They understand the power of ideas.

They dream big dreams.

And most critical of all, they know that you have to take the time to listen to young people and answer them honestly when they ask "how do boats stay on water?"

An age-old model. Isn't leadership in education – at all levels – about understanding human behaviour?

Source: http://www.pigswillfly.com.au/

"The illiterate of the future are not those that cannot read or write, but those that cannot learn, unlearn and relearn' - Alvin Tofler

Principal fires security guards, hires art teachers and transforms his American suburban school

The community of Roxbury in Massachusetts had high hopes for its newest public school back in 2003. There were art studios, a dance room, even a theatre equipped with cushy seating.

A pilot school for grades K-8, Orchard Gardens was built on grand expectations. But the dream of a school founded in the arts, a school that would give back to the community as it bettered its children, never materialized. Instead, the dance studio was used for storage and the orchestra's instruments were locked up and barely touched.

The school was plagued by violence and disorder from the start, and by 2010 it was rank in the bottom five of all public schools in the state of Massachusetts.

That was when Andrew Bott — the sixth principal in seven years — showed up, and everything started to change.

"We got rid of the security guards," said Bott, who reinvested all the money used for security infrastructure into the arts.

Orchard Gardens a one-time 'career killer'
In a school notorious for its lack of discipline, where backpacks were prohibited for fear the students would use them to carry weapons, Bott's bold decision to replace the security guards with art teachers was met with skepticism by those who also questioned why he would choose to lead the troubled school. *"A lot of my colleagues really questioned the decision,"* he said. *"A lot of people actually would say to me, 'You realize that Orchard Gardens is a career killer? You know, you don't want to go to Orchard Gardens.'"*

But now, three years later, the school is almost unrecognizable. Brightly colored paintings, essays of achievement, and motivational posters line the halls. The dance studio has been resurrected, along with the band room, and an artists' studio.
The end result? Orchard Gardens has one of the fastest student improvement rates statewide. And the students — once described as loud and unruly, have found their focus. *"We have our occasional, typical adolescent ... problems,"* Bott said. *"But nothing that is out of the normal for any school."*

The school is far from perfect. Test scores are better, but still below average in many areas. Bott says they're *"far from done, but definitely on the right path."*
The students, he says, are evidence of that.
'I can really have a future in this'
Eighth grader Keyvaughn Little said he's come out of his shell since the school's turnaround. *"I've been more open, and I've expressed myself more than I would have before the arts have came."*

His grades have improved, too. Keyvaughn says it's because of the teachers — and new confidence stemming from art class. *"There's no one particular way of doing something,"* he said. *"And art helps you like see that. So if you take that with you, and bring it on, it will actually help you see that in academics or anything else, there's not one specific way you have to do something."* Keyvaughn has now been accepted to the competitive Boston Arts Academy, the city's only public high school specializing in visual and performing arts.

"All of the extra classes and the extra focus on it and the extra attention make you think that, 'Hey, oh my gosh, I can really have a future in this, I don't have to go to a regular high school — I can go to art school", he said.

Source:
http://dailynightly.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/05/01/18005192-principal-fires-security-guards-to-hire-art-teachers-and-transforms-elementary-school

SIGNALS IN THE NOISE

NEXT 5

McKinsey Global Institute Ranks Most Disruptive Technologies to 2025

What technologies will most radically transform human life in the next twelve years? The McKinsey Global Institute looked at more than a hundred possible candidates across a variety of technology fields and narrowed the most potentially disruptive down to a dozen.

They are, in order of size of potential impact:

- **Mobile Internet** defined as *"increasingly inexpensive and capable mobile computing devices and Internet connectively."*
- **Automation of knowledge work** or *"intelligent software systems that perform knowledge work* tasks involving unstructrured commands and subtle judgments." An example might be IBM's Watson system.
- **Internet of Things** or *"networks of low-cost sensors and actuators for data collection, monitoring, decision making and process optimization."*
- **Cloud Technology** or *"use of computer hardware and software resources delivered over a network or the Internet, often as a service."*
- **Advanced Robotics** or *"increasingly capable robots with enhanced senses, dexterity, and intelligence used to automate tasks or augment humans."* This category is perhaps most famously personified by the Baxter robot
- **Autonomous and Near-Autonomous Vehicles.**
- **Next Generation Genomics** or *"fast, low-cost gene sequencing, advanced big-data analytics, and synthetic biology."*
- **Energy Storage.**
- **3D Printing.**
- **Advanced Materials** defined as *"materials designed to have superior characteristics."* Much of what we today call nanotechnology would fall within this category.
- **Advanced Oil and Natural Gas Recovery.**
- **Renewable Energy.**

Of the above, the Mobile Internet, which could change the lives of more than 5 billion people around the globe, the automation of knowledge work, and the Internet of Things would have by far the largest economic impacts, according to McKinsey. All together, the above technologies could generate $14 to $33 trillion. But the authors caution that much of that growth will be at the expense of older technologies and even entire industries falling into obsolescence.

"When necessary, leaders must be prepared to disrupt their own businesses and make the investments to effect change," the report's authors write. *"By the time the technologies that we describe are exerting their influence on the economy in 2025, it will be too late for businesses, policy makers, and citizens to plan their responses. Nobody, especially businesses leaders, can afford to be the last person using video cassettes in a DVD world."*

A full copy of this report can be sourced from the office of the futures foundation.
Send us an email to info@futuresfoundation.org.au