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Book Reviews

Learning Futures:
education, technology and social change
KERI FACER, 2011
Abingdon: Routledge
182 pages, ISBN 978 0 415 58143 1, paperback, $44.95

Education of the Future or the Future of Education?

In this compelling account of how socio-technical changes are affecting and shaping human life and activity in general, and education in particular, Keri Facer is re-imagining a vision for education futures. Juxtaposing the notions of 'future-building' and 'future-proofing', she discusses the challenges of socio-technical change and the ways this change affects our desired and real futures. Facer opts for the term 'socio-technical' in order to capture the historical, social, material and epistemological practices embedded in the 'technical' aspect. Against a given, predetermined, inevitable, prescriptive and partial future, Facer attempts to rewrite the relationship between education, socio-technical change and the future, and reclaims the right of schools to act as resources in their communities to imagine and build those futures that they want, rather than simply training for the futures they are given. Her theorizing of the future is open, non-deterministic and constructive and opens up possibilities for individual and collective agency.

Facer's central question is whether 'the orthodox future of an ever expanding global knowledge economy is sufficiently rich or robust to act as a basis for redesigning education system tools today' (p. 132). Along the lines of an 'orthodox future' narrative, the social and technological change in the twenty-first century implies that we have to adapt to a high-tech, globally competitive world. In this account, education's role is seen as overcoming inertia and catching up with the changing technological times on one hand, and, on the other, as helping and equipping learners to adapt to this future. In this particular vision, there is little room for human agency, let alone democratic change.

However, *Learning Futures* does not buy into this 'future-proofing' narrative. On the contrary, the author encourages readers to rethink what it means to imagine our own futures, outside a preconceived notion and a prescribed trajectory. She dares us to imagine educational futures based not on what we know, but rather on what we desire to see as the future of schools as democratic institutions. She argues for 'stranger, more disruptive and less benign future trajectories that are latent in contemporary socio-technical change' (p. 132) where education, in the shape of the local school as a public space, a public good and a public resource, will enable students and communities to imagine, and create, democratic spaces where they can assume individual and collective agency and take meaningful responsibility: 'If we see education as having a role in mitigating inequalities and in contributing to the creation of fairer and democratic futures', insists Facer, 'we have a responsibility to ask whether socio-technical developments will contribute to or impede that role' (p. 9).

The book is structured around the narration of dominant and alternative stories about the major challenges that schools need to respond to, if they are to become 'future-building' agencies. These challenges include: (a) human relationships, especially those between adults and children (intergenerational relationships); (b) the socio-technical change and the human body; (c) new conceptions of knowledge (knowledge commons); (d) economic landscapes and the workforce; (e) networked publics and new public spaces; (f) schools' roles as actors in democratic debate.

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Facer's discussion is fascinating, drawing from different realms of human life, and provides a wealth of high-tech examples, with narratives about the future that at times may sound like science fiction but which, nevertheless, acquire materiality in a coherent and illuminating analysis.

In discussing the evolving roles of children and adults in light of the socio-technical change, Facer analyzes in Chapter Two new ideas of childhood and adulthood that 'threaten to disrupt the standard model of adult–child relations upon which most educational institutions are premised' (p. 33). Children and teenagers are seen as consumers, gamers, entrepreneurs, and producers of new meanings and new narratives about what it means to be young. We can easily witness the generational divide as well as the renegotiation of family roles and intergenerational relationships in the changing nature and character of what we have known as the traditional 'family'. Families witness shifts as homes are reconfigured not as sites of leisure but rather as workplaces, and different generations co-existing in those spaces negotiate the new socio-technical discourse in radically different ways. The author concludes by suggesting an education for intergenerational solidarity and a commitment to building powerful learning environments to support it.

What will be the ways of being human in the future? In Chapter Three, Facer makes a much needed connection between technological change and the boundaries of the individual and the human body. These boundaries are being 'fractured and transformed in interesting ways through emerging socio-technical practices' (p. 44). Memory, lifespan, cognitive capabilities are all in the process of becoming augmented, amplified and prolonged. The individual is not simply a biological person but has a highly sophisticated and powerful set of potential capabilities, as well as a shareable, searchable and detailed history, that are recorded through ubiquitous computing. The different ways human beings are 'augmented' provide a permanent blueprint and record of places, communications, ideas, people, relationships; what Facer calls 'an intimate archive of the physical and cultural minutiae of our everyday lives' (p. 49). How does all that translate in the 'future-building' school? Facer argues that the role of the school is then

> to make visible the rich and diverse experiences that students bring into school, to show how the differences between children can be used as a basis for building all children's capacity to create, mobilize and build powerful research networks, and to make visible the sorts of network resource that others have access to and that are needed for building particular future trajectories. (p. 55)

While learning technologies have become part of the educational discourse of the past thirty years, this nevertheless has been done in an uncritical and reproductive way. One of the questions that researchers and educators are currently struggling with is how educational goals might change as a result of a new landscape of practices for gathering, sharing and collating information. Chapter Four addresses this particular question and deconstructs the common myth that technology is by default helpful and emancipatory: 'We may soon take for granted the idea that we have easily accessible tools that allow us to convey our ideas fluently in models, both virtual and material' (p. 64). Massive amounts of digital data are now competing for visibility and the impossible task of archiving and using this information is a central issue. At the same time, this data can be viewed as a shared 'knowledge commons' (p. 60) to which everybody can contribute and from which everybody can take. Humans are both producers and consumers of knowledge and information, and Facer stresses the important risks embedded in this 'knowledge commons'; private interests that pose the risks of enclosure, pollution and invisibility of the labor that goes into the production of knowledge and information. There are important implications for students and schools in dealing with this knowledge commons, or as Facer puts it, 'What curriculum will ensure that we thrive in such contexts?' She argues against a 'list of prescribed content knowledge or learning outcomes' and proposes that students should develop three attributes: discernment (supporting students to explore and to make visible the relationship between individuals, contexts and information), multiliteracy (different modalities of the digital landscape require that students are able to model, to experiment, to visualize, to verbalize, to write and to film, among other things) and responsibility (seeing our developing socio-technical knowledge as the product of choices and intentions rather than as a disembodied, inevitable and unstoppable force).

In Chapter Five Facer explores some of the highly conflicting visions of economic futures that are emerging from the interplay between technological and economic change. Under the telling title 'Mind the Gaps' she discusses 'crowd sourcing' as a new model to source ideas by large

numbers of people where knowledge and creativity are the new natural resources to be tapped. Knowledge and creativity seem to be the new top qualifications and different industries are tapping consumers as originators of ideas that will ultimately be connected with the new knowledge economy. However, these new models of working affect considerably real labor or relations of production and further blur the lines between consumers, co-producers, regulators, industries, and so forth. These new practices have led to a certain polarization of the workforce: the gap between a large body of poorly paid labor and a small body of elite global talent seems even larger. This reality points to a highly polarized future as well: 'such a polarization would make it harder for social mobility, let alone social equality, as the occupational ladders that would have provided opportunities for progression are broken by the scale of the gap between talent and the rest and by the increasing insecurity of those "in the middle" protecting their position' (p. 80). There is a need to rebalance discussions about the implications of socio-technical change for the future economy. In an orthodox narrative of the future 'schools risk to prepare students for a future of radical inequality that offers desirable futures for only a small elite and sustainable futures for no one' (p. 88). Facer proposes two directions for schools that will build alternative futures: first the school needs to be a public space, a type of agora where teachers, students and communities come together to dialogue, debate, critique and challenge. Second, schools must acknowledge their deeply economic character and function. Schools are not only part and parcel of an existing economic reality; they further contain, produce and reproduce their own internal political economy.

The role of 'networked publics' is discussed in depth in Chapter 6. These are seen as sites that host new types of human engagement, ranging from social networking and consumer interest to developing new forms of participation and citizenship, or even electing a president. And while the borders between commercial and civic are often blurred, this is an important discussion about networked publics as new public spaces where participation, self-representation and intertwined stories take on a new meaning. As far as schools are concerned, these new sites should be understood as important resources for practicing democracy and for offering new resources to enable schools to effect change (pp. 89-90). Facer suggests that, in light of this discussion, we need to rethink our definition of public spaces to expand to these virtual, *sine loco* spheres. 'Networked publics' hold emancipator potential and promise for student agency, as in the case of citizen journalism that creates an alternative version of news stories and where producers and readers of stories coincide, where media power is about collective intelligence rather than media concentration and control. Furthermore, access to vast amounts of data from an array of different sources makes it easier for individuals to synthesize, challenge and analyze their version of a story.

Facer is cautious to note the risks embedded in the very potential of these new digital tools: the persistent digital divide in the United Kingdom and worldwide that makes questions of access particularly important, the percentage of actual involvement of people in social causes and civic issues online, the documented retaliatory use of these same tools by governments, 'compulsory individuality', as well as a retreat from politics. The author insists that 'the critical choice in modes of civic engagement over the coming years ... may be a choice between civic engagement as a cultural accessory cultivated to maintain an impression of agency or civic engagement conceived of as an embodied and lived commitment to sustain dialogue' (p. 99). Schools, rather than using these technologies for surveillance, control, and containment, should ensure that they are used towards practicing democracy, creating public spaces for dialogue and debate and building long-term caring human relationships.

Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine succinctly summarize the author's vision of the future of education with a discussion of the 'future-building schools'. This vision is materialized in Chapter Eight, where Facer provides a very graphic – almost science fiction – presentation of the school of 2035 that unfolds in detail before the reader's eyes in narrative. The chapter starts with the image of a caregiver and a child walking up to the school of 2035. Facer takes us to different material and digital loci where discussions from previous chapters here acquire flesh and bones and provide a vivid glance into the 'future-building' school of the future. The final chapter discusses cases of the 'future-building' schools currently at work, as an attempt to illustrate the previous chapter's imaginary account and bring it to life through concrete cases.

Facer touches upon issues of disparity in technology use, and the 'socio-economic' gaps, as issues of access continue to plague people's entry to the global village. While trade and goods

(including cultural goods) almost instantaneously cross borders unimpeded, billions of people still remain locked out by more rigid and militarized cultural and physical borders, as noted by David Trend (2001): 'While a minority of the world's population is moving into a virtual society, with all of the attendant benefits, the rest of humanity remains in a world of material scarcity. As increasing amounts of commercial and cultural activity are shifting to the Internet, the distance between the connected and the unconnected may well be creating a new global information proletariat' (p. 10). This 'unconnected underclass' seems to get lost at times in Facer's discussion. Similarly, it is important to discuss how the socio-technical change is affecting not only those who do not have (and will not have) access to this new digital world where power and economic relations remain rigidly asymmetrical, but also how it affects labor and relations of production. Issues of social class play an important role in this globally interconnected village. As Manuel Castells (1985) has observed, 'between the discontinuous spatial elements of the informational city, there will remain switched off, wireless communities, still real people in real places, yet transformed into urban shadows doomed to haunt the ultimate urban dream of the new technocracy'(p. 19). As we talk about the future-building schools, it would be interesting to explore how we are going to bring in the unconnected underclass, those that remain switched off.

Nevertheless, Facer's book opens up a space for an important dialogue and sets the agenda concerning the school of the future as well as the future of the schools. She does so not by celebrating technology, nor by uncritically accepting it or simply adapting to it, nor by being overly critical to the point of dismissing it. On the contrary, she asks pertinent questions that challenge today's instrumental education that is connected to the formal economy and problematizes the goals and vision of education. She sees education as a crucial site for future visions, a site that does not simply assimilate technologies, but rather contributes to creating or reappropriating those needed. At the same time, she forcefully argues that schools do engage the kind of actors (students, teachers and communities) who are able to intervene and map out new visions for sustainable, equitable and positive futures. Towards that direction, what is even more interesting in her discussion is the constant attempt to bring the issues back home and bridge the local with the networked, the digital and the global, by stressing always the importance of the local. Future-building schools are those that will be able to tap on resources from the socio-technical change, locally and globally, to map out their own democratic, equitable futures.

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Childhood and Consumer Culture
DAVID BUCKINGHAM & VEBJORG TINGSTAD (Eds), 2010
Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
280 pages, ISBN 978 0230227835, hardback, £58

Economists often employ the term 'utility' to describe the pleasure or satisfaction one receives from purchasing a particular good or service. In the most basic and convenient definition of the word, utility is a subjective measure of pleasure or satisfaction that often varies across individuals based on preferences and tastes. It is often advocated within the economic and marketing communities that preferences and tastes will change throughout one's life cycle. Buckingham and Tingstad (2011) bring to attention the new genre where 'marketers are seeking to target children more directly and at an ever-younger age; and they are using a much wider range of techniques

that go well beyond conventional advertising' (p. 1). In their book, *Childhood and Consumer Culture*, these authors explore a more profound way of 'how the commercial market operates and how children relate to it' (p. 2).

This book emerges from 'Child and Teen Consumption', a conference held every two years since 2004. This text collects the best papers from the 2008 conference held at the Norwegian Centre for Children Research in Trondheim, with chapters written by well-known scholars and emerging researchers from the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, China, Israel, Norway and Sweden. The book consist of five parts: Part I – History of Children's Consumption; Part II – Theory and Method in Research on Children's Consumption; Part III – Practices of Contemporary Marketers; Part IV – Social Contexts of Children's Consumption; and Part V – Childhood Identities and Consumption. Each part includes three enriching and informative, well-written and well-organized chapters with empirical data and case studies.

Part I commences with a historical overview by Gary Cross of the ever-changing relationships between adults and children in the United States consumer culture. Cross demonstrates the historical influence of 'how adults have repeatedly projected onto children their own contradictions and desires' (p. 7). A culture of teenage 'cool' has become a lifestyle for both adults and children alike. In Chapter 2, Tora Korsvold examines a historical case study of the Norwegian company Riktige Leker (Proper Toys). The toys marketed are pedagogical and focused on 'good parenting', despite the popularity of war games and sexuality. Proper Toys is constructed on a tradition that defines 'play as progress, and on into adult hegemony that claims to know children's "own good"' (p. 7). Furthermore, Korsvold's analysis centers on the distinction between accepted definition and sustainability, as well as the interpretational shift in social values and in the ideologies, along with the best practices of contemporary parenting. In Chapter 3, Jacob Smith provides an additional historical case study of the marketing scheme of children's phonograph records. Smith addresses 'how the child audience was constructed and addressed, and how parents were implicated in this process' (p. 7). Furthermore, he takes into consideration the combination of appeals to education and entertainment of children's nursery rhymes and songs.

Part II addresses questions of theory and method in research on children's consumption. In Chapter 4, Daniel Thomas Cook advocates a theoretical critique of the widely-used concept of 'consumer socialization'. Furthermore, this concept has been acknowledged as 'a paradigm that carries the embedded assumption that there is some point where the human organism "enters" consumer life from a place or time "outside" of it; and that there is a know (or knowable) end point to the development of the consumer – usually that of the "competent adult"' (p. 8). By plurality assumptions children are viewed as a unique and marketable consumer entering into a social relationship 'with and through goods' of their taste and preferences. In Chapter 5 Barbro Johansson seeks to 'develop a broader theoretical analysis of the role of consumption in the construction of a "generational order", in which people in different life stages are organized in relation to each other, and power and responsibility are allocated between them' (p. 8). Johansson seeks to move beyond the polarity between 'being' and 'becoming'. In Chapter 6, Claudia Mitchell makes a case for the study of 'material culture of childhood as a means of empirically grounding the emerging body of sociological and cultural research on children's consumption' (p. 9). This chapter positively confirms the study of children's material culture along with promising recommendations for further empirical research.

In Part III, Chapter 7, Janet Wasko examines the 'phenomenon of children's online social network worlds, drawing particularly on forms on critical analysis developed within the "political economy" approach to media and communication' (p. 9). Wasko provides two case studies introducing two leading children's sites, Neopets and Webkinz, examining the ways the sites 'defined and produce children as consumers; and the forms of consumer ideology they promote' (p. 9). In Chapter 8, Ingunn Hagen and Oivind Nakken hypothesise the 'phenomenon of children's consumer "crazes" – situations where highly marketed media products and their spin-offs suddenly "catch-on" and become popular with children' (p. 10). The analysis centers on a Norwegian cartoon character, Captain Sabertooth; Hagen and Nakken focus their attention on the marketing strategies employed by multiple producers in achieving as well as maintaining long-lasting brand loyalty among advent consumers. The final chapter by Lydia Martens analyses the United Kingdom consumer exhibition The Baby Show. Martens brings to attention the two dimensions of the Show – the spectacular and the practical. '"What it means to become a parent" in

contemporary society is culturally constructed alongside and in relation to "what it means to be a baby" – constructions that are essentially created by adults working discursively on the cultural distinction between adulthood and childhood' (p. 10).

Part IV begins with Chapter 10, in which Caitlyn Collins and Michaelle Janning analyze 'how children of divorced parents use artifacts of material culture to construct the meaning of domestic spaces and to form identity' (p. 11). Collins and Jannings provide an engaging case study of the significance of children's material culture, along the avenues in which its meaning varies according to social settings and relationships (p. 11). In Chapter 11, Randi Waerdahl examines the children and parents residing in China's consumer revolution. Chinese scholars are extremely concerned that 'excessive spending on children is a result of parents' lack of quality time to spend with the family' (p. 11), a concern that may be shared with other global economies. Empirical research in the form of questionnaires, interviews and home visits reveals changing and contested ideas concerning what is considered appropriate and excessive consumption. In Chapter 12, Agnes Nairn, Paul Bottomley and Johanne Ormrod take on the challenge of exploring 'complex relationships between deprivation, materialism and wellbeing among families in the United Kingdom'(p. 11). Their analysis suggested a difference between materialism and well-being.

Part V addresses the theme of identities. In Chapter 13, Havard Skaar explores the 'use of and significance of branding and marketing materials in children's presentation of self on a popular social networking site' (p. 12). Skaar's analysis reveals how children are employing branded resources and tools in creating their individual profiles in relation to the existing social dynamics and hierarchies within their peer group. In Chapter 14, Mari Rysst examines young girls' views on the fashion industry in Oslo, Norway and concludes that girls are employing controlling mechanisms within their own peer group. In Chapter 15, Dafna Lemish and Nelly Ellias investigate the role of fashion of immigrant children and adolescents from the former Soviet Union in Israel. Using in-depth interviews, Lemish and Ellias center on the 'complex personal and social challenges resulting from immigration and the need to solidify a new identity and the role of consumption in that process' (p. 13).

This definitive text is enriching and informative. This text is highly recommended to all those in Childhood Curriculum Development, Innovation in Economics, and Marketing and Consumer Behavior. Senior secondary school educators and academic researchers are all likely to benefit from Buckingham and Tingstad's exemplary contributions as well all those who engage with and embrace the opportunity to enhance the dynamics of global learning in the classroom.

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Children at Play: learning gender in the early years
BARBARA MARTIN, 2011
Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books
188 pages, ISBN 9781858564845, paperback, £20.99

'Children at Play' is the result of a careful two-year ethnography within an urban early years setting in the United Kingdom. The book aims to challenge the ways in which boys and girls within the early years context are essentialised along gender lines in terms of the play they engage in. Power suffuses the book as the relationships between and amongst children as well as children's relationships with the adults working as early years educators are revealed. The book follows in the footsteps of Carrie Paechter, Bronwyn Davies and Emma Renold, as the research is approached from a post-structuralist feminist perspective and aims to illustrate some of the ways in which children 'become gendered' through play. Following post-structuralist lines of thought, Martin also examines the intersections of gender with other identity markers and offers an analysis of the ways in which children make sense of difference through the games that they play.

Martin's book aims to challenge the behavioural discourses that dominate early childhood education and practice, which position play as 'children's own work', therefore rendering gender as

inherent and 'natural'. She meets this aim with skill as we are guided through a world where play is often gender specific and is policed by both the children and the adults around them – where even the milk the children drink is packaged for boys or for girls.

The book is well written and is delivered in an accessible style. It is suitable for use in the early childhood teacher education setting as well as being of interest to the academic working within social science generally and education specifically. What I particularly liked about this book was its format. After sound introductory and methodological chapters, chapters 2-5 thematically illustrate the findings from the research, with chapter 6 acting as a conclusion. At the end of each of the analysis chapters are sections outlining the implications for early childhood education and a checklist for action for gender equity. These sections draw upon the findings from the chapters and thoughtfully offer suggestions for making future, and present, early childhood classrooms more gender equitable.

It is here that the usefulness of this book comes into play. As a fledgling teacher educator I have often struggled to make gender theory relevant to the teacher education classroom, and students have, on occasion, pondered the relevance of gender theory to their future classrooms and careers. By offering the implications and checklists, Martin enables the teacher educator to relate theory and research to practice, and this is invaluable to the teacher educator hoping to demonstrate the importance of gender within the classroom and of the teachers' role in its construction. These sections, then, encourage the educator to be mindful of the power play that occurs within the classroom, to examine the games the children are engaged in and to challenge the dominant assumptions around gender, race, class and ableism that are often operationalised within children's play.

Throughout each analysis chapter the author weaves the story of the children she observed 'becoming gendered' through play, drawing upon diverse but interrelated theoretical perspectives in order to do so. She also illustrates the moments during which the construction of gender is subverted by the children in her study. For example, in chapter 2, Martin draws from Lave and Wenger's work on communities of practice and adds to the work begun by Carrie Paechter that relates the notion of becoming gendered to the idea of a community of practice. She asserts that in order for children to share a repertoire of play, gender identities need to be solid. This usually means that girls and boys play separately; however, Martin also reveals the moments during which boys and girls play together and the negotiations that occur during these moments. Chapters two and three engage closely with these ideas.

Chapter four examines the ways in which children embody gender; this chapter not only examines the ways in which children learn from each other but also how they learn gender from the adults in their lives. Parents figure heavily here, but so also do the early childhood educators she observed, who are seen to encourage the children in their care to stick to tightly delineated gender boundaries in play and in pedagogical moments. During chapter five, which looks at 'Imaginative and Socio-Dramatic Play', Martin draws from the Foucauldian notion of the 'spirals of power and pleasure' to illustrate the moments during which the children subverted the expectations of the early childhood educator around the games that they played. The author was privy to these moments and was treated almost as a confidante by some of the children, who coerced her into 'not telling miss' during certain games.

The final concluding chapter of the book asks where we go from here. Here, Martin offers a succinct summary of the major findings from the analysis chapters as well as offering a section that encourages teacher educators to help young children to play beyond gender stereotypes. She also illustrates implications for future research as well as providing us with a final checklist for action for gender equity.

I would highly recommend this book to both teacher educators and students, as well as to anyone interested in the ways in which power is operationalised to police the gendered boundaries of play.

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