

The Future is a Canvas, Not a Curriculum: Teaching to Disrupt, Unlearn, and Create

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The current educational paradigm operates within entrenched norms that shape how we envision the future, often dictated by colonial, capitalist, and neoliberal forces (Dei, 2019). Where there could be an infinite canvas of possibility, these systems present instead a pre-drawn future, with boundaries already marked and paths already traced. This results in the colonisation of the imagination as past and present political direction and cultural realities, as well as specific views and perspectives, constrain the capacity to imagine radically different, ethical, and sustainable futures. A key question emerges: **Whose futures are being prioritised, and whose are being sidelined?** (Death, 2022).

If education is to truly transform, there must be a fundamental shift in how we approach the future itself. By extending the present into the future, we risk perpetuating the same structures of inequity (Bal and Brookes, 2022). When sustainability is added into current capitalist structures, it can become a hollow term—conveniently checked off by corporations seeking to maintain the status quo while reaffirming systems of exploitation. This calls for a fundamental reimagining of how we relate to each other and the world, yet the path to such reimagining remains contested and complex.

The challenge extends beyond simple reform or new methodologies. Instead of guiding students to adapt to these systems, should educators focus on empowering them to unlearn the dominant structures they are conditioned to operate within? This act of unlearning begins with the decolonisation of imagination, challenging the narratives that define educational and managerial landscapes (Miller, 2018). While tools like Futures Literacy might support this journey—helping us become aware of the sources of our hopes and fears (Larsen, Mortensen and Miller, 2020)—the core task remains to create educational spaces that liberate imagination from current constraints.

This tension between prescription and possibility becomes particularly acute in management education. Education must become less about mastering existing patterns and more about fostering collective, ethical creation (UNESCO, 2021). Can we shift away from developing traditional leaders to nurturing those willing to dismantle the ladders rather than climb them—those who question why these ladders exist in the first place? This represents not just a pedagogical shift but a reimagining of agency—students should not just fit into the future; they should question and reshape its very foundations.

The educator's role in this context becomes increasingly complex. Rather than providing paint-by-numbers, we must create spaces where uncertainty and possibility coexist, discomfort becomes generative, and exploration leads to transformation (Ryan and Tilbury, 2013). Yet a critical challenge persists - any alternative frameworks we develop risk being absorbed back into the logics of control, efficiency, and capital. Dundon and Rafferty (2018) remind us that even the most innovative approaches can be co-opted by the very systems they aim to disrupt.

The path forward requires us to cultivate new ways of thinking and acting that embrace plurality and non-linearity. Students must be equipped to navigate ethical dilemmas, environmental crises, and social upheavals with creativity and resilience. But this raises further questions about the nature of education itself: Can transformative learning exist within institutions built on colonial and capitalist foundations? What happens when we approach education not as a curriculum to be followed but as a canvas of collective possibility?

In this journey of disruption and questioning, several provocations arise:

- What would it mean to build a curriculum where students are empowered to imagine and create alternatives that challenge the ideological foundations of capitalism and coloniality rather than simply adapting to current systems?
- How can we design educational experiences that dismantle the cognitive and cultural boundaries limiting our collective capacity to envision radical futures rather than settling for simulations of predictable scenarios?
- How might we move beyond traditional and alternative pedagogies to create spaces where multiple ways of knowing, being, and becoming can flourish?
- What role does unlearning play in educational transformation, and how can educators create environments that help dismantle entrenched paradigms while nurturing new ethical, ecological, and social imaginaries?

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