

Nordic Journal of Literacy Research – Some Prospects and Challenges

Education in our society is increasingly oriented towards competition and anxious impatience with measurable outcomes in the short term. Similar to the global economy, there is little trust and patience regarding long-term perspectives and features surrounding the maximum profit in the shortest possible time. These mechanisms are working their destructive powers on our natural resources and on possibilities for people to make meaningful lives. By invading the school systems all over the world, this short-sighted view also threatens to undermine the possibility of people of the future critically examining and resisting a scenario wherein human beings are but functions in a fully automatised society.

We live in a high-risk and imperiled world. We face pressing problems from a myriad of complex systems spinning out of control. These are systems such as global warming, environmental degradation, massive inequality, disruptions from automation and new media, and a global speculative capitalism unmoored from productivity and devoted to short-term interests. Near constant global conflicts are exasperated by all these forces. In this context, we badly need to rethink business as usual in our schools, colleges, and society as a whole. We need to think about the role of literacy, teaching, and learning, in and out of school, in terms of preparing young people to live in a fast-changing, complex, and high-risk world, where critical thinking and collective intelligence will be crucial.

It is more important than ever before now to start an educational dialogue that sees education as part of a larger picture than simply producing the workforce needed in the future economy, especially when in reality we have no idea what this workforce or future will be. Indeed, important values developed through our entire cultural history are at stake here. We need research that views education against both a broad social and historical background and a cross-disciplinary appraisal of the future, both in terms of its perils and its possibilities. We should fight to retain core academic values around knowledge, evidence, and innovation unblinkered by short-term economic interests, and to face a future in which change is inevitable, business as usual won't work, and individuals and institutions will need to develop great resilience. In the end, we must focus on what type of people and what type

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of society ought schools and teaching, and learning throughout society produce if we are not just to survive but also to flourish. May the *Nordic Journal of Literacy Research* contribute to making sound judgement in important matters such as these.

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