

Are We Educating Students for a Future that Doesn't Exist?

Few subjects these days are more contentious than education, and rightly so. If our children are our future, it's essential we do everything we can do educate them properly, to prepare them for what's to come. But are we schooling our kids for a future that might not even exist by the time they're ready to transition to the working world?

Today, more than ever before, the ground beneath our feet is continuously shifting — growing and expanding in ways few have been able to anticipate. And with exponential advances in technology being reached with each passing year, the pace at which the global economy is changing has increased proportionally. The fact is, we might be training the next crop of professionals for obsolescing positions, and we may be failing to accurately predict the yet-to-be-invented industries and professions of tomorrow.

A frightening example of this idea can be found in the legal field. A generation ago, becoming a lawyer was one of the most sought-after, highly acclaimed professions. Legal education was in demand, and law schools were inundated with applicants. Eventually, the legal field became oversaturated, making finding a good job as a lawyer incredibly difficult. We heard horror stories of JD recipients who, burdened with student loan debt, couldn't find work. Eventually, aspiring lawyers got the message. Over the past several years, the overall pool of law school applicants has dropped significantly; between 2014 and 2015, the applicant pool shrank by a whopping 8.5%. Now, law schools are reacting by accepting less-qualified applicants and offering them discounts to attend. As these students graduate, bar exam failure rates continue to rise.

And that's just one industry out of thousands.

Students seem to be learning reactively, as if through a rearview mirror, when they should be learning the skills that will prepare them for the future — soft skills like problem solving, leadership, and being anticipatory, and the hard skills inherent in being tech-savvy, like the ability to quickly adapt to new technology, and to creatively apply technology to create new products and services for the industries of the future. Because make no mistake: at this point in time, every business is now a tech business. Technology impacts every single industry, from agriculture, to music, to construction.

So, if we're all in the tech business and technology is continually transforming and evolving, educators must learn to get ahead of these developments before our children fall behind to an irreversible degree. Educators can no longer ignore the tech component — or, worse, fail to teach kids properly by assuming they already know how to operate mobile and computer devices and adequately navigate the Internet.

Technology is changing how we live, work, and play, and the only way we can stay ahead of the game is to be anticipatory, looking at the Hard Trends that are shaping the future, especially with respect to education.

We teach accounting without taking note of how the field is rapidly evolving today — how in the future, we'll need new, transformative accounting methods. And that's just the accounting field; what if we applied this thinking to the medical profession? It's a safe bet most medical schools are failing to anticipate not only how technology will impact the hospitals and operating rooms of the future, but how

it will impact the field from a broader perspective. When the widespread institution of semi-autonomous vehicle technology drastically reduces car accidents, that will invariably affect the medical and insurance industries.

The world is transforming, which means relearning how to learn — in academia, this idea is called “metacognition,” being able to think about the way you think.

It’s a Future Fact that industries we probably can’t even fathom right now will exist by the time our children graduate from college. A decade ago, most people didn’t think becoming “social media famous” would be a viable career path; I doubt people imagined “YouTube celebrities” making millions of dollars off self-posted videos, or teenagers using Instagram as a virtual marketplace.

A decade from now, a host of new, technology-based industries will undoubtedly exist, representing a Hard Trend educators need to capitalize on now. And this doesn’t just apply to teachers. Are guidance counselors and college advisors educating students on careers that exist now, ones that might not be viable when their charges leave school? And after students leave school, what then? An oft-cited statistic used to dictate professionals changed careers an average of seven times prior to retiring; now, you might change careers 30 times before you quit for good. And with technology developing at an exponential pace, your learning path is inextricably tied to your career trajectory — but who will provide you with career guidance when you’re out of school?

The Future Fact of the matter is that if we don’t start taking a more anticipatory, proactive approach to education today, our kids run the risk of being rendered completely unprepared for the professional landscape of tomorrow.



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