



## RE-IMAGINING THE ENGAGED UNIVERSITY AS A CULTURAL PROJECT

PROFESSOR JIM NYLAND AND PROFESSOR DAVID DAVIES

Professor Jim Nyland took up the role of Associate Vice-Chancellor (Brisbane) at the Australian Catholic University (ACU) in October 2011.

Previously, he has held academic appointments at the University of Queensland, where he was the Director of Corporate Education and Director of UQ Business School Downtown. Prior to this he was Manager and Principal

Advisor in the Vice-Chancellor's Office for Engagement at Griffith University and has held managerial positions in a number of universities in the UK. He holds a doctorate in Education and has published research covering curriculum change, the nature of learning and the impact of modernity on educational opportunity.

Professor David Davies is

Emeritus Professor and former Executive Dean of the University of Derby in the United Kingdom (UK). Prior to this he held senior leadership roles at various universities throughout the UK. He has had an outstanding and varied academic career supporting a diverse range of communities from the Director Public Programs at Cambridge University to development programs via the Open University, UK. He has published widely in the areas of Education, Lifelong Learning and Access. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and a member of the Oxford University Education Society Committee.

In creating culture we are in fact creating action; we are creating meanings, thoughts and action. Culture, according to John Berger, in the form of art, restores the memory that communities have of themselves; it connects and reveals what would otherwise remain concealed. Universities are seeking to reveal and connect a 'way of seeing' their institutions as innovative and creative in the ways in which they organise learning for their students, stakeholders and society more broadly. We could call this the search for an engaged education. This is especially important for the way knowledge and learning might be re-conceptualised around

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key issues and themes of concern in a fragile and uncertain global world.

Universities are always thought of as somehow being learning communities; if not this then what are they? The relationship a university has with its own community may involve a strong connection to the local or regional town or city and stand for a set of localised identities. On the other hand, a university may not aspire to being a physical community at all but to being a learning community without borders of a conventional kind. There is in fact dissention about what exactly is a university today (Collini, 2012). A quick internet search will show the existence of open universities, free universities, third-age universities, company universities, private universities, public and state universities, women's universities, on-line universities, tele-universities, land grant universities, Ivy League, liberal arts, federal, specialist and 2 and 4 year universities. This is not an exhaustive list and the variety continues to grow as the possibilities of the digital era mean that knowledge explodes into availability.

If there is a question mark about what is a university, there is equally a question about what a community is? We need to re-examine the university's relations with both its own community, however defined and with the wider social forces and events that force the idea of engagement into our consciousness, for we are surely forced to engage with economy, society and culture? Can there still be a sense of retreat from the cares of the material world into an abstract search for knowledge, science and truth within the walls of

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the academy? Universities may still be places where an individual can go and find peace, tranquility, refuge from strife and access to knowledge amongst libraries, cloistered quads and scholars and researchers who are at the cutting intellectual edge of their subjects. Yet most universities throughout the world now face forward towards a marketised and monetised real world of competing institutions, individualised student demand for products (qualifications) which yield immediate benefits and jobs and pressures from their governing bodies and stakeholders for accountability and reputational enhancement. Under the rubric of striving for quality, universities compete for diminishing returns in the global market for reputation in an ever increasingly differentiated and fragmented system of colleges, universities, research institutions and quasi-academic 'providers' of higher education.

If there is uncertainty surrounding our use of the terms university and community, in modern times it is at least matched by that around the notion of culture. Before looking at some issues that arise in our theme on this we need to clear some ground on the matter of 'community'.

### OUR UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT MAKES A COMMUNITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY IS CHANGING

Universities whilst committing to research, scholarship and learning, often invoke the community as their reason for being. It is not always clear what this means in reality or in practice. The idea of community is under severe challenge according to some, and when we examine the idea of community we

can find ourselves embroiled in questions of identity, nationalism, ethnicity and belonging which go to the very heart of what we think we are and what we would like to become. These are existential questions in a world where migration, globalisation, dispossession, war, terrorism, poverty and extensive cultural and social conflict characterise our way of life. We live in changing and uncertain times which force us to confront such issues if we wish to have universities which help shape our communities as active and engaged partners, because it is ultimately as communities that we face the challenges of change. The ideology of individualism has created and sustained much modern thinking and behaviour, especially in relation to consumer-driven economic development and the cultural industries. However, when faced with what are existential issues, the notion of belonging and community re-asserts itself, sometimes with a vengeance!

What then makes a community? Zygmunt Bauman (2001) asserts that communities remain essentially united in spite of all separating factors due in large part to the notion of 'sameness'. And that once we are no longer the same we are unable to maintain the boundaries of 'community'. This raises the question of whether and how in a globalising world we are all becoming the same? Does the fact that regardless of our national origins or identities, we all consume similar food, clothing, consumer durables, entertainment and technological 'fixes', mean we are all becoming the same? Does global change mean we lose that local community which was given to us by birth having grown up within its boundaries? Is





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community replaced by individualised identity which sets up boundaries of difference rather than boundaries of sameness?

**Who belongs in a community or nation?**

These are not small matters. Who belongs within a community and how that is to be determined is the stuff of modern politics. In societies undergoing mass migration, the notion of community belonging, usually within a national state or a religion can be decisive in how people are perceived and accepted or rejected. Who belongs in the nation and who can be properly excluded becomes central to politics of nationhood and identity. How these questions are handled may be seen as the test of our humanity and of our democratic right to be what we feel we are and to maintain our right to exclude those who do not belong. So there is concern with how we think about 'community' which leaves us searching for answers.

**WE ARE NOT SUFFICIENTLY  
ENGAGED WITH SOME OF THE  
CRITICAL ISSUES FACING OUR  
SOCIETY**

If culture and community are deeply problematic, this does not mean we have simply abandoned our sense of what community might mean and how it might be relevant to learning. John Berger, the great writer and broadcaster on art and society reminded us that community is one of the longings of our century (Berger 2016). It retains a powerful charge and seems to offer a framework of meaning for modern life. But it is culture which connects us to the events 'out there'. There is no

community outside of and beyond cultural forms and practices which make us what and who we are. Yes, there is an essential sense of self for most people and there are collective experiences and identities and some people feel alienated from the collective norms, values, practices and behaviour which we can observe and analyse around us. But it is in the relation of things that understanding emerges, and culture through the various ‘languages’ it employs is the means of relating one thing to another. Without culture and cultural mediation there can be no valid knowledge which can equip us with the power to change our thinking and consciousness and transform (if we so choose) our social and material lives and, who knows, our human ‘spiritual’ lives as well. It is in this spirit that we are asking in this article - what is going on around us, where is the leading edge of change and how can we understand this as engaged universities?

No simple nostrum will do. Complicated and connected answers risk confusion and diversion however, so we have tried to summarise and bring into an alignment a range of matters which we believe are actually connected. Our task initially is to describe the issues so as to isolate and highlight things that are in reality not isolated but part of a greater whole. These current and future issues are not the totality of problems faced by the human condition! However, we believe they are the issues facing universities as learning institutions and as innovators in learning. This perspective informs our sense of curriculum innovation and leads us to ask what are the key learning issues that impact on universities which wish to innovate for change? How can

the universities re-think their approach to entrepreneurship so as to benefit the community in all its abundant variety but especially perhaps for dispossessed and marginalised communities? How can we conceptualise an engaged education which is culturally attuned to modernity and all its diversity and opportunities?

Having briefly reviewed the evolving context of our theme, what are the framing issues we have to encounter? One such

issue is that of how knowledge gained inside and outside the classroom can engage people and communities in new and meaningful ways. This has been called ‘real knowledge’ (Nyland et al 2015; Davies et al 2016) and ‘engaged education’ (Hymen, 2017) and focuses on issues to do with learning and knowledge which meets

the challenges of the times in schools, universities, workplaces, communities and life experience. It forces us to engage with the ‘big issues’ – and we signal some of these below.

**Poverty is still with us – globally and locally**

The ‘real’ world, out there still consists of millions who are without an adequate income to rear their families, a world without dignity or education, without clean water or adequate food and medicine and whose share of world wealth is actually

diminishing. There is also a world out there where climate change and pollution are far from improving and where the threat of human extinction is real. The arguments for devising a new curriculum which addresses these issues seems to be self-evident

**The marginalisation of young people**

The rapid pace of social and economic change, the apparent quickening of mass migration across large parts of the globe, de-industrialisation and the

‘hollowing out’ of many traditional economies and communities have meant the growth of more challenges to the neoliberal consensus in many societies. For many young people this has meant their future is at risk with youth unemployment and marginalisation the fate of many across the world.

**The growth of digital technologies and how we understand what is happening**

In a society where knowledge has exploded, learning is being transformed by the artefacts and the apps of the information age. Communications can be instantaneous, and reality becomes ‘virtual’. Local communities can become marginalised and impoverished by the almost instant switching of production to cheaper locations, perhaps half way across the globe. There can be no under-estimating the sheer power and reach of the new technologies. However, it is one thing to describe the exponential



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growth of digital machines to almost every living human on the planet and the communication networks which sustain them, and another to overcome the negative effects and dis-benefits which accompany them.

### **Knowledge and learning relevant to life and work**

The sheer power and availability of computerised automation has now shifted the nature of work and leisure so fundamentally that it faces us with an existential challenge. Modern work, for many, involves a lack of engagement in the task and even leisure and free time may be occupied by 'lazy' and sometimes aimless pursuits.

The task facing universities is of developing knowledge and skills and a curriculum which can cope with the capacities and threats presented by the machines we depend on and which can help us challenge the loss and separation of ourselves from our communities.

### **Learning and the university and engagement**

Ways of learning relevant to a community stress the importance of common identity, shared values and a sense of shared experience aimed at changing and conserving valued traditions. The community, in a sense, may become the curriculum and a belief can emerge in a large reservoir of talent and ability within individuals and their communal experience that can be tapped and released. The university can sponsor learning which revolves around this growing and developing sense of awareness.

The modern university is expected to be many different and contradictory

things. It is expected to be an innovator in learning and knowledge; collegial in its dealings with its staff and its partners yet competitive in an increasingly marketised and monetised world; caring in its concern for people yet entrepreneurial in its business dealings; it is expected to be both a public institution and a private organisation and it is almost always both a local and an internationalised institution. This wide array of university roles and identities does not imply that it is in any sense isolated from its community!

### **The university and democratic citizen-members?**

What then are universities and what are their characteristics that we value? At its heart, a university is a community, where academic citizenship can be seen to be central to the idea of membership. A university must surely sponsor recognition of rational and scientific enquiry as the basis for learning, rather than the handed-down dogmas of orthodox belief, and a place where all belief systems are open to scrutiny, dialogue, questioning and critical discourse.

Universities are diverse institutions and to cope with a changing future, universities will have to play a fully developed role in the emerging civil society; a society that on a global scale is faced with a series of problems and issues such as those outlined above. Having indicated some of the directions to which we think universities appear to be heading, we can tentatively suggest that the community must be a focus for engagement, and a university must play its part in improving, amongst other things, the environment, local education and health and community outcomes.

The new view of the university in its community will also need to embrace the fact that learning will have to be 'social', that is to say it will be shared and will be for a progressive social purpose. That elite higher education systems have paid off for many cannot be denied. However, the next stage requires not merely a scaling up of existing provision but a wholesale re-thinking of learning for those billions of people who can view the benefits of advanced industrial society (via their hand-held devices and computers) but who cannot achieve them.

Learning is of course not just a social activity, it is also an intense personal activity. Change yourself and you change your situation is no mean epithet, especially when allied to a notion of a community since all individual action needs to find its appropriate object and community, as we have seen, is one of the longings of our century.

### **SKILLS AND AN ENGAGED CURRICULUM FOR CRITICAL THINKING: IS THIS WHERE THE LEADING EDGE OF CHANGE FOR ENGAGEMENT LIES FOR UNIVERSITIES?**

The first aspect we want to consider is that of the need for curricular renewal and the idea of critical thinking skills as a feature for all university learning and teaching programs. We have already alluded to the fact that the really big issues facing us are somehow marginal to our key concerns with the curriculum. The big challenges of our times are not central to our learning. Peter Hymen (2017) has asserted that we have a one-dimensional education system in a multi-dimensional world. We

are living in an age of big challenges, big data, big dilemmas, big crises, big opportunities. Yet (education) too often is small in ambition, small in what it values, small in its scope. He argues that we need something different which can meet the challenges of our times and where we can properly engage with learning. His suggestion is that we need an engaged education which is academic (based deeply in literacy and numeracy and which is empowering); is about character building (involving independence and autonomy, resilience and open-mindedness for the individual), is concerned with creativity and craftsmanship and a can-do approach to innovation (which is about problem solving). These three facets of learning correspond to an education of the head, the heart and the hand and can help us overcome the artificial and self-limiting and debilitating divisions we have between academic, vocational and technical education. Those who experience such learning understand that they have an obligation to apply their knowledge to make the world a better place, not merely to make money, important though that may be in our presently existing world.

In an era where billions of people cannot access academic education there is the question of 'skill' by which we mean how individuals primarily understand and grasp their environment in order to make it work for themselves. The better this understanding is, the better life can be. Skill is what people develop to survive and thrive in the environment in which they find themselves. Sometimes this involves changing that environment or seeking an entirely new one. This is a deeply cultural matter. It involves how

the individual self attends or relates to the environment which itself is 'cultural'. Some commentators such as Crawford (2015) argue that the environment actually constitutes the self, rather than just impacting on it, and therefore how the individual pays attention to this environment becomes key to succeeding in it. In an internet dominated world the idea of the public attentional world (what and who is on the internet and in our minds and for how long each day) gains some serious traction.

In acting on the world however, (in reality or in virtual reality) we find skill is a key part of the process. Through the exercise of a skill, the self that acts in the world takes on a definite shape. It comes to be in a relation of fit to a world it has grasped. What is deeply problematical still though, is how public space (including spectacularly the internet) in general diminishes the skill of understanding and acting on that environment. The digital and virtual world is one made up of mediations where our daily lives are literally saturated with representations which are made elsewhere. We make contact with the worlds of work, of family, of friendship, of communication, entertainment, consuming, learning and leisure through the apps and software provided for us. We make contact through, not with, these representations and become 'skilled' at the point of gaining access but we do not make or construct the objects of our desires and we do not become skilled at practices which give us 'agency'. Crawford (2015) argues persuasively that it is when we are engaged in a skilled practice that we can understand and own, as it were, a reality which is independent of the self and where

the self (the individual as an identity) is understood as not being of its own making. The illusion of the internet is of course to implicitly infer that the virtual reality constructed by the 'individualised' internet software has precisely been made by and for the individual self. The significance of this insight is we believe that in the encounter between the self and the external world, skill, defined as the capacity to engage with and act on the real world, is the critical element. It embraces the skills of the head, the heart and the hand and above all it means an engaged education is needed in universities.

Skill in this viewpoint becomes a crucial enabling concept because instead of allowing our perceptions and experiences to be determined by and through the internet apps we employ, we can choose to develop skills which express an embodied perception. This means that our knowledge and understanding can be enhanced through our actions not just through mental or intellectual representations which are shaped by the virtual realities provided for us on the digital platforms. In this view, what we perceive, how we understand and how we use knowledge to change something is actually what we do. This is one of the philosophical underpinnings of action learning. Embodied perception, according to Crawford, is an antithesis of virtual reality; it suggests we can have a self that has expanded through skill rather than just through mental or intellectual effort. Since we live highly mediated lives so we ourselves have been made biddable and 'pliable' to whomsoever has the power to make and shape the representations we consume via the internet and in parts



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of our public space. Representations are comprised of thoughts, language, symbols, images, narratives and the media themselves which make up the apps and software programs we consume. Crawford argues “... representations collapse the basic axis of proximity and distance by which an embodied being (person) orients in the world and draws a horizon of relevance around itself.” The horizon of potential seems to expand exponentially but the circle of action diminishes as each one of us becomes absorbed in the screen in front of us to the exclusion of all else. Even the most densely packed public places will now show the introverted individual wholly absorbed in a mediated self, fixated to the screen, narcissistically introverted and unaware of the significance of the public domain. There is here both a deficit of attentionality to public social life and conventions and a form of mass

psychological ‘interpellation’ by which the bonds between perception and action are separated.

The powerful mediating institutions which provide our means of accessing life on the internet are not democratically organised and accountable, no matter how much they assert their right to offer choice in a consumer-driven world. Neither do they offer a world of freedom simply to communicate with whom we wish even though we can reach almost every living human being on the planet with a hand-held device. The ‘real’ reality is that we make contact almost exclusively now through the representations of people and objects which are provided to us on our devices by the media corporations. We no longer rely on ourselves and our own skills to do this and we are diminished potentially as a result. We are of course

‘free’ to deny realities and to dissociate ourselves from the effort needed for skilful engagement. If we can pay, there are always others in a market who will provide these things for us.

The matter of skill thus becomes critical for our understanding of what universities might do and how they might re-construct their curricula. This is so in respect of two major objectives: first, the need to deliver learning programs that equip students with critical thinking (as we have defined it in this article) and second, the need to recognise alternative forms of ‘skill’ which those beyond the boundaries of conventional universities (ie. the billions in the ‘third world’) possess but which go largely unrecognised and unrewarded.

**CRITICAL THINKING AS A CONCEPTUAL MAP FOR ENGAGEMENT.**

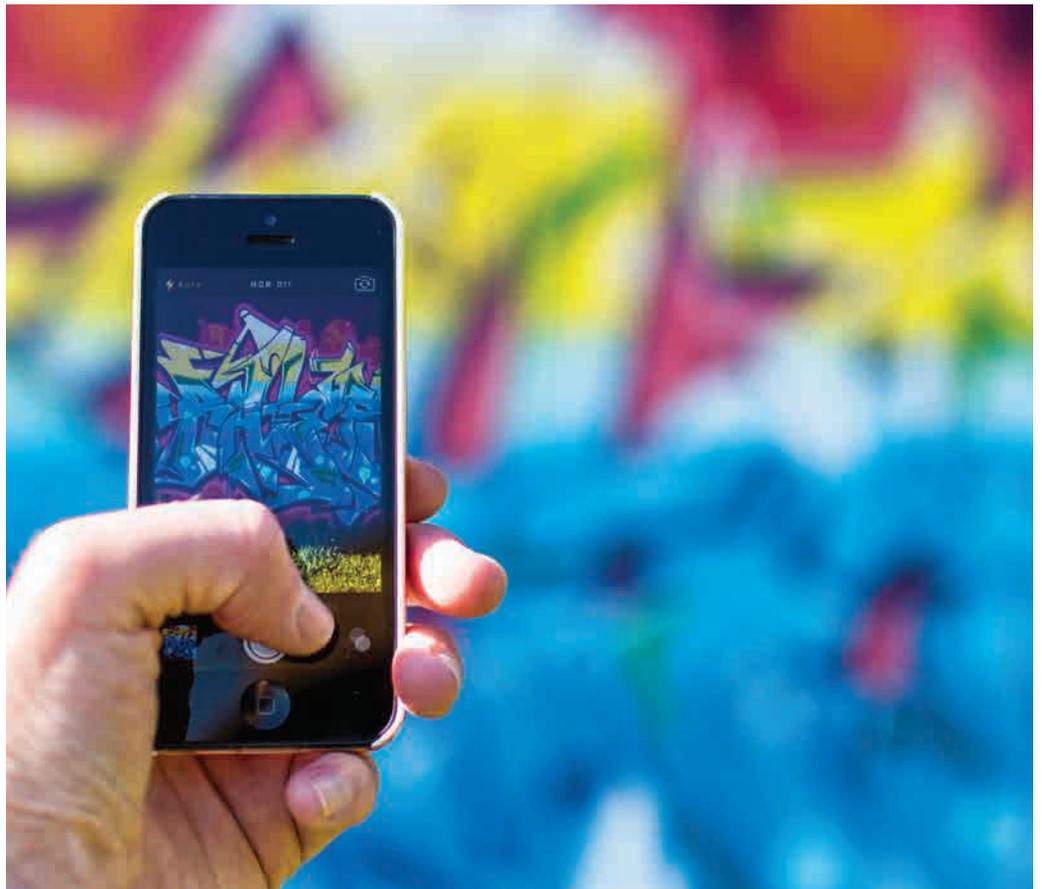
If we are then to reclaim the ‘real’ as against the representations of it which mediate and distort our experience and understanding of the world, we need to develop our ideas of critical thinking which can help us overcome the limitations. Critical thinking in its context of education can be defined as rational and practical activity centred on decisions as to what one should do in complex situations. Critical thinkers are likely to be fair, objective and committed to accuracy and clarity (Ennis, 1996). Furthermore they are likely to be able to think about thinking itself, also called metacognition. Critical thinking is also about the impact of ideas and understanding of ‘self’ and identity since these constructs in different ways shape how an individual interacts with the wider community and society. As Jenkins

(2004:56) has argued, developmental psychology has shown that learners who are active in their own right require the work of others to achieve their potential. At the heart of learning processes is the growth of a cognitive and social being who can cope with the challenges of everyday life. Personal identity and social identity are intertwined so that membership of a group, for example, can be part of how individuals can change their definitions of themselves and bring about change in collective life. Such skill as this, for that is what is required to actively engage with others in a conscious and aware manner, is not simply to be taken for granted. It has to be learned and taught and individuals

learn by engaging in what Jurgen Habermas (1972) called instrumental,



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interpretive and critical learning where the latter involves applying critical concepts and ideas so as to 'transform' the objects and subjects of study. Critical thinking is thus about the things we need to think and do to change and transform any given reality into an improved one. It is not neutral thinking in the sense of a disembodied, objective and value-free judgmental process. Critical thinking is not a neutral activity; it is an engaged activity.

There is no specific and subject-based content for critical thinking. It does not reside in a single or cluster of academic disciplines, though the social sciences broadly speaking have done most to develop the notion. Although it is possible to list in a granular fashion the attributes of a critical thinker (Khalaily, 2017) and these would include at a high level all of the performance skills to do with reading, understanding, memorising, verbalising, absorbing information, comparing, contrasting, clarifying, investigating and questioning, this would be to miss the true significance of critical thinking. This lies in "the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualising, applying, analysing, synthesising, and / or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. These skills are highly valued in a democratic society" (Khalaily, 2017:57).

Critical thinking is not a unitary phenomenon and it can have differing meanings within its different contexts. For the universities, its significance is in the qualities it can develop in the student. For an engaged institution this might mean giving the learner the capacity to separate

truth from ideology or 'post-truth'. It should surely mean not taking things at face value or not letting others make up our minds for us. As Newman (2006) asserts, critical thinking, drawing on critical theory, is concerned with the idea of social justice and fairness and that knowledge can be generated and applied for an improved social result. It involves learning which should lead to an enhanced sense of self in the real world and not just in the virtual world. This means we might expect



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a more capable individual who is able to relate to others and be personally more responsible and 'viable'.

### **THE CHALLENGE OF THE DIGITAL AGE IS ALREADY UPON US.**

The second aspect of our argument concerns the reality of the now and existing digitalisation of global economic life, communication and learning. This is what Castells (1996 and 1997) called the network society and the information age. The potential for both liberation

and oppression seems to be inherent in the digitalisation, automisation and roboticisation of industrial capacity and of our social life. The work of Evgeny Morozov (2011) has proved to be prescient and ground breaking in our understanding of how the internet might not lead to freedom and liberation and how we should be sceptical of the 'cyber-utopians'. This issue is key for universities since young people, in particular are more in tune with the highly engineered environment in which we find ourselves as the 21st century moves forward.

Like many others, Morozov (2011), initially viewed the Internet as a force for good, particularly in terms of opening up closed societies. Morozov suggests that many Western (USA and others) decision makers believed that the internet could help the West promote democracy. They, and he believed that the power and apparent freedom of Twitter and Facebook, for example, could help to promote freedom and democracy for what they saw as the oppressed of the world. But it didn't work in quite that way. While democratically elected governments in the West saw the internet as a good thing; authoritarian governments' intent on suppressing free expression and free assembly saw things differently. What was unexpected was their response. Such governments have used and continue to use the internet for purposes such as propaganda. We can even now find such an example in the largest democratic country on earth where the new President uses the internet, Twitter, to directly provide information about his policies without going through the mediations of the media. Morozov believes that the West needs to adopt a

less ‘starry-eyed’ approach to the internet and that it needs to assess realistically the risks and dangers posed by it. We are beginning to see that those who voiced critical comments in the past were not necessarily the new ‘Luddites, but posed questions and views that needed be considered.

To say that the internet is not a tool for heaven on earth is not new. What is new is that there is much more concern about the internet: about cyber-crime; about on-line bullying; about the collection and use of personal data; about the abuse of children; and about ‘fake news’ to name but a few fears. So what has this got to do with universities, with learning, with communities, with culture and with engagement?

The internet has undoubtedly transformed our lives, particularly the lives of our young people, our students and those who will become our students. Is this generation, which has grown up with the internet, with smartphones, Facebook, Snapchat and Twitter thinking critically about the world they inhabit? Their personal, social and work lives are lived to some extent in cyber-space. They make arrangements to meet, share their thoughts and images, share their likes and dislikes through screens. Although as students, they attend lectures and tutorials, even though their physical presence is not always strictly necessary, they do much of their learning on-line, submit their assessments on-line, receive results on-line, make job applications on-line and meet their future life-partners on-line. For many much of their day is spent in one way or another in front of a screen. Perhaps it is too early to know the impact on their brains/minds

of all of this screen-time. It is, however, worth considering whether they are critical in their thinking, engaged in discussing the big issues of the day. After all, these are the issues which will impact on their futures.

Today, many students are studying vocational degrees, and even those who are enrolled within what may be thought



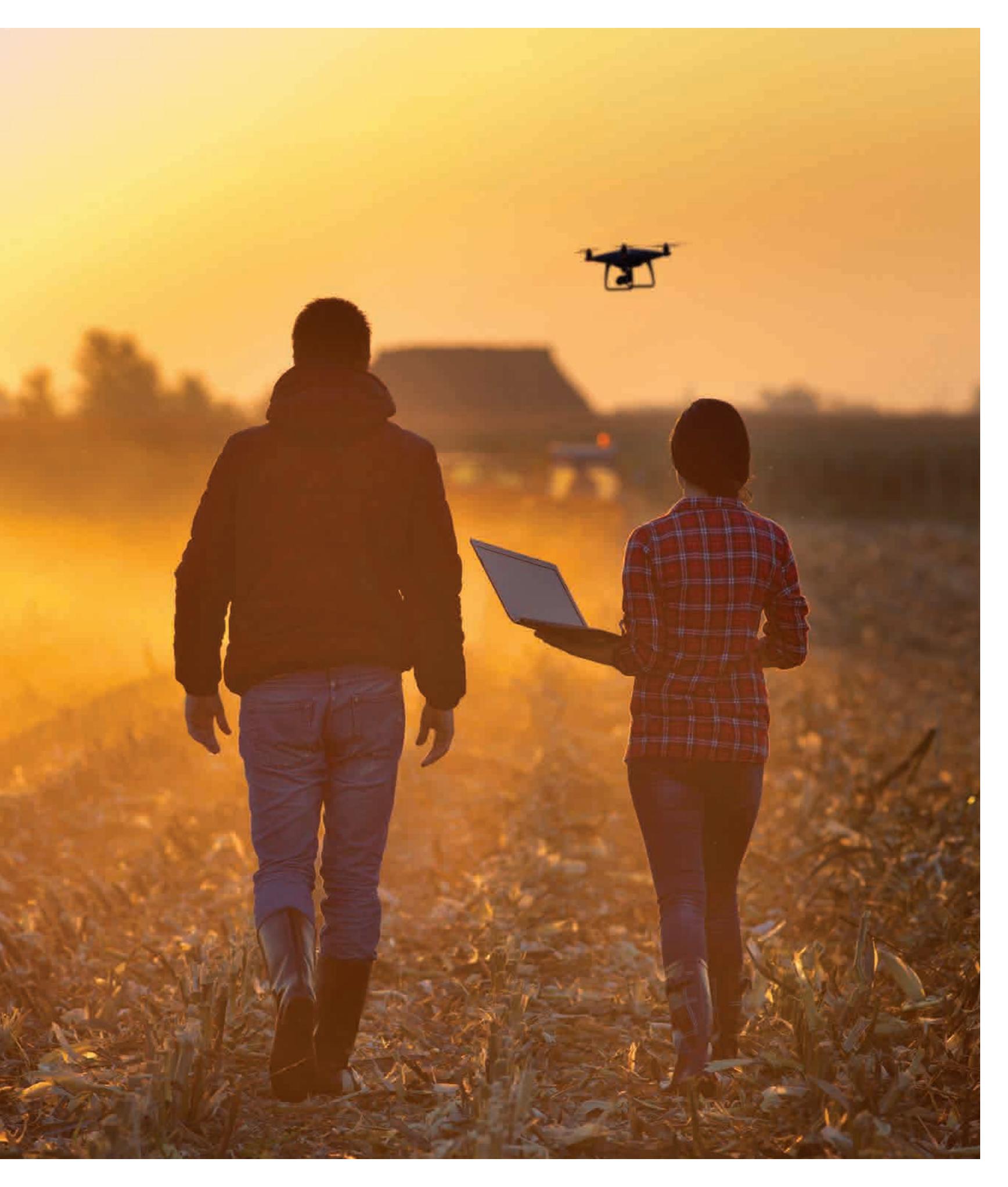
*The potential for both liberation and oppression seems to be inherent in the digitalisation, automisation and roboticisation of industrial capacity and of our social life.*

of as the more critical aspects of the curriculum such as the humanities and social sciences, may not be engaged in their studies in a critical way. They may not be sufficiently engaged in face-to-face discussion and debate, after all it is a more expensive mode of learning and possibly less easy to assess and justify in terms of contact time with students. But surely if we wish to encourage, develop more entrepreneurial students and prepare them for what is a more uncertain world, we need to encourage

them to think critically about the world. While on-line learning, reading and writing are immensely valuable, there is really no substitute for helping students to think critically and be able to pose and support an argument/point of view through debate and discussion.

While Morozov’s ‘The Net Delusion’ appears critical of the internet, he acknowledges that the “Internet proved excellent for research (for academics. Collaboration is now cheap and instantaneous, academics have access to more papers than they could have dreamed of” (Morozov, 2011). A main focus of his book was the paradox of Western politicians promoting internet freedom abroad whilst limiting it at home. In some instances such limitation has clear public support, such as responding to concerns about the risk to children’s exposure on-line to pornography, identity theft, exploitation, abuse and even abduction. Adler (2017) makes the case that even without these hazards modern connectivity threatens the health of not just children but everyone. For example, he says that a typical smartphone user checks their phone 39 times in 24 hours. By comparison, in 2008, before the introduction of smartphones, adults spent only 18 minutes a day on their phone. He poses the question as to whether this matters, but suggests that the need to check smartphones may be thought of as an unhealthy compulsion. He also wonders whether “... a brain raised on online friendships” can adjust to friendships in the real world?

There is now an explosion of information, perhaps even an over-abundance of information, and the internet as well



as its impact on learning in the digital age has opened the gates to a tsunami of entertainment. One is reminded of Aldous Huxley's (2004, originally 1932) 'Brave New World' where science and technology were used to maximise pleasure and then as a consequence citizens lose the ability to think critically.

Recently, Monbiot (2017) has suggested that contact with the 'tangible world' is lessening much faster than we perhaps appreciate. Some children, particularly as they move into their teenage years, are beginning to live virtual lives. How connected are they with the world around them as they retreat into a land of experiences through their headphones and screens? Next on the technology agenda are virtual reality goggles. In this world of virtual reality how do you check what you are being told is correct. Recently, we have been fascinated/horrified by the discussions about 'fake news' or 'alternative facts' and casualness with the use of facts. When those users of the internet can use the Holocaust, Nazism and racism as a form of irony, we must be concerned. Unless you have 'solid' / real world experience how do you know what is right? It is surely our responsibility as educators to provide students with the skills to be able to critically respond



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to the digital age – all its benefits, its access to more information than we could have dreamt of, but to be aware of its other less attractive aspects. Is it too radical a step to suggest that universities re-shape their curriculum in the light of these concerns? If we are not engaged as universities, it is clear the issues will not simply wait for someone out there to resolve them.

#### A GREATER

#### FOCUS BY UNIVERSITIES ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND PERSONAL VIABILITY

Without entrepreneurs there would be a great deal less innovation and creativity and so the third of our suggestions lies in the notion of that individuals might be encouraged and sponsored to develop their own skills of survival and success as a form of personal growth and development. Richard Teare's work (1998; 2013; 2015) and that of Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt (2013) have been seminal in developing such a perspective and yield up rich insights for universities which might seek a different way forward to instill entrepreneurship into their students and graduates. What does an engaged type of entrepreneurship look like when we focus on the excluded populations in subsistence communities,

whether these are in developing countries or in the neglected areas of the inner cities in the industrialised west?

Teare's work cites communities which live in the shadow of major extractive industries and yet who do not benefit from the massive developments associated with such industries. Some of these are in Papua New Guinea. His concern is to outline and develop qualities of personal life and existence which are compatible with entrepreneurship and economic productivity. He refers to 'personal viability' as a mindset which people need if they are to achieve some economic independence and control over their own natural resources. This mindset involves knowledge of the business opportunities and the ways and means of applying that knowledge to generate an income. He is, however, at pains to point out that wealth cannot just be measured in terms of financial and capital accumulations. It has also to include the holistic development of individuals, groups and communities and is reflected in the health and well-being of a society.

What is involved is a step-by-step process for preparing and equipping people at the grass roots level to succeed in entrepreneurial activity in their own context of culture, language and traditions. Of significance for universities is the intended emphasis on changing people's mindsets. This is the educational and learning agenda but it takes place within an objective and empirically verifiable plan to develop material resources, extend public and health services, enhance human resource development and attempts to stimulate progressive competitiveness and greater self-reliance. This is not a

naive attempt at social reform imported from outside. Full acknowledgement is given to the constraints and barriers to development which include high cost structures, the difficulties in accessing land and markets, the need for business training, the need for finance and borrowing, the requirements of public and legal regulations as well as the instability arising from law and order problems (Teare 2013: 102).

What then are the qualities of personal viability? Teare argues that personal viability is a training for life that facilitates micro-enterprise development. It is learning that encourages people to make mistakes, to experiment and to study and learn from making mistakes. Learning is measured in such a training not by examinations but by the growth in personal capacity that occurs. It requires energy, thought, courage and support in the form of coaching. Most significantly it draws on life experience and addresses the solving of problems by questioning, thinking and experimenting until a solution is found. The real life context for this has been developing economies where village-based livelihood and informal economic activity and subsistence have been the norm. In many such communities the emphasis for the future must be on income generation rather than formal wage employment. A range of conditions of course must be met to bring about economic transformation in such communities and it is not our intention to address these complex issues here. Rather we want only to point to the contention that sustainable development for marginalised communities may be possible only when people develop 'viability'. This

means that they can change themselves and help to change others when they are engaged in learning which produces desired change and progress. A change in thinking and approach to life may be required. This is undoubtedly a major challenge to universities. How to construct a curriculum which responds to such a challenging and different agenda remains a major question mark for us today.



*We have been fascinated/horrified by the discussions about 'fake news' or 'alternative facts' and casualness with the use of facts.*

### **ENGAGEMENT IS CULTURE: IS THE CURRICULUM**

We have already noted the amorphous use of the terms community and culture. Meanings can somehow slide into vague and non-specific generalities when academic and professional understandings become suffused with commonsense understandings of the same words. At issue here is what the great American Sociologist C. Wright Mills called vocabularies of motives (C.Wright Mills 1959). By this is meant the proposition that the way language and science

organise our thoughts therefore limits our capacity to understand and interpret the world. Sometimes new vocabulary and concepts are needed to create new and innovative meanings. There are differing schools of cultural studies; some see all of culture as an epiphenomenon of social and economic structures; others are concerned with theories of value, human interests and the objects, real and symbolic, which occupy people in the institutions of society (Bruyn, 1966). Our perspective in this article follows that of Bennett (1998) who argued that there exists a cultural matrix in which we study practices, institutions and systems of classification through which there are inculcated in a population particular values, beliefs, competences, routines of life and habitual forms of conduct. Such a definition allows us to investigate and reflect on the idea that a community itself can be viewed as a cultural construction and is something grounded in popular and everyday experience. As such we might say that it is not just a basis for the consuming of knowledge and the products of the university but is co-extensively a locus for the production of new insights, understandings and illuminations into our present lives and futures. In this sense culture should be constitutive of our curriculum, reflecting and expressing what we know to be the significant events and values in our lives. Such an approach can embrace both 'high culture' as we have come to term cultural products and pursuits in the arts, sciences and humanities and 'popular culture' as lived contemporary experience. An engaged university must therefore acknowledge the need for an engaged curriculum in both cultural senses and in respect of its

constituent communities.

For the purposes of clarification here our viewpoint on community takes account of the fact that people live out their lives in a variety of contexts but some of these are paramount. There is, for example, the question of work which historically has shaped a good deal of the human enterprise. There is the question of place and neighbourhood allied to issues of belonging, identity, ethnicity, race, religion and nationality –all of which can have a bearing on how we understand and experience the notion of community.

Work is one of those cultural realities ‘out there’ which has fundamentally shifted in its organisation and nature so that it faces us with an existential challenge which is co-terminously ‘in here’. Once upon a time, work for many people involved meaningful and life-fulfilling tasks. It laid out clear goals and tasks and it set time frames for achievements and life’s transitions. It provided a meaningful context in communities and neighbourhoods which could validate and even valorise work and workers. This is not to deny the fact that much physical and manual work was hard labour and heavy lifting with often inadequate rewards and pay. Work in the past allowed some workers and groups to acquire and apply skills that were rewarding and deeply absorbing. Modern work, for many, involves a lack of engagement in the tasks and duties required. Free time can be taken up with aimless pursuits such as day-time TV shopping, logging on to Facebook, endless text gazing. Carr (2015) has called this being sentenced to idleness where people are disengaged from an outward looking focus and attention turns inwards. At its

worst this can lead to forms of narcissistic behaviour which are fuelled by the availability of internet infotainment. The popularity of internet pornography surely gives the lie to the idea that the explosion of knowledge potential on the internet is simply a good thing in itself.

The sense of engagement that meaningful and rewarding work gives can be achieved



***In communities which have historically lacked access to learning through formal education systems there is a need to revise the teacher-led, content-centred and propositional-knowledge based curriculum in favour of critical thinking.***

when we are acting on the world, intentionally and consciously. Yet the growth of technologically sophisticated systems involving computerisation and robotisation continues to obliterate jobs across the whole social class spectrum. The gains in wealth and productivity emanating from the new technologies are not going to the workers who produce and operate the machines but to the existing owners of the economic assets and capital (Pickety, 2014; Mason, 2015). Knowledge that can

challenge and change this situation should be the concern of universities. What would this knowledge look like and what kind of curriculum would be involved?

A certain type of critical thinking is needed as we have argued above and this cannot be provided by the nearest software package. We need knowledge which is rooted in experience and embodied skills and which draws on deep understanding and creativity. The curriculum needs to be open to the idea that a continuously active mind and an active ‘self’ requires the challenge of engagement and that this requires appropriate scepticism as well as tolerance for diversity and dissent. Automated calculations using algorithms cannot substitute for critical judgements about social and professional purposes. Key values and commitments cannot be undermined by the needs of automated systems and so we must be consciously less dependent on the technologies of hand-held devices and apps. A key point is that we (the people, the community) are not just a product of social reality but are producers of that reality.

Our second major cultural reality which might impact on the university curriculum concerns community and community development. We are suggesting that universities support forms of learning and accreditation which are rooted in an action learning paradigm. This might involve helping self-sustaining and self-directed processes in communities where people have learned themselves to analyse and solve their own problems. Individuals, groups and entire communities can be mobilised given the necessary support and resources (Teare 2015). The potential for identifying assets- based community

development is great and can highlight the significance of existing skills, resources, social capital and the creative energies of people who can see a solution to an existentially felt problem. There are questions of course of identifying and facilitating leadership in communities and this is also a learning agenda for those involved and for those providing learning opportunities, such as universities. In communities which have historically lacked access to learning through formal education systems there is a need to revise the teacher-led, content-centred and propositional-knowledge based curriculum in favour of critical thinking. This was here defined as being learner-centred, self-directed, problem-oriented and participatory. It requires commitment to the idea that critical thinking can help transform any given reality through its engagement with learning.

As we endeavour to re-imagine the engaged university as a cultural project a key set of questions include: 'Is this type of vision merely possibilitarianism? Can it be achieved in empirical reality, out there in the real world? To ask these questions may be to pre-suppose answers. For universities the posing of questions itself is part of their historic function and so we have posed some questions and are aware we stand in a long line and tradition of question raisers. Ultimately any answers will be subject to the court of empirical judgement but there is thinking (critical we hope) which is co-terminous with learning and teaching. There is dialogue and interaction and the possibility that we can share knowledge. Whatever the future holds, the present demands we look at our real experience in the real world and

this can only be done by knowing others in some direct and meaningful way and by sharing the thoughts and insights we gain as a result.

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