

education and policy - changing attitudes

Bob Dylan and his stupendous consequences for education

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for the times they are a-changin'

[Bob Dylan](#)

This is not about acoustic and electric guitars. It's more important even than that. This is about change - from the personal to the planetary. And the times they are a-changin' alright, but more than Bob knew. More than anybody could know.

He held out hope for a generation; but no generation gets the last word on anything. There's little consensus on what anybody can do about what's happening. It's easy enough to trot out vague promises - 'more choice' is popular, 'empowerment' might get applause, and 'creativity' a murmur of approval. But they're pretty fluffy concepts. I'm suggesting that they camouflage more than they illuminate.

I'm thinking about the way influence is exerted, how it fragments societies, whether myths can easily posture as reality, why there are so few whistle blowers, and the risk all of this poses for us all. Growing fear needs transposing into sustainable hope. Educators are in no position to fix that; this is about how students will figure it for themselves. But this is pragmatic, it signposts what can help.

It is a companion piece to an earlier blog - '[what education gets from politics](#)' [BL38]. If it feels a bit scowling-grumpy, ask yourself whether we've passed the limits of what smiley-nice can do.

It's addressed to education's stakeholders. These are the families, educators, voluntary groups and social enterprises concerned for what students can gain from education. It signposts useful ideas, arguments and evidence. Each source is followed by an item for a stakeholder agenda. Education doesn't need shareholders looking for a pay-off, it needs stakeholders probing who is getting what out of education, and whether its stakeholders need to do something about it.

There's a lot of stuff here, because there's a lot going on. It may be best to start from the signposts which point to your work now. I'll update the list as things change - and they will. I'll also open up other areas of enquiry.

I don't want to be unfair to Bob Dylan - I don't dare. But the issues are too troublesome for uplifting inspiration. The point is this: stakeholders need students to get more from education than they've so-far been in a position to realise. Boundaries need to be pushed.

on influence

Should the wishes of the rich-and-powerful prevail? Are the people who most need help least likely to get it? Should we be surprised that there is little resistance? Is there damage that is not being openly confronted? And, if any of this is so, how does education resist being bounced into compliance with it? There's evidence on all of this, showing the interplay between politics and commerce - and its consequences for how we live together. Or don't.

- **1. policy interventions**

'[Question for learning and work...](#)' - brief review, linked to more detailed sources, showing how what were once socially-embedded programmes have been displaced - they are 'Sure-start', backed by thinking entitled 'Every Child Matters' - both are being displaced by neo-lib priorities

stakeholder interests are integral to Sure-start, part of long-standing thinking that local links are vital to any complete education

[Tough on People in Poverty](#) - social-attitude survey showing how poverty is less likely to be attributed to bad luck - and less likely to be attributed to poor provision - but, in line with policy, more likely to be blamed on lack of will-power or laziness

stakeholders can be aware of whether these general findings apply locally, and whether and where they're found in education

['...social work and the story of poverty...'](#) - revue of a wide-ranging study of how policy controls can reverse professional attitudes - so that professionals change their minds about who deserves help, and about where in the system the real causes of distress lie

education stakeholding manages a commitment, independent of policy controls, to the well-being and fulfilment of students

['...disdain for experts...'](#) - thoroughly illustrated analysis of how a neo-lib government consultation on the future of education systematically sidelines informed argument

what is hidden by government can be exposed by stakeholder groups, and be fed into nationwide action locality-by-locality

- **2. commercial interests**

['Can business teach the world?'](#) - education journalist's report of how the business-world claims to be able, globally, to sell 'expertise' for re-shaping education

the education that commerce seeks for competitiveness may not correspond with what stakeholders seek for well-being and fulfilment

[...Letting Young People Down](#) - business-world monograph surveying an education service said to be failing because it is not giving enough attention to the business world

stakeholders must deal with commerce seeking to persuade educators that they can realise their professionalism by acting as its agents

['...minimum income standard...'](#) - think-tank report on how employers' failure to pay a living wage is pushing working people into levels of poverty which are complex, beyond their control, and have consequences for their children's education

educators and their stakeholders need to be clear about where the causes and effects of educational underachievement lie

- **3. damaged lives**

[The Body Economic - Why Austerity Kills](#) - education-journal review of a publication, well rooted in history and economics, characterising neo-lib austerity policy as driven by myths which damage lives

if there is any mythology or damage in neo-lib policy then stakeholder interests in well-being and fulfilment can probe and expose it

['...austerity advocates have blood on their hands...'](#) - newspaper article, by a well-connected economist, examining how neo-lib economics physically and mentally damages lives and hinders learning

stakeholder and educator interest in education-for-citizenship can probe and expand local experience of such politically-fraught claims

[Detoxifying School Accountability](#) - think-tank monograph setting out attempts to control what educators do, by using target-driven accountability procedures - it claims that this fails to provide a 'rounded' education - and is alienating key stakeholders

stakeholders can find local mandates for disentangling themselves from what any central influences seek harmfully to impose

on fragmentation

'Fragmentation' might be another take on 'a broken society'. It offers another way into asking where are the cracks and fissures? How are they formed? By whom? And why? Some of that break-up is being phrased as between 'strivers' and 'slackers'. But perhaps it's more useful to talk in terms of 'predators' and 'prey'?

- **4. divisions**

[Fractured Times](#) - distinguished professorial historian's long view of the education-related origins of fragmentation - it finds them in the rejection of the credibility of a bourgeois élite, in a science and technology providing new ways of learning and earning, and in the emergence of a consumer society in which the citizen become a customer - the trends consign all to what sociology once referred to as 'the lonely crowd'

stakeholders can find that, although not patriotically favoured by neo-lib policy, all 'academic learning' can be the stuff of 'learning-for-living'

['Why more jobs may be bad news...'](#) - economics journalist's survey of evidence showing that, although some prospects in some sectors have significantly improved, this is not so for many - lower commercial investment, at middle and lower ranges of work-life, is lowering levels of employment - it's under-employing people - and offering poor and unreliable prospects

stakeholders and educators need action for students who find the 'promise' of competitive education for career success as just not believable

['Job security a thing of the past...'](#) - trade-union perspectives on how flexible labour markets commodify workers as functionaries - seen in terms of whether they are worth retaining, whether they need replacing, whether they can be reliably contracted - but not thought of as supporting families - this working-life sector has been named 'the precariat'

students and educators can work on what people they know and trust do to make career management so fearful or more hopeful

['...gentrification and exclusion...'](#) - peer-reviewed journal study of the 'middle-class' colonisation of formerly 'working-class' neighbourhoods - it includes the separation of schooling for richer and poorer families

stakeholders and educators may be working less with 'standards', more with how other people's troublesome children are avoided

['Mixed-tenure myths...'](#) - peer-reviewed journal account of how attempts to use shared neighbourhoods, to reduce social fragmentation and improve opportunity, are thwarted - these contrary dynamics enclose educational opportunity

stakeholder contacts with families who had thought of enclosed local schools and colleges as, in some way, 'theirs' need special attention

[‘...open tribes...’](#) - on-line think-tank probing possibilities for reconciling protective attitudes with open attitudes - a tribal collectivity or solidarity excludes others - this argues it can be changed into a reaching-out openness and generosity - it is argued in a series of podcast conversations with informed social and political commentators

stakeholders can reach beyond being ‘nice’ about conflicting interests, issues for the education of the marginalised need confronting

- **5. income**

[‘...worse off than in 1983...’](#) - professorial magazine article, polemical and political but well-documented, setting out the decades-long deepening of the rich-poor gap

stakeholder groups must win trust of poor who grab help where they find it, it's what 'tribal alignments' are for

[‘A more unequal society’](#) - statistically sophisticated think-tank, assembling detailed calculations of wealth distribution since over three decades - displaying massive increases in the separation of rich and poor

stakeholders cannot redistribute wealth, but can introduce strangers, so that living and working together is based on mutual comprehension

[‘...Inequality rising faster than ever...’](#) - professorial sociologist's think-tank account of the world-wide accelerating separation between rich from poor

stakeholder support to education for well-being and fulfilment is a global trend, strengthening its case, and worth publishing locally

- **6. aspiration**

[Poverty, Participation and Choice](#) - historically-rooted think-tank account of how poverty squeezes aspiration out of people - damaging their ability and willingness to take part in society - it does so in many different ways, not of all them obvious - there are consequences for how they see themselves, and don't see themselves, as citizens and as members of their own society

education and its stakeholders touch upon experience and feelings deeper and wider than can be fixed with information and skills

[‘...an undisclosed and unsustainable model...’](#) - working paper collating evidence on the failure of the private sector to generate opportunity - it traces that failure to not taking adequate account of the interaction of wealth, environment, privatisation, politics and work-life - all elements in well-being and fulfilment

education and its stakeholders may be dealing with private-sector outfits who, so far, have shown little interest in such stakeholder voice

on myth-and-reality

Talk of parasite-people selfishly avoiding work, generation-on-generation, is an issue for education. Whatever beliefs, values and expectations such behaviour would amount to a counter culture. And it's not hard to provoke into hostility members of a mainstream culture thinking of themselves as deserving. Where a government goes that way people may be pre-disposed to believe it, and even welcome the role of abused hero. There are always counter cultures - the super-rich cultivate one. But suppose there are not enough parasite people to form a culture - not even among migrant families? Could, then, a wound-up mainstream hostility be unwound? Do people unlearn what they think they know? Little can so seriously damage the relationship between education and the cultures it inhabits than a deceitful government.

- **7. 'scroungers' or 'strivers'**

[Are There Cultures of Worklessness?...](#) - think-tank looks for it, but fails to find evidence of extensive worklessness over generations - there is no 'culture of worklessness'

education achieves little by telling facts, more by enabling discovery - but fragmenting barriers must first be unblocked

['The myth of the "welfare scrounger"'](#) - political journalist cites UK government figures showing minimal welfare dependence, and high job mobility among claimants - it negates claims of 'neighbours sleeping off a life on benefits?', and 'generations languish on the dole and dependency'

the contrast is useful to students and educators working on the abuses of evidence, and the differences between perception and reality

- **8. economic causes and cultural effects**

['...tough times & attitudes to welfare...'](#) - national population survey showing support for welfare in sharp decline

the shift is useful to students and educators working on social-and-cultural influences on fragile beliefs, and the uses of scapegoats

['...economic distress can push through reforms...'](#) - leading economics professor argues that élites see bad news as an opportunity to claim support for the reforms they want - it also shows how people accept damaging claims from authorities they presume to be honest

the shift is useful to students and educators working on how people can be persuaded to act against their own interests

[Forum for Youth Participation and Democracy](#) - university-based research-and-development programme contesting the loss of social participation and fellow feeling

the argument, evidence and programme-development are catalysts for educators and stakeholders working on establishing credible causes for useful effects

on simplicity

Is anything ever, as the cliché claims, 'as simple as that'? Education is working with local, domestic and global influences. Social, cultural, economic and technological forces are at work. Their interaction is always layered, often volatile, and sometimes unpredictable - the world 'chaotic' crops up. But people know about chaos, what they need to find is meaning in confusion and purpose in response. Any failure to take on this complexity risks losing touch with students. And that failure leaves education vulnerable to dominant interest-groups, with other agendas. There are branches of education close to such collapse. No informed educator can accept the prospect of entrapping students in any such simple-mindedness.

- **9. simple messages on complex issues**

['...a significant moment in our national history...'](#) - novelist's journalistic assessment of how charm and simplicity can form a narrative which cuts through frustration and disappointment - it shows how it gives prominence to recently-ascendant political figure - this is one of several possible examples

students and educators can work together on how simplicity persuades, but asking for how long? and with what consequences?

[‘...the evoking-freedom technique...’](#) - peer-reviewed outlining of evidence for the effectiveness of flattery in persuasion - saying ‘of course you are free to say “no” to this’ gets attention - and, too often, compliance

students and educators can work on whether every promise of ‘choice’, ‘empowerment’ or ‘creativity’ is real, and how anybody would know

[‘...behavioural insights...’](#) - the official account of testing a UK-government programme for controlling behaviour with an unthinking nudge - this is a behaviourist technique for suggesting and reinforcing desired behaviour

students and educators can work on wondering when political and commercial nudges are useful, and when they hide too much

- **10. ‘icons’ and their influence**

[‘...Bono a crony of bankers...’](#) - polemical but probing professorial review of a book claiming that celebrity endorsements can do more harm than good - they can even persuade people to support the causes of damage rather than their remedies - celebrities can be seriously bad news

students and educators can work on figuring how to check for the credible, and deal with the harm done by the merely plausible

[‘...evolved to follow celebrities?...’](#) - professor of social anthropology setting out a richly-illustrated account of why following the famous may be a genetically-inherited impulse - as though we trot along behind alphas as we evolved to do it on the savannah

education stakeholders need to be circumspect in drawing on celebrity endorsement, checking for the clear-and-credible argument

- **11. infantilised by popular culture**

[‘...how markets infantilise adults...’](#) - moderate social commentator entertaining the possibility that a startling book might have a point - it condemns the excesses of commerce in pandering to consumers' childish impulses

students and educators can work on what maturity is, and on assessing how it is distributed between older and younger people

[‘...a double-dip regression...’](#) - right-wing journalistic review of the anti-infantilising publication - this one referring to media imagery which portrays ‘child’ and ‘adult’ as barely distinguishable from each other

students and educators can work on whether there are outfits that rely on such compliance - political? commercial? religious? educational?

[‘...infantilist ethos replaces protestant ethic...’](#) - left-wing philosophical blog, applying the anti-infantilising publication to the capitalist exploitation of child-like compliance

should educators and their stakeholders wonder how free of exploitation they are, actively or passively?

- **12. simple error and complex reality?**

[‘Perceptions are not reality’](#) - report of a think-tank and university-based survey of how spectacularly wrong people can be in favouring policy positions

students and educators can work on identifying errors they know about, and wondering how bright-enough people can be so wrong

[‘How the poverty consensus unravelled’](#) - think tank specialising in social-exclusion, with a documented account of the UK government’s evidence-free reframing of the re-funding of welfare - looking at why it’s done and how it’s targeted - also looking at how it dismisses a former cross-party consensus on education for well-being

stakeholder credibility needs informed sources, particularly where its programme conflicts with political claims and popular assumptions

on risk

Social, economic and planetary change focus attention on risk - asking what can go wrong?, how likely is it? and how bad would that be? Risk is unavoidably a feature of how people incorporate education into their lives - asking ‘what is education for?’, ‘what good is it?’, and ‘what can I expect from it?’. The answers are different for different groups. For some expectations are more likely to be met. For some making a mistake would have more serious consequences. How is this to be managed by policy, by expertise, and by people who have learned to act for themselves. Few current proposals have much to say about the enormity of the risk that contemporary society faces, or about the urgency with which education needs to be engaged.

- **13. opportunity and risk**

[‘...this is class inequality...’](#) - refereed-journal article arguing that, although some seek to discard the idea of ‘social class’, the levels of risk are greater for some social groups, and that justifies the use of the term

stakeholder voice enables expression of what the excluded need to be heard, and some claim the right to be heard as ‘working class’

[“goods” and “bads” are embedded](#)’ - accompanying article, arguing that assigning levels of risk to social classes takes too little account of how risk is distributed - it is in how social systems are organised, and that risk is thrust on us all - there is more to risk than can be expressed only in terms of ‘social class’

stakeholder voice expresses risk that is institutionally imposed on gender, sexual preference, disability and poverty, not all of this is about class

[‘...calculating social class...’](#) - university-based enquiry suggesting a more inclusive assessment of social class - it must refer to economic, social and cultural advantage and disadvantage - and levels of education are a feature

students and educators can work on how social divisions are claimed and ascribed, and on how such attributions are welcomed and resisted

- **14. position and risk**

[‘...place, space and social enclaves...’](#) [NICEC Journal 31] - journal article illustrating how ‘social class’ can be understood geographically, different groups inhabiting different social enclaves - it’s quite a departure, because the dynamics of enclaves can usefully be set out as social systems

a complication for stakeholder voice is that geographically up-close groups can easily conflict, if they inhabit separated social enclaves

[‘...a broken society?...’](#) - refereed-journal article arguing that social breakdown is not the product of human failure but the ascription of destructiveness to targeted groups in certain locations - their stigmatisation is argued to be little more than a way of claiming political effectiveness

stakeholder networks act contrary to the ‘broken society’ myth by enabling voice for ‘broken lives’, they are prey not predator

[Rise of the super family](#) - professorial account of how well-positioned families displace the more vulnerable, not least in capturing what they take to be the best educational opportunities

stakeholders and educators may need to work with groups whose advantage is gathered into the enclaves that least need it

[The Price of Inequality](#) - journalist's review of an economist's argument that neo-lib policies most favour the least at risk - but, it argues, what is good must not be good just for one constituency and not others - to ignore that is to cause the social destructiveness that some politicians want to ascribe to its victims

students and educators work together on local incidences of good luck and bad luck, wealth and poverty, and the 'deserving' and 'undeserving'

['...The Politics of Uncertainty...'](#) - idealistic think-tank review of 'intelligent' risk management by government - specifically mentioning the rights of stakeholders, it identifies overlapping issues where there are doubts about statistics, expertise, control, and privatisation - the argument is for engaging a 'new politics of uncertainty' to avoid what will otherwise seriously threaten society

the voicing of education-stakeholder interests responds to issues as critical as any facing contemporary or foreseeable society

on fear-and-hope

An informal but prevalent script for learning is "tell 'em, and then they'll know". It's implicit in media claims about what teachers should do on issues ranging from love-life to bullying. A more sophisticated script is that education should pass on to each new generation 'the best that has been thought and said'. And that view sees students as vessels waiting to be filled with golden wonders. The trouble with both theories is that students come to educators already full of learning. It is experience-based learning, and experience can be a convincing teacher. So whatever is taught must find a place, if it can, among what is already believed. And whatever comes out of that mix will not correspond with what the media or the élite think desirable - never exactly, sometimes not at all. Learning is a back-and-forth process: educators wondering what students are taking from it, students wondering what it has to do with them. The only sense that matters is the sense that students make of it: 'what's going on and what can I do about it?', 'is this good for me, or bad?', 'do I approach, or avoid?', 'must I fear, or can I hope?'.

- **15. about fear**

['Are we done for?...'](#) - a sceptical philosopher's review of conflicting claims concerning the survivability of what economic growth has done to planetary life

students and educators examining what's going on, and asking what people do about it... in denial? in escape? in pretence?, and by getting to grips?

[Disruptive Technologies](#) - business-world account of the scientific unpredictability of economy - students see images of fewer workers - all of them having rare abilities

students and educators wondering whether it's better to know or not to know bad news, and if it's possible to make good use of bad news

[The Death of British Industry](#) - leading economist's review of a long-standing commentator's account of the relationship between politics, commerce and economy - and documenting the damage done by commerce to industry

students and educators work together on what's going on concerning the work-life that once gave their community its livelihood

[‘...human progress is a myth...’](#) - cosmopolitan academic reviews the sceptical philosopher’s own account of how it is better to face up to how animal instincts rule human behaviour

students and educators probing macho street-level talk of ‘winners’ and ‘losers’, and what that does to everybody’s fear and hope

[‘...a moral catastrophe...’](#) - novelist’s account of how his science fiction is built on an appreciation of a philosophical argument that society is in moral collapse - that collapse is thought to be for a lack of respect for deeply-established tradition

students and educators working on where their morality comes from, and if it’s not tradition what else do they have to go on?

[‘...isn’t faith becoming more important?...’](#) - religious think-tank claims government support for religious belief as a way of repairing social damage - the claim is that it would divert student attention from the ignorance, superstition and self interest which has caused social damage

students and educators working on how faith can be better than the ‘ignorance’, ‘superstition’ and ‘self interest’ it claims to replace

[‘...myths bring comfort...’](#) - a former senior clergyman, now agnostic, reviewing the sceptic’s philosophical rejection of the inevitability of progress - there is quite an argument here, the agnostic contesting the sceptic by claiming that myths can be more than a narrative of romantic escapism

students and educators working on whether there are both stories that deceive and stories that offer meaning, and how you tell the difference

[‘...”generation Y” backing government...’](#) - politics and music commentator’s review of anecdotal evidence that there is a decline in youthful idealism - they and their icons are found to believe that erecting self protective barriers to others is now safer than welcoming and helping them

students and educator working on how far a ‘beat-em-or-join-em’ attitude is where much of modern youth is at

[‘...a third of children consider suicide...’](#) - an education journalist’s report of research showing that stress at school is a main cause of depression - with self-harm a part of this in more than half the sample

local stakeholders work with outfits housing distress, educators struggling to cope, students suffering and detaching, on-line links allowing, and policy causing

- **16. about hope**

[In Defence of Enlightenment](#) - philosopher’s account of the human ability to disentangle from arbitrary demands - in history from crown and priesthood - now from dishonest politicians, bogus pundits, self-interested promoters and self-styled leaders

educators and their stakeholders must ask what if such claims are valid? can there be a more important concept for education than enlightenment?

[‘Can non-European’s think?’](#) - Cosmopolitan professor characterising the enlightenment as intellectual imperialism - and making a case for global enlightenment - where students of Asian and African stock find their own claim to independent thinking

educators and students working together on whether any upbringing equips people for the possibility of independently navigating a life-journey

[‘...cooperation, genetics and female choice...’](#) - refereed journal enquiry into female sexual preferences, showing women seeking for cooperative males with altruistic traits - this is because such males maintain long-term relationships - it gives students somewhere else to turn - other than impulsive brutality and romanticised sentimentality

educators and students working together on whether alpha males need to know more about women - especially the ones who prefer nerds

[‘... "generation Y" is not hard-hearted...’](#) - sociologically-informed research rebuttal of claims that students are sympathetic to mean-spirited neo-lib policy - with evidence showing that contemporary youth is as generous as anybody, and more-so than some

educators and students working on whether academic argument has anything to do with their lives, and how they can speak for themselves

[‘...core values are driven by more than economics...’](#) - conservative philosopher’s appeal to a classic political position, arguing that a society should be in contact with its past, its present and its future - a position claimed by political conservatives, but having progressive resonances

educators and students working on historical, contemporary and futuristic ways of seeing their own membership of society

[‘...digital literacy...’](#) [BL34] - analysis of evidence on education showing how people, particularly in the digital age, figure out what and who they can trust - it enables students for reliable and sustainable command of their own story

educators and students on how anybody knows who and what can be trusted enough to make a difference to another person’s life

[‘The uses of narrative...’](#) [BL35] - analysis of how people use narrative - it is true that misleading myths are narrative - but an interrogated narrative enables students to find credible meaning in experience, from which they can construct a hopeful purpose in life - it brings students to where they can self-critically and safely develop, share, discuss and even publish their own stories

stakeholders can probe whether the best hope of linking remembered experience to useful reflection is a narrative that can be shared

There is a salutary tale here. It concerns an aspect of education fully enmeshed in these issues. Careers work is about who gets to do what in society. It has a century of research-and-development to draw on. It assiduously canvasses policy support. The commercial world can be counted on to take an interest. It has had some kind of representation in most education settings. Yet it is struggling to secure its own future. What went wrong?

Is it possible that it defended a past rather than reaching for a future? That would explain why it ran out of recognisably useful things to say. That retro-thinking was framed by a psychologically-understood individualism, linked to economically-understood opportunity. Such simplicity was, for a time, convenient to both commerce and politics. But it has little place in a privatised, digitised and globalised world. And it has no room for the social-and-cultural complexities of a fragmented, polarised and damaged social world. It has produced not so much inspiration as desperation - and the confusion seems to have taken refuge in what is called ‘career-chaos theory’.

But students don’t need to be told about chaos. If they are to find meaning and purpose in confusion, it will need more time and space where students can learn about what’s going on, and how they can make sense of it. Little of that can be done in hit-and-run careers interviews. This is not to say that face-to-face help is not

necessary, but it is to say that it is not sufficient. Careers work has never found the need to draw on the full range of processes available to a well-constructed curriculum. It needs to do that now. The whole of what is set out here need the full scope of a curriculum designed to deliver learning for living,

This website is about innovation. And innovation means the 'creative destruction' of what can no-longer help. Should that be a lesson to us all?

this work is in four parts...

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