Technology and Schools

Neil Selwyn   My name is Neil Selwyn and I'm the author of *Education and Technology: Key Issues and Debates*. This is a short recording following on from chapter 6 of the second edition, where we looked at technology and educational institutions. We finished this chapter with a set of questions about the future of schools. So to get us thinking about these issues have a listen to the thoughts of another academic who researches and writes on the topic of education technology.

John Potter   I'm John Potter, I'm reader in media in education at University College London Institute of Education.

Neil Selwyn   For this chapter I asked John a few deceptively simple questions. What is your gut instinct about the future of schools? Do you think that will still have schools in 2050? If so, why would we still need schools by then?

John Potter   I think yes, we will still have schools. I think the answer is difficult because it's so culturally specific and schools are different in all different kinds of societies and in all different spaces in the world. I think that we might see a kind of coalescing of what education means, given the fact that large corporations are interested in education and that therefore exporting the models already to different countries in the world, and so we may see a kind of homogenization across the world of different kinds of educational forms. I think we still need them because I'm assuming that by 2050 people will still be living together so I think that there are specific sorts of social purposes to having schools and to having some kind of face to face and interaction in them. I think the curriculum will change. Of course schools will also follow the patterns of employment and other structures of their own society, you can't really divorce them off from that place in in the whole scheme of things.

Neil Selwyn   So there's a lot in John's answer to think about. His opening point about acknowledging the different forms of school around the world is important. When you consider the lack of basic primary education much of the developing world, then technology arguments for the "end of school" from a privileged position in the developed west seem way off the mark. John's answer also highlights the new models of school that are being developed by large corporations, many of which are driven by the extensive use of digital technology. Now we covered this in the chapter with regards to examples like Quest to Learn, and the Steve Jobs schools in the Netherlands and South Africa. John's point that these developments might lead to a homogenization, rather than diversification of schooling is definitely worth thinking about. I also like John's point that societies will still need schools for social purposes, especially in terms of developing forms of face to face interaction and socialization, as well as more practical issues such as child care. These are functions of physical schooling that digital education is less capable of replicating. John's final points about the ways in which schooling is linked to new economic forms is also important. If you want to predict the future of schools in 2050 then perhaps the best place to start might be thinking about what types of industry, and what types of jobs there'll be. The correspondence between education systems and economic systems is likely to remain strong.