Radical change strategy

In previous posts I have talked about why school is a problem[1], how people learn and hence how we should teach[2], what should be learnt in school[3], and that we need to think more radically about the design of schooling[4]. In this post I suggest a strategy for achieving this sort of 'disruptive innovation'.

My strategy is based on Christensen et al's (2008)[5] model for disruptive innovation. As illustrated in Figure 1, the starting assumption is that a new model of schooling will never compete with the existing model if it is targeting students who are already performing well in the existing model using existing metrics.

Figure 1   Graphic illustration of the advantage that incumbents have over new entrants
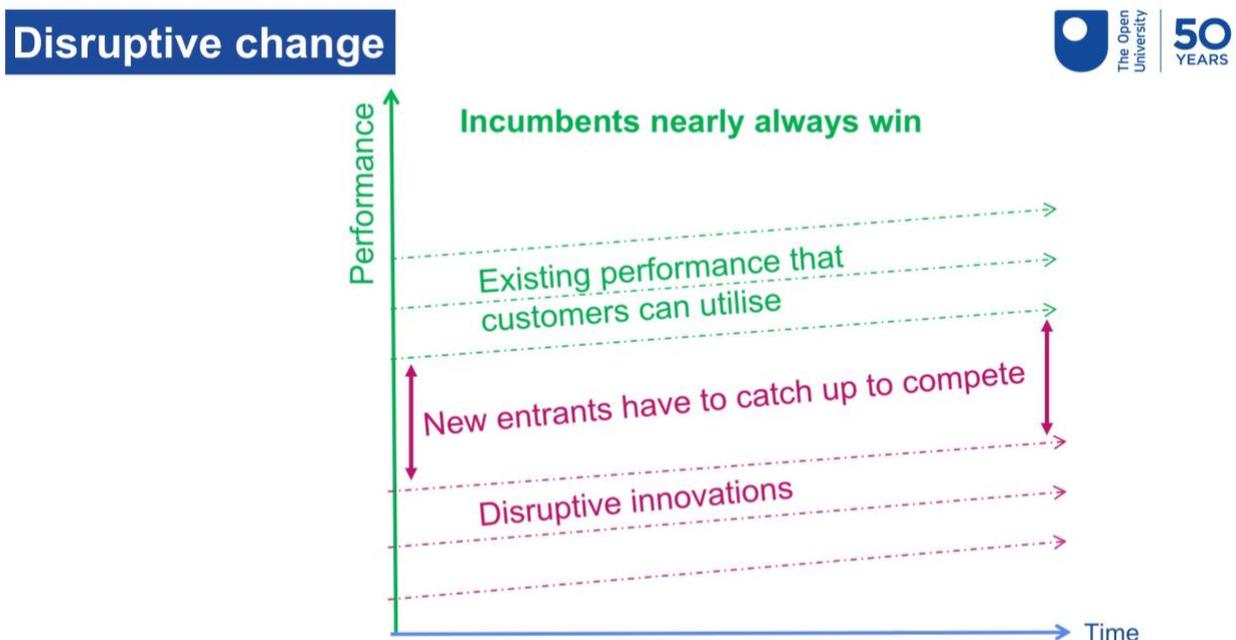
Adapted from Christensen et al 2008 p.46 Disrupting Class: how disruptive innovation will change the way the world learns. London: McGrawHill.

So, in order to be seen to be successful new models of schooling need to do two things (see Figure 2):

- Firstly, they need to target students who the current model of schooling isn't working well for (e.g. those who are deemed to be failing, have been excluded, are home educated, or are not being sufficiently stretched)

- Secondly, they need to develop new metrics of success which are more appropriate for their students
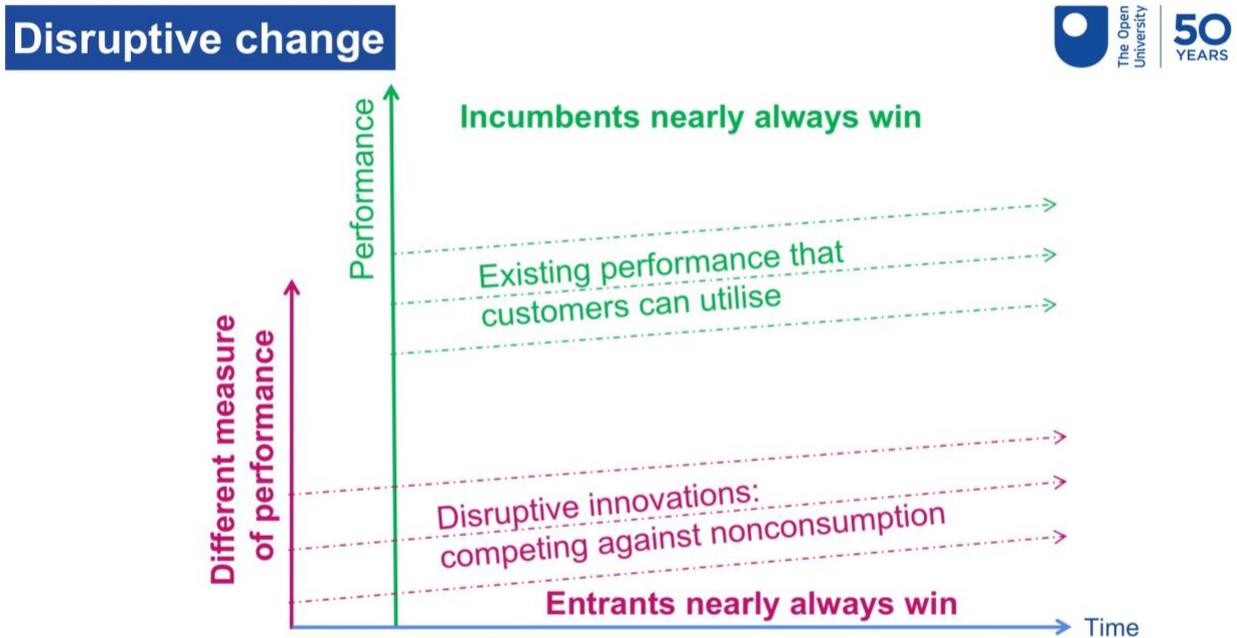
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[1] https://halfbaked.education/is-school-the-problem/
[2] https://halfbaked.education/how-should-we-teach/
[3] https://halfbaked.education/what-should-be-learnt/
[4] https://halfbaked.education/we-need-schome/
[5] http://claytonchristensen.com/books/disrupting-class/

Figure 2   Graphic representation of factors that enable entrants to succeed over incumbents

Adapted from Christensen et al 2008 p.46 Disrupting Class: how disruptive innovation will change the way the world learns. London: McGrawHill.

This sort of approach is already being used in education. For example, in Australia there are mainstream schools that are adding a 'Big Picture Academy' stream to their offer (see Figure 3). The Big Picture stream is based on the defining characteristics of Big Picture Learning[6], including learning through interests and internships. Students either stay in the standard programme or transfer into the Big Picture stream. In some schools the Big Picture stream is intended for students who have been identified as 'gifted and talented' who are not being stretch sufficiently in the main stream. In others the aim is to cater for students who are failing in the mainstream or are in danger of being excluded. In all cases students have to apply to move from the mainstream into the Big Picture stream. Students in the Big Picture stream develop portfolios of evidence of their knowledge, skills and attributes. Many of these students will leave school with no formal 'end of school' qualifications.

Figure 3   Disruptive innovation in schooling in Australia

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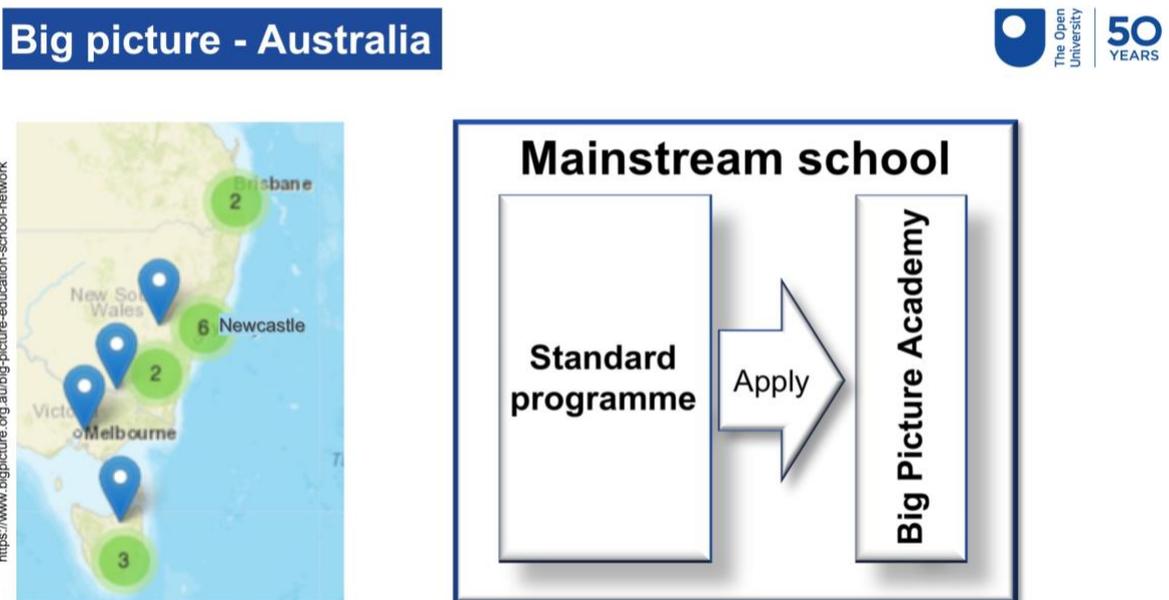
6 https://www.bigpicture.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=389353&type=d&pREC_ID=902235

The challenge for these students is how they represent their knowledge, skills and attributes in a concise way for potential future employers and/or university entrance. Christensen's disruptive innovation model assumes new metrics - new ways of evidencing 'learning'.
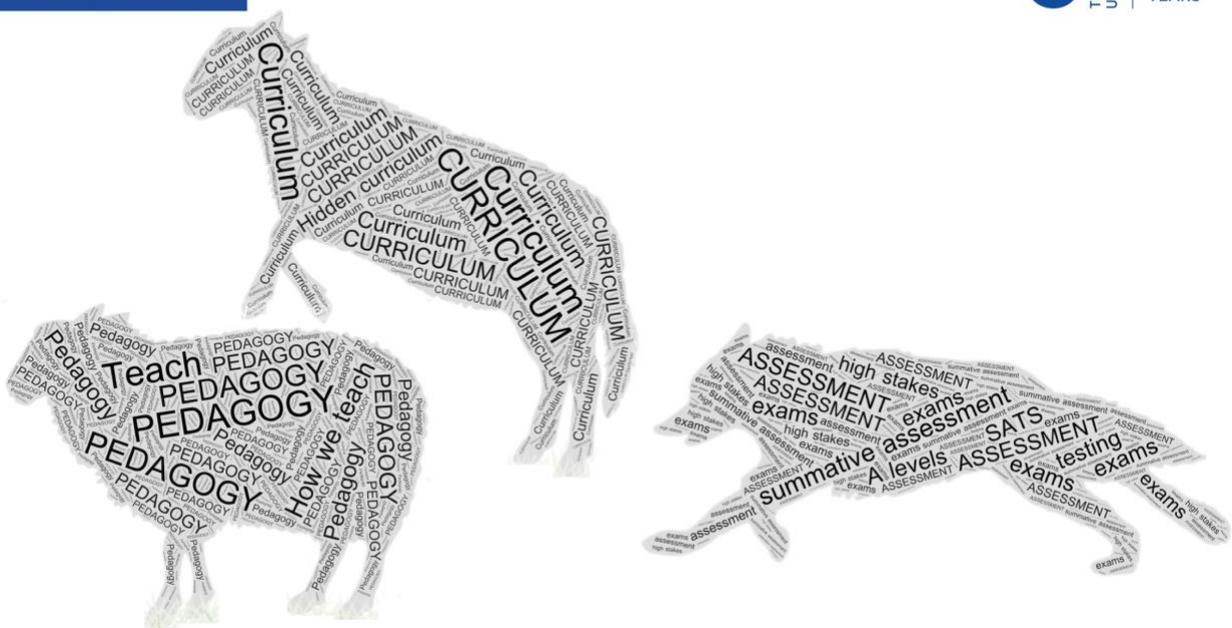
Figure 4   Assessment is the elephant in the room

The elephant
in the room

Assessment

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Traditional forms of assessment are the bedrock of current schooling - they drive curriculum and pedagogy - and are strongly resistant to change.

Figure 5   Assessment drives curriculum and pedagogy

However, traditional forms of summative assessment are limited in their ability to provide evidence of individuals' knowledge, skills and attributes. Terminal exams (Figure 6) are fine for

measuring 'knowledge about' (i.e. content) but cannot capture evidence of many of the other [outcomes of schooling that are so important today](#)[7].

Figure 6   Terminal exams don't map well onto the fit for purpose curriculum

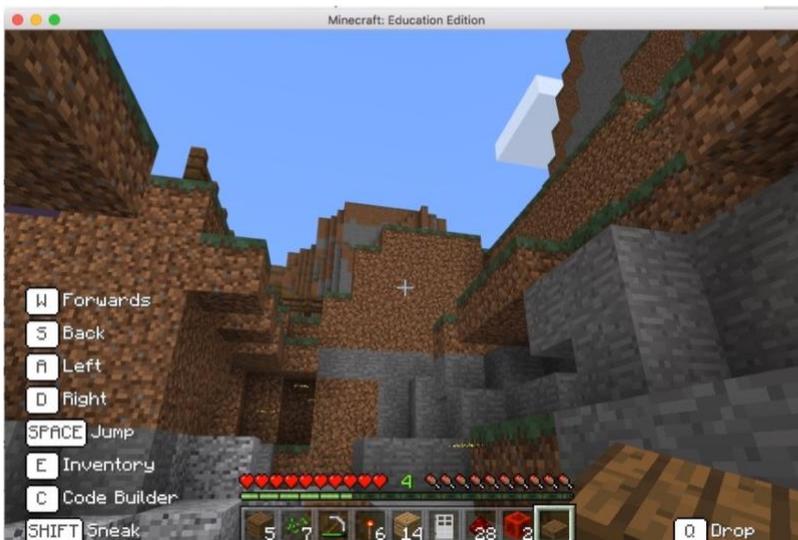We need to find additional ways to demonstrate what young people have learnt by the time they leave school. [As I have suggested elsewhere](#)[8], this might include using AI to infer knowledge, skills and attributes from people's digital footprints. However, this is rife with ethical issues around data ownership, transparency and bias (Figure 7).

Figure 7   AI (data mining) may provide new ways of assessing learning outcomes

[Point of Learning (PoL)](#)[9] also offers a new way of evidencing knowledge, skills and attributes, based on individuals being seen doing things which demonstrate that they have consistently met specific agreed targets over time (Figure 8).
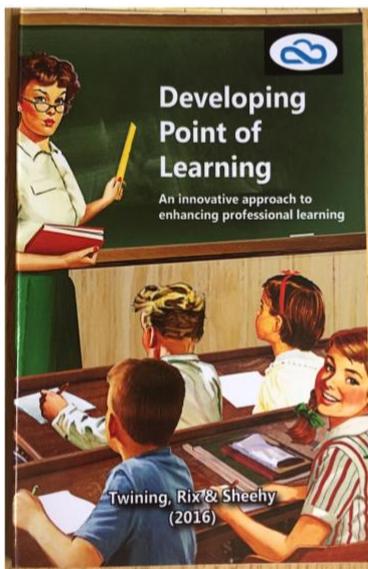
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[7] https://halfbaked.education/what-should-be-learnt/

[8] https://halfbaked.education/ai-and-assessment-mining-learning-outcomes/

[9] https://halfbaked.education/what-is-point-of-learning-pol-moving-beyond-standardised-testing/

Figure 8   Point of Learning

Of course the more radical alternative when it comes to university entrance would be to do away with entry requirements based on end of school exams. The Open University (UK) has been doing this for the last 50 years with great success (Figure 9).

To solve the assessment problem we need to think more deeply about the purposes underpinning summative assessment. Is it to assess the quality of the school? Is it to filter and sift individuals' life chances? Is it to signal who will conform and not rock the boat? Is it to help people learn?

How does assessment relate to achieving the vision[10] of Individual fulfilment and Universal wellbeing? What would fit for purpose assessments[11] look like today?

We need a paradigm shift in education - a shift away from distrust and coercion where gaming the system makes sense and towards trust and meaningful engagement where success relates

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[10] https://halfbaked.education/educational-vision-is-not-enough-d2/
[11] https://halfbaked.education/characteristics-of-effective-summative-assessment/

to the degree to which all individuals are fulfilled and the wellbeing of societies and the planet are ensured.

This blog post summarises part of my [OU inaugural lecture](#)[12], which was delivered at the Open University in Milton Keynes on the 25th June 2019. Other posts from this lecture include: [Is school the problem?](#)[13], [How should we teach?](#)[14], and [What should be learnt?](#)[15]

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[12] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A401c5kKM_w
[13] https://halfbaked.education/is-school-the-problem/
[14] https://halfbaked.education/how-should-we-teach/
[15] https://halfbaked.education/what-should-be-learnt/
[16] https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/