

# STORYING CURRICULUM AS TECHNOECONOMIC PROGRESS: A LAMENT!

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Until two years ago, I did not own a smartphone. Prior to adding this digital appendage, I often relied on my memory, an internal sense of direction, international calling card, and public pay phones to communicate with my family. Or, in a worse case scenario, and to their chagrin, I borrowed a colleague's phone. Now I live and walk around the world plugged-in to the digital "Matrix," whether I am trail running, at a meeting, skiing, vacuuming to The Sunday Edition, or browsing Facebook while sitting on the can. And yet, I keep telling myself: "I am not alone!" Or, as Shirley Turkle succinctly puts it, we are alone together!<sup>1</sup>

As we approach the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our settler nation, the institutional headwinds that once supported the traditional *aims of education* have shifted to meet the demands of our current digital knowledge economy.<sup>2</sup> Universities and schools are now poised to implement different social innovation programs in the spirit of entrepreneurship for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Our provincial governments have developed new curriculum policies that decree the teaching of financial literacy, computer coding, and entrepreneurship by design across the school curriculum in provinces such as Nova Scotia and British Columbia. "Canadian political leaders," we are told,

...have increasingly championed the digital economy after largely overlooking the sector in recent years. With oil and other commodities trading at multiyear lows, the economy teetering and a new class of startups gaining traction and disrupting traditional industries, Canadian politicians are hearing they need new, effective approaches to foster innovation and support tech startups.<sup>3</sup>

Within this story of progress, the school curriculum must now be retrofitted for Smartphones, iPads, iPods, and digital literacies. Teachers and students are now plugged-in to multinational socially mediated platforms like Facebook, with their powers of data mining, advertising, and commercializing our virtual realities. In order to ensure the national security of future capital, teacher education programs and school boards are asked to create more "effective" approaches by securing edubusiness partnerships with multinational companies like Apple, Google, and Microsoft. Together we will develop the next generation of technolaborers, experiment with social innovation, and establish cutting edge incubators within the elementary, high school, and university schooling systems that promise to nurture entrepreneurialism. Technohipster youth can even chillax with their Prime Minister on Google Hangout.

Earlier this year, Justin Trudeau travelled to address the business elite at the annual World Economic Forum in Davos Switzerland. Klaus Schwab, a German economist who presides over the Forum, stated that we are currently living within a

fourth industrial revolution. Part of this new order will be typified, as Schwab stressed then, by “diversity and plurality, significant investments in infrastructure and a fostering of entrepreneurial spirit.”<sup>4</sup> He went on to praise Justin Trudeau’s capacities, as both our Prime Minister and Minister of Youth, to represent the kind of entrepreneurial spirit needed to address the technoeconomic demands of the digital knowledge economy. In response, Trudeau addressed the attending audience: “My predecessor wanted you to know Canada for its resources...I want you to know Canadians for our resourcefulness.”<sup>5</sup> And yet, studying history teaches us that such resourceful and clever political scripts are not new.

We can trace similar narrative tropes back to Greek poetry. In *Work and Days* Hesiod retells the story of Prometheus’s resourcefulness when tricking the Gods to give the technology of fire back to humans (representing foresight).<sup>6</sup> Whereas his brother Epimetheus (representing hindsight), despite being warned, mistakenly opened Pandora’s box and, in turn, enslaved our future to the plight of the (technological) evils he released out into the world. Only *Hope* failed to escape the box. Or, we can flip our interpretative script as her refusal to enter a certain kind of world. Regardless of one’s gendered political spin, such narratives of resourcefulness, entrepreneurial spirit, and failure, situate us somewhere between foresight and hindsight, where our future indebtedness, in/security, and faith are storied as this narrative trope of *Hope*.<sup>7</sup> In this contradictory story, the urgency of our future security is near, yet the best technological tools to get there remain...unclear. Only the right curriculum, right technology, right science, right clever politician, with the right business plan in hand, can enable us to cheer each other on to the clarion calls of...*Yes We Can!* Today, such hope, such resourceful foresight, as Prime Minister Trudeau makes clear, rests on the shoulders of certain kinds of universities, teacher education programs, public schools, teachers, and youth. In this story, the public school becomes a dystopian Deweyian Lab of sorts. One whose sole aim for society is to educate Canadian citizens toward a life of pioneering commercialized ideas for the elite.<sup>8</sup>

It is with such entrepreneurial spirit in mind that Jim Basillie, the co-founder of Research in Motion, both enthuses and laments:

The good news is that Canadian entrepreneurs have the potential to generate great wealth. Our innovators and entrepreneurs are world class. Their desire to grow a business here benefits every Canadian. But if we don’t create an ecosystem where they can flourish, Canada’s prosperity is at risk.<sup>9</sup>

In this storied dystopia, Basillie warns Canadians, that our policies for tenure, promotion, and programing toward securing our national futures are out of date with the market logics of a digital economy.<sup>10</sup> Our lack of technoeconomic preparedness within the school curriculum could be the defeat of our capacity to profit globally from settler capitalism.

Here, Basillie’s, Schwab’s, and Trudeau’s narratives of commercialization, incubation, and technoeconomic progress remind me of Dr. Seuss’s *The Lorax*. Near

the beginning, the Lorax asks the Once-ler, “*What’s that THING you’ve made out of my Truffula tuft?*” In response the Once-ler says:

“Look, Lorax,” I said. “There’s no cause for alarm.”  
 I chopped just one tree. I am doing no harm.  
 I’m being quite useful. This thing is a Thneed.  
 A Thneed’s a Fine-Something-That-All-People-Need!  
 It’s a shirt. It’s a sock. It’s a glove. It’s hat.  
 But it has other uses. Yes, far beyond that.  
 You can use it for carpets. For Pillows! For sheets!  
 Or Curtains! Or covers for bicycle seats!<sup>11</sup>

Ah yes, a commercialized idea, is a Fine-Something-That-All-People-Need! There is no cause for alarm. Today, teaching curriculum as coding, entrepreneurship, social innovation, and resourcefulness advocates for understanding our relationships with, and reliance on technology, as the *thing* everyone *needs*. In turn, technology as hope has become a narrative trope where children are “spoken of as if they were raw materials to be shaped to market demand.”<sup>12</sup> Such conceptualizations of technology, as Aoki astutely observed, remains “an instrumental view” of our future, our schooling, society, and our children, where we might remain alone together in our hindsight.

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### **Biography**

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