

DIGITAL DESTRUCTION AND THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

“DIGITAL DESTRUCTION”

1. The Story of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*¹

- established in Scotland in 1768 and “generally regarded as the world’s most comprehensive and authoritative encyclopedia”
- in recent decades the publishing company failed to monitor the rise of online reference works and ran into financial problems (English language Wikipedia appeared a year after the book was published)
- Evans and Wurster identify four morals for all businesses:
 - (i) “the most venerable can prove the most vulnerable”
 - (ii) “a strong corporate culture can blind business leaders to events that do not fit into their collective mental framework”
 - (iii) even if executives do fully grasp the impact of new technologies, they may be at a competitive disadvantage because they are “saddled with legacy assets”
 - (iv) this is not a *zero-sum* game (a *sum* game is where the losses and gains balance each other, for example, a cricket match: one side wins and the other loses); in a *non-zero-sum* game both (or all) sides can all lose out
- as at 2014 the company no longer prints a hard copy version; there is some online material and the company (using its well-established brand) also publishes other educational material

2. The Risk of Complacency

- Australian export of education has been an international success story
- but we must not become complacent
- the time of greatest danger comes at the time of greatest success: we may be so focused on making the most of current successes that we overlook future threats
- digital disruption contains many challenges and opportunities

MOORE’S LAW

3. Gordon Moore of Intel

- April 19 1965: power of computers will double every 18 months-2 years; price of computers will halve every 18 months-2 years
- . “sequentially”: 1, 2, 3.....30 (I could walk to the back of a lecture hall)
- . “exponentially”: 1, 2, 4, 8, 16 (in 30 steps: 1 billion)
- we have often been blind-sided by change, for example, newspapers carried stories of IT changes but newspaper boards themselves failed to ask: “What does all this mean for our newspaper business model?” Are educational providers now running the same risks? Universities have IT departments but who is asking what it all means for the university business model?

4. The Incremental Revolution

- not all changes occur suddenly and dramatically
- the current digital revolution is the biggest revolution since the 18th UK Industrial Revolution

¹ Philip Evan and Thomas Wurster *Blown to Bits: How the New Economics of Information Transforms Strategy*, Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2000, pp 1-7

- 18th century Industrial Revolution didn't begin as a government programme; UK Government was more of an obstacle than a help
- "incrementalism": political science term to explain how change occurs in one small step at a time (sometimes resulting in "unintended consequences")
- it is only by looking back one can see how much has changed
- Google driverless cars; Mercedes driverless trucks: for how long will we continue to allow humans to drive vehicles (road crashes kill 1.2million people around the world each year); will human drivers be gone in 15 years? The current discussion focuses on the novelty of the vehicles and not the long-term economic and social implications of these vehicles

SOME SPECULATIONS ON DIGITAL DISRUPTION FOR EDUCATION

5. Digital Disruption and the Delivery of Education

- a surgeon (say) returning to life after being dead for five centuries would not recognize the profession today; an Oxford lecturer would immediately feel at home back in their own college in front of students
- but will digital disruption transform teaching?
- education will remain vital – but will we need formal institutions to provide it?
- is there still a need for formal attendance at lectures?
- evolution of MOOCs: massive open online courses: designer universities can preserve their branding by giving away their intellectual property; they are trying to develop a different business model
- eventually software will be developed to write student essays for them:
<http://www.businessinsider.com.au/babel-generator-mit-2014-4>

6. What is the Role of Education in Today's Economy?

- education needs to be viewed in the larger economic and social context in which it operates
- government support for education assumes that it has an economic purpose (it would be nice to think that the "manhood" approach to education motivates government but it is the "manpower" motivation that counts)
- "software eats the world": for the first time in history we are now losing jobs faster than we can create them
- are we producing too many graduates for the workforce?²
- should we scrap many of the current courses and instead focus on the growth opportunities in the economy: self-employment and being an entrepreneur (rather than, say, preparing to be a medieval historian)
<https://industrymoves.com/blog/how-to-prepare-for-the-jobs-of-the-future>

RESPONDING TO THE DIGITAL DISRUPTION

7. Journey to an Unknown Destination

- the intensity of current educational administration means that people often have little chance to stand back and look at the wider issues of digital disruption
- technology adds to choices (we can still ride horses as well as ride in cars) and so the digital disruption will broaden the range of options for people wishing to learn
- educational providers need to ask where they can add value

² A challenging website that explores the limitations of American education is www.martynemko.com

8. The Student Experience

- repositioning the status of teaching within the institution
- there is a risk that students are regarded as a “cost centre” and research as a “profit centre” because of the money brought in by high-flying academics
- iT cannot provide the face to face experience of students (exchange of ideas via discussion, networking, developing social skills, being exposed to other cultures, learning to be accommodated with other people in a safe environment)
- students want quality teaching and a good experience
- educational providers can achieve a marketing edge by enhancing the student experience

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

9. Protecting the Industry

- we must never assume that the current offerings for international students represent the best that could be done for them.
- it is appalling that three decades after the “export of education” became an Australian Government priority we are still wrestling with matters that were identified as problems at the outset (such as the basic issue of ensuring that each jurisdiction treats international students in an equal way to domestic students with respect to things like hospital charges and transport concessions³)

10. Helping the Industry

. a new not-for-profit association has been formed to improve the international student experience through the support of best practice across the sector:

International Student Experience Association (ISEA):

www.internationalstudentexperience.com.au

. ISEA is available to assist institutions in getting it right and helping to future proof the international student experience.

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World of Thinking

www.worldofthinking.com.au

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International Student Experience Australia

www.internationalstudentexperience.com.au

³ Michael Chaney *Australia – Educating Globally: Advice from the International Advisory Council*, Canberra, February 2013, p 5, 45-46