

Pathways of anticipation: futuremaking and the design of social futures

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Efforts to understand the dynamic processes of learning situated across space and time, beyond the here and now, are presently challenging traditional definitions of learning and education. This is partly defined by technological developments creating new mobilities (Leander, Phillips & Taylor, 2010), transformation of learning environments (OECD, 2017) and how young people anticipate their learning futures and social change.

As such, this paper relates to anticipation issues on two levels. First, it is about transformative education and new models of education for the 21st century. Second, it is about how learners have anticipation about their own learning futures and key factors of ‘futuremaking’, connection past, present and future learning trajectories. Both levels builds on and further develops perspectives presented by Keri Facer in her book ‘Learning futures’ (2011).

The focus in this paper is on how young people take advantage of digital technologies in pursuing learning futures for themselves based on interests developed outside of school. Our interest is to explore and discuss how digital technologies create new possibilities for ‘futuremaking’ in the intersection between formal and informal ways of learning (Facer, 2011; Erstad, Gilje, Sefton-Green & Arnseth, 2016). This will inform us about how young people take advantage of resources in contemporary societies, made available through digital technology, and how such resources become part of their identity work over time. This thematic focus also raises issues about how boundaries between contexts of learning, and between past, present and future conceptions of the self, are created and sustained, about agency and trajectories of participation among learners in epistemic communities, and enables us to reflect on the broader sociocultural transformations of education in the 21st century (Bronkhorst & Akkerman, 2016).

In our research, we have used the term ‘learning lives’ (Erstad, 2013; Erstad, et al., 2016) to unpack a focus on students in motion across contexts of learning. On an analytical level, we have studied different knowledge practices, learning identities and transformative practices

that young people are involved in, across school and everyday life (Silseth, 2018; Silseth & Erstad, 2018). Digital media are defined as embedded parts of these practices. We refer to empirical data from one large scale ethnographic project in Oslo studying young people with different ethnic backgrounds across school and diverse community settings, with a series of interviews on young people's (15-16 years old and 18-19 years old) personal past, present and future trajectories.

In studying how young people create opportunities for themselves of importance for their educational futures across formal and informal contexts we relate to theoretical positions focusing on people within social practices and the provision of opportunities within different spatial settings. These notions of spaces and places as well as new mobilities among children in contemporary societies can be related to conceptions about communities and cities as where these movements take place and represent the environments and resources in which children interact. We also connect this to what Cope and Kalantzis (2000) describe as the "design of social futures," or the "what" of multiliteracies; "Instead of a focus on stability and regularity, the focus is on change and transformations. The breadth, complexity and richness of the available meaning-making resources is such that representation is never simply a matter of reproduction. Rather, it is a matter of transformation; of reconstructing meaning in a way which always adds something to the range of available representational resources." (p. 204). It is this transformation and what it implies in young people's lives we want to explore further.

In her book 'Learning futures', Keri Facer (2011) uses the concept of 'future-building' to criticize what she sees as the basic orientation of all education; "equipping young people to compete in the global economy of tomorrow as potential socio-technical futures that are latent in contemporary developments" (2011, p. 103). Facer defines this as inadequate in understanding how young people position themselves and how educational institutions need to find ways to address much broader orientations towards learning and living in digital futures. We ought, then, to explore how participants are not merely situated in time and space, but also how they are actively networking learning resources across space-time configurations (Leander, Phillips, & Taylor, 2010, p. 8). To analyse how people do this is particularly important in knowledge economies in which people are regularly faced with new challenges that require the innovative use of knowledge and expertise.

Anticipation about education and learning is important for the design of social futures. However, it is important to explore how learners' educational trajectories relate to their overall "learning lives", with their learning identities and trajectories of participation across different contexts of learning. The concept of futuremaking enables us to deal with complex issues considering how young people plan and play with resources that are part of contemporary media and technological practices for the purpose of envisioning or imagining future educational trajectories and possible selves. How students view themselves, in light of past and future trajectories has implications for what they can and will do regarding their future.

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