

ONE FOOT IN THE FUTURE

SCHOOLPUNK, DESIGN FICTION, AND REGENERATION

New frameworks, tools,
and lenses to help educators
imagine what comes next.

by Will Richardson

Foreword by Homa Tavangar

In the following pages, Will Richardson has organized and articulated some of his latest thoughts on the future of school, the daunting challenges, and especially, some exciting and creative opportunities ahead. It gives me great pleasure to see this process he has poured so much energy into culminate in this gorgeous publication and to share it with the world.

At the Big Questions Institute, we've had the honor and responsibility to work with and learn alongside public school districts, independent and international schools, and education leaders from Helsinki to Houston and Ho Chi Min City, Colombo to Columbus, Colombia, British Columbia, and many points between. Each engagement has helped inform and broaden our lens, and despite the range of approaches to school, the earnestness, thoughtfulness, and care from educators have been universal and have kept us going.

The Covid-19 pandemic propelled our work online and across borders but also pushed us to think harder about the future, to learn what it means to use futures thinking, and go even further: to take on the role of futurists. Indeed, we have embraced the idea that to be an educator means being a futurist because you stake your success on your students, who are the future.

I've watched Will turn big (often scary) questions into provocations that are simultaneously tangible and awe-inspiring, complex yet approachable. With *One Foot in the Future*, readers are invited to dream - and then to do something about it. Rather than feel overwhelmed by this, we hope it lights a path forward.



TWO-DAY DEEP DIVE!

One Foot in the Future Workshop

Presented by Will Richardson

April 15 and April 22, 2023

10 am to 12 pm US ET

[VIEW WORKSHOP DETAILS](#)

Will and I have often shared Mariame Kaba's quote that "Hope is a discipline," to focus both on the practice of hope and the work it will take to realize that hope, so that hope does not stay fixed as an empty ideal.

This book helps educators stretch their imaginations to consider their radical hopes as well as potential bold steps that will seed a future that responds to the present and imminent crises of people and the planet. Education must embody both hope and discipline if it is to be part of the regenerative (not just sustainable, as you'll read) process that must be more relevant, just, liberatory, and healthy, in every sense of wellbeing.

This is not improvement or reform or correction or compliance - and that's where imagination, hope, and discipline come in. How can enough educators break free from the limiting frames of traditional schooling? What will it take to truly move forward as if our children's lives depend on it? Because they do.

Homa Tavangar

Co-Founder of Big Questions Institute





Let's Get Started

Thanks so much for downloading this e-book. To me, it's a signal that you want to play, to imagine, and to connect around the possibilities for the future. I can't tell you how much we need to do that right now. So, welcome!

Before we dive headlong into some new thinking about how we might begin to interact with and better understand the future, I want to tee up an activity to get your creative juices flowing and put you in the right frame of mind for what comes next.

If you're game, go ahead and open a doc, or go old school and grab a pen and paper, and let's warm up our imaginations with some "fearless inquiry."

kkStart Here

Have you heard of Jetson?

STEP 1

This image is from a 2-minute video about Jetson. Wait. Before you [click and watch the video](#), make a guess (or a few guesses) at what you think this might be. Then, watch the video. When you're done, move on to the next steps.



STEP 2

Now, without thinking too much, do a brain dump of whatever questions come to mind after watching the video. Take five minutes or more and really push yourself. Get beyond the obvious and try hard to develop some questions that you don't think most others would think of.

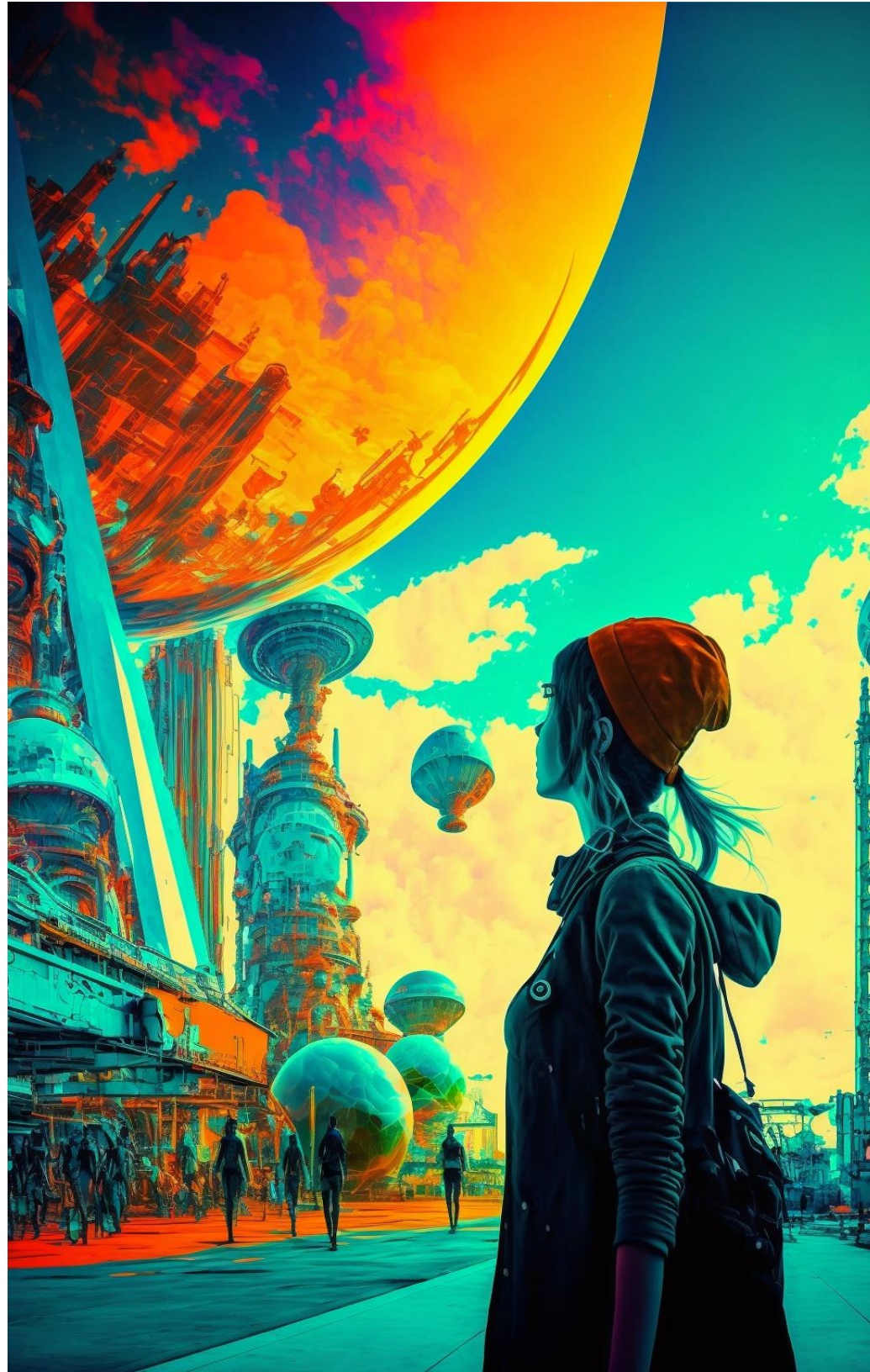
When you're sure you're done, look at your list and find the one or two questions that you feel *might be unique from any other readers of this book*. Then, navigate over to [this Padlet](#), and ***before you read any of the questions already there***, click on the plus sign at the bottom right of the page and add yours. Only after you've done that, look at what other people are asking about. Give some love to whatever questions resonate by clicking on the heart in any individual post.

STEP 3

Here's the last part: Take a few minutes to imagine what "Jetson 2043" is. How will Jetson evolve? What comes next? If you're still playing, bullet out some descriptions of what you think it might look like and what might have changed 20 years into the future. And then share those descriptors with other readers on [this Padlet](#).

What's the point of this activity?

Well, if past experience is a guide, the result will be to start "opening up our apertures" for the ways in which we think about and interrogate the present and what comes next. And to begin a practice that can help keep us more in tune with the current arc of the world.





New Practices for Educators

“One Foot in the Future” suggests that every institution - and every individual - should spend a good chunk of time tracking the changing technologies, storylines, and discoveries that will impact the way we live and work in the future.

And because children are at the center, nowhere is that a more urgent calling than in education.

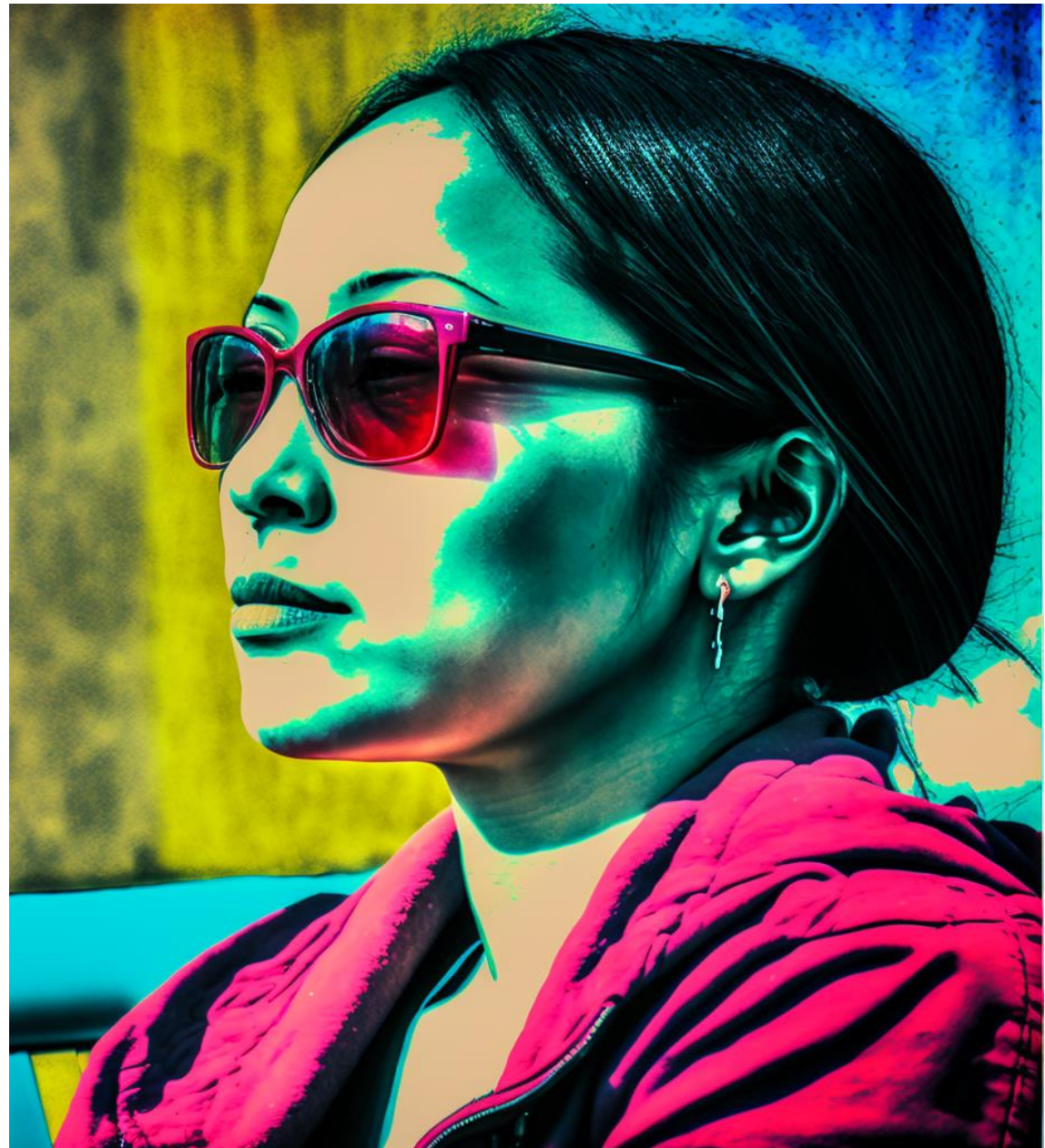
School communities that are not engaged in curating new information, building capacity to understand the impacts of change, and constantly revising their visions for what our practice of education must become are risking their relevance in a world that seems to be spinning faster by the day.

What follows are some fresh new ways of thinking and acting that, in my opinion at least, educators as well as parents and other members of the school community would be well advised to consider and implement. I'm aware that time is tight, that the pressures and challenges of being in the profession are huge right now, and that we still have a pandemic hangover that's sapping much of our bandwidth for "new."

Yet, there's a palpable urgency to address these challenges right now.

For some of you, what follows may be a bigger ask or a heavier lift than you can take on. In that case, steal whatever ideas that resonate and/or pique your interest and let them marinate until you might be ready to try them out.

Or, just read the rest of this e-book and then use the dedicated free space in our 1,700-member [BQI Online Community](#) to engage with other readers on these topics in whatever ways work best for you.





In this e-book, I'm going to introduce you to a number of ideas and practices that are emerging around us all and bring an education focus to them. Among them are:

“Regenerative Design,” which centers nature and the environment as powerful lenses for the work we do in school.

“Schoolpunk,” which is a term I've coined to help us all frame a compelling vision for a new way of thinking about education and schooling that hopefully we can begin to build together.

“Design Fiction,” which asks us to imagine, create, and interrogate artifacts that might be found in some future society, making us “archeologists of the future” in a practical sense.

And much more.



Along the way, you'll read about the dispositions and skills that are required to make sense of and build from this moment.

At the [Big Questions Institute](#), we're starting a movement to connect educators and leaders from around the world who are peering out over the edge of the present and stepping more confidently into the future.

And we're also supporting schools or groups who want some additional guidance and to work with us hand in hand on a deeper level to put into place the systems, practices, rituals, and cultures that effective and meaningful futures work like this requires.

Please reach out and [let us know](#) if you'd like to discuss the possibilities for your school.

The World We Live in Today

Let's start by unpacking what change looks like today, the implications for the future, and the ways we can begin to think about education differently to help us create school experiences for students and teachers that are more relevant, healthy, just, and helpful to life on the planet.

Because here's the reality: The world is in some deep difficulty right now.

Yes, the US recently passed a potentially game-changing response to climate change. And the Great Barrier Reef has more blooms on it right now than we've seen for 30+ years. And poverty continues to decrease worldwide. And wild tigers are making a robust comeback in many parts of the globe.

It's not like there aren't some bright spots.



However, any honest reckoning of this moment would acknowledge that we're in the midst of some serious challenges that have many suggesting we're in a "world system transition."

The climate impacts of global warming (floods, fires, heat waves, melting ice caps, etc.) are still at the top of the list. We humans are still in full-on extraction mode when it comes to our natural resources, and the impacts are still not clearly known (but can't be good).



Sadly, we're in a moment where the **most successful businesses** in the world are also the most responsible for the environmental crisis we face.

Think about that for a second...

And it's not just the natural ecosystem that's under duress. We have increasingly huge divides in wealth, democracies are in decline around the world, social and racial injustice issues remain prevalent, and we are increasingly illiterate when it comes to the information we're consuming via the technologies we are depending on more and more each day.

We seem more separated, less caring, and less connected to one another and to the environment.

And oh, yeah...pandemics and wars.

Permacrisis

It's no surprise that the 2022 "Word of the Year" according to the Collins Dictionary is "permacrisis."

Permacrisis is "an extended period of instability and insecurity, especially one resulting from a series of catastrophic events."

And it may be that the extended period is just beginning.

Change is happening **faster than ever**, leaving us all with a deep sense of uncertainty about the future. We're no longer sure what to do next, nor what to tell our kids to do next. We're living in a "prefigurative culture," a term the anthropologist Margaret Mead used in the 1970s to predict a time when children in large measure know more than their elders about how the world actually works.

It's becoming clear that the "normals" that the adults have created on Earth are unsustainable, and that many if not all of our institutions and familiar "ways of life" are at a point of reckoning. And not only are we dealing with that long list above, but we're also questioning what a "good life" is, how we find and maintain deep relationships, and how we live without stress and anxiety. We're in an uncomfortable "liminal" moment when traditional ways of thinking and living are breaking, but we're not yet sure what will take their place.

"Living in a 'prefigurative culture' is a term Margaret Mead used in the 1970s to predict a time when children in large measure know more than their elders about how the world actually works."



A Reckoning for Education

Education is no exception.

There is a growing sense that the world is leaving schools behind as new technologies (assuming we have them and can use them effectively) allow us to access a growing library of information and millions of potential teachers to learn whenever, wherever, and with whomever we want.

In essence, learning has already left the building, which in and of itself demands a fundamental rethink as to the purpose and value of schools.

**But for the most part,
we're not doing that.**

Disruption Ahead

Most schools seem focused on either going back to the normals they enjoyed before the pandemic or tweaking the experience of school on the edges, hoping to make it “better” (whatever that might mean.) And I get it; there are literally billions of dollars and millions of lives invested in our “normal” practice of “school.” Lots of “t” words that would be very much disrupted if we were to actually come up with and implement an alternative approach to learning that is more focused on, well, learning than schooling:

1. **Technology companies**
2. **Textbook companies**
3. **Testing companies**
4. **Tutoring companies**
5. **Teachers**
6. **Traditions**

But given the circumstances of the world today, a decidedly different purpose for and conception of “school” are required. Especially when considering how recent advances in artificial intelligence are causing educators at every level to reconsider the hows and the whats of their curriculum and practice.

“Given the circumstances of the world today, a decidedly framing and different conception of ‘school’ is required.”



Artificial Intelligence and Schooling



ChatGPT

Late in 2022, almost everyone was talking about OpenAI's newest version of ChatGPT, **a program that uses AI to interact in conversational dialogue form and generate human-like text in response to almost any prompt you enter.**

I'll let ChatGPT describe ChatGPT:

"To use ChatGPT, you need to provide it with a prompt, which is a piece of text or a question that you want it to respond to. Then, the program will generate a response that is similar to how a human would respond. This response can be used for various natural language processing tasks like text summarization, question answering and language translation."

For example, I entered this prompt in ChatGPT:

"What would be the main changes that Seymour Papert would make to today's schools?"

It took about 15 seconds to generate the 270-word reply on the next page.

“Seymour Papert was a pioneer in the field of educational technology and the development of the constructivist theory of learning. His work focused on the idea that children learn best by actively constructing their own knowledge through hands-on, experiential learning.

Based on Papert’s ideas, I imagine that he would likely advocate for a number of changes in today’s schools, including:

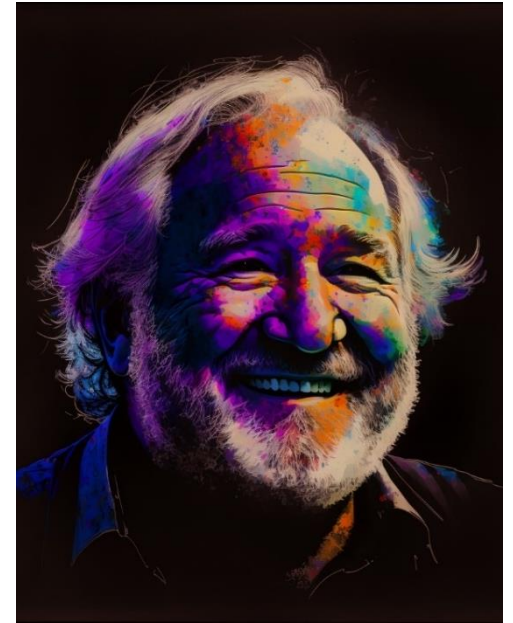
An increased emphasis on experiential, hands-on learning. This could involve more project-based learning, field trips, and other activities that allow students to actively engage with the material they are learning.

A greater focus on providing students with the tools and resources they need to actively construct their own knowledge. This might include providing students with access to technology, such as computers and other digital tools, as well as a variety of materials and supplies that they can use to explore and experiment.

A shift away from traditional, lecture-based teaching methods and towards a more collaborative, student-centered approach to learning. This could involve more group work, peer-to-peer learning, and other forms of collaborative learning.

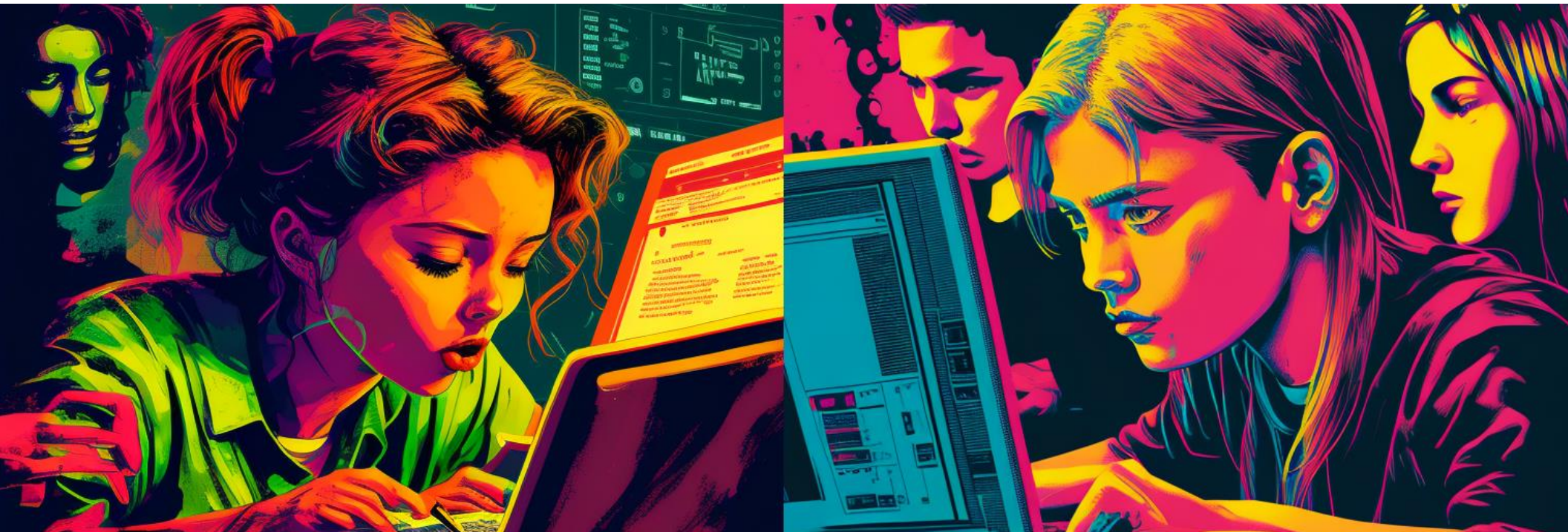
An increased emphasis on the role of play and creativity in learning. Papert was a strong advocate for the idea that children learn best through play, and he believed that schools should provide students with opportunities to explore, experiment, and be creative in their learning.

Overall, Papert’s ideas about education focused on empowering students to be active, independent learners and providing them with the tools and resources they need to construct their own knowledge. I imagine that he would advocate for a number of changes to today’s schools in order to better support this approach to learning.”



If you're familiar with Papert's work, you know this is actually a pretty incredible response. In fact, if you're a school leader, just start doing what ChatGPT described in that answer. (You could do much worse.) From a writing standpoint, the English teacher in me would love to see a bit more complexity and description, but I'm thinking for a typical freshman or sophomore-level writing assignment, this definitely passes the test. (Which, of course, speaks volumes about the test or assessment criteria.)

Regardless of how you feel about the writing, however, if you're even halfway paying attention and thinking about the implications, you know we have some very turbulent times ahead of us. (By the way, if you're reading this in mid-2023, the next version of ChatGPT has likely been released. Those who have previewed it at the time of this writing are saying their brains are absolutely exploding from what it's capable of. Buckle up.)



Generative Art

Image generation tools like Midjourney and DALL-E and others are also having a huge impact on creativity and content production. These tools use AI to create stunning works of art based on text prompts, design variables, and original images that the user inputs. In 2022, millions of people discovered a new artistic ability using these tools.

(Note that we used Midjourney to generate the images in this e-book.)

I love the big questions that David Holz, CEO of Midjourney, [is asking](#) relative to the implications of AI art:

“How do we expand the imaginative powers of the human species? And what does that mean? What does it mean when computers are better at visual imagination than 99 percent of humans? That doesn’t mean we will stop imagining.”

By the way, I created the image on this page in Midjourney by entering this prompt:

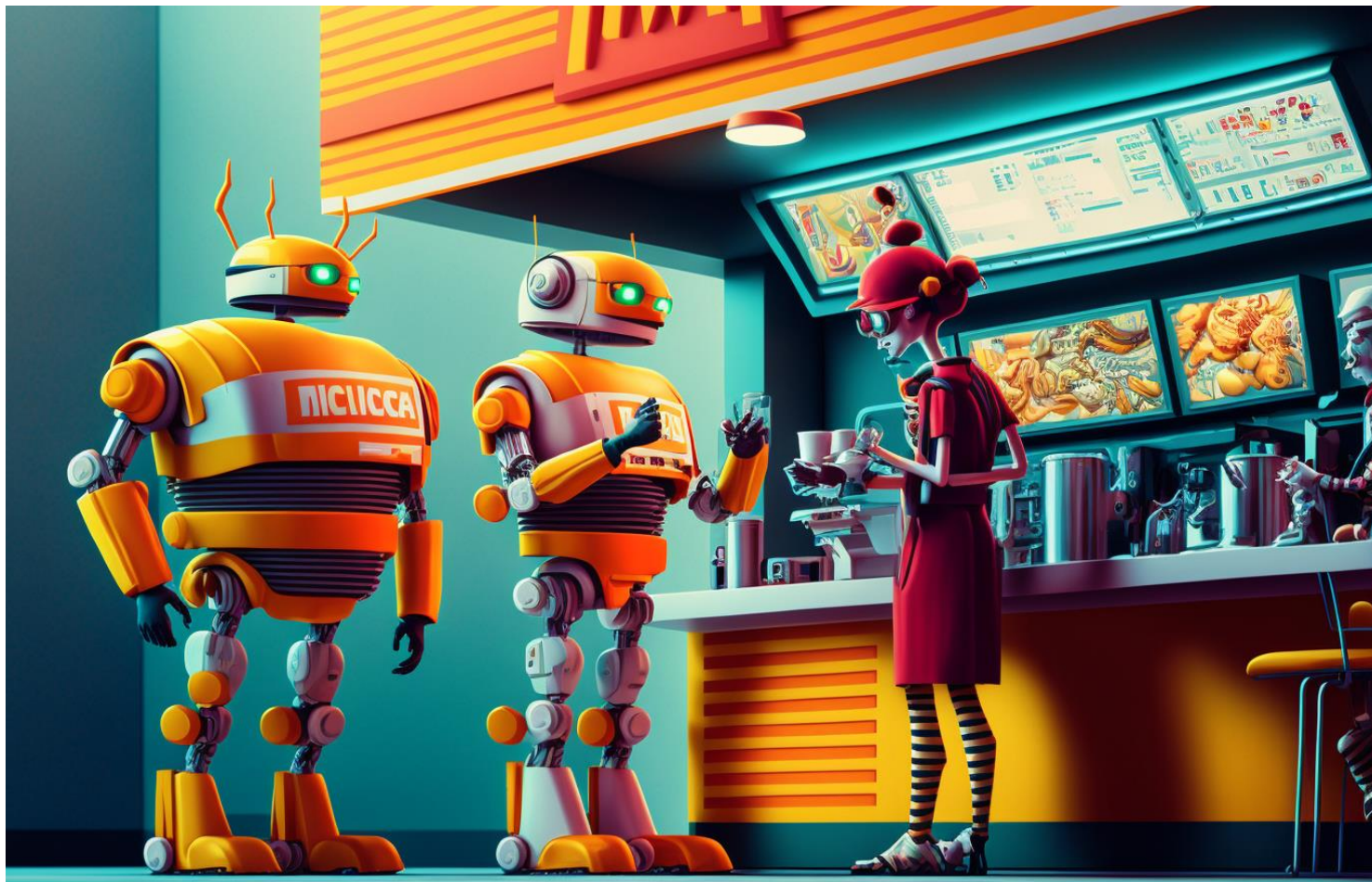
“One house made up of many different houses attached to each other, huge house, Moomin style, steampunk”.



It's not just writing and art...

It's also **music**. It's **coding**. It's the **ability to converse** with anyone in any language at any time. If you don't play an instrument but can sing, it's about composing a song **with just your voice**. And if you're a teacher wanting to ease the pain of lesson planning, **have at it**.

Since we're still in the early stages of all of this, it's more than reasonable to conclude that AI will impact almost every aspect of our lives, sooner than we think. McDonald's, for example, is already testing out a **fully automated, no-human restaurant** in Texas.





As the Director of the Centre for Change and Complexity in Learning at the University of South Australia George Siemens [recently wrote](#):

“AI is emerging as an active competitor for our most human skills. Research and scientific discovery are now a pairing of human and artificial cognition.”

That’s not to say that everything is wonderful in the nascent world of generative AI tools.

Ethical issues abound. Misinformation is becoming easier and easier to spread.

And there are real concerns about the impacts on critical thinking and creativity which we’re still at the very beginning of understanding.

All of which means that for educators tracking these trends, none of this feels remotely comfortable. These tools and technologies are already challenging what we do and how we do it. Huge swaths of current practice and pedagogy are going to have to be interrogated for how effective and how relevant they are in helping our students understand and navigate a landscape that continues to change at light speed.

As someone who has been steeped in technologies for the better part of 25 years, it's left even me breathless.

Living in this world will also require a host of new skills and literacies and dispositions, for our kids...and for ourselves.

Predictably, however, as I write this, New York City Schools has “banned” the use of ChatGPT **“due to concerns about negative impacts on student learning, and concerns regarding the safety and accuracy of content.”**

And a friend just relayed that his nephew is now being required to handwrite his essays and assignments to make sure that he's not “cheating.” (Think any of those kids are just going to create handwritten copies of what ChatGPT generates?)





Big Questions about AI

So, instead of bringing ChatGPT into the classroom, unpacking it, figuring out with students what the potentials and drawbacks are, and helping them build the skills they need to navigate these new tools effectively and ethically, many schools are choosing to go backwards into the past than confront the future.

Obviously, just around AI, many big questions loom:

- **What constitutes cheating now?**
- **What's an "original"?**
- **What are the ethical implications?**
- **Can we control it?**
- **Are schools becoming less relevant and less efficient than other ways of learning in the world?**

That last question is a big one...

And there are a million more questions we need to be asking about schools and education, many of which the system of school has been loathe to seriously interrogate for decades, if not centuries.

The Task of Education Today

So, it's becoming clearer by the day that we are on the precipice of some major upheaval. That's why much of my work and our work at [BQI](#) has been animated by this quote by author and educational philosopher Zak Stein from his book [Education in a Time Between Worlds](#):

“Those preoccupied with fixing the existing system of schools do not stop to ask questions about what schools are for, who they serve, and what kind of civilization they perpetuate. As I have been discussing, our civilization is in transition. Across the planet, major transformations are underway – in world system and biosphere – that will decenter the core, reallocate resources, and recalibrate values, the economy, and nature itself.

This is the task of education today: to confront the almost unimaginable design challenge of building an educational system that provides for the re-creation of civilization during a world-system transition. This challenge brings us face-to-face with the importance of education for humanity and the basic questions that structure education as a human endeavor” (87).

We're drawn to that quote for a couple of reasons:

- It's about asking questions and interrogating the fundamental premise of school's existence, which is very much in our wheelhouse at BQI.
- It situates this work as a “**design challenge**.” That suggests something much bigger than just a rethinking of the daily schedule or adopting more of a project-based pedagogy or adding some computers here and there. It suggests, instead, some serious box-breaking and a major revision to the story of how we learn and become educated in our lives.

State of Education

The current reality is that any full and honest accounting of the state of education in this moment leads to an uncomfortable tension. It's clear that legacy classroom practices and systems of schooling have contributed to the list of challenges above that all of us are now grappling with.

“Success” in traditional schooling depends on stripping students and teachers of agency and power, on “delivering” a narrow slice of curriculum and knowledge that has roots in a history of white colonial worldview, and on a student’s ability to figure out how to win at the game of school and get to the next step, be that going to college or getting a job.

Our children become **increasingly disengaged** in school learning as they move through the system, one of the many **“unpleasant truths”** that we seem unwilling to confront. In the US, factors like these are contributing to an **exodus of teachers** leaving the profession, with few in the pipeline to replace them.



Among educators from around the world with whom we stay in contact, it seems to be a public secret that schools are not preparing kids for the world they’re going to be living in. And you can see this with the now urgent calls from businesses and employers to develop problem-solving and collaboration and critical thinking (and more) skills in students that they currently are leaving school without. Our fealty to traditional narratives and outcomes of education is literally putting our children at risk.

And rarely mentioned is the need to develop the skills to adapt to fast-changing environmental conditions. Yet, does anyone think there is a way out of the “permacrisis” that we’re in without education being a big part of the solution?



Our Moral Purpose

As Stein and others suggest, the challenge is that we need a wholesale rethinking of the experience of school and the purpose of school in our lives. Up until now, it's been all about preparing kids for the world of work and making a living. But given what's changing and the speed of change, we may have to grapple with questions like these:

“What is the right thing to do now?”

“What is our purpose, not just intellectually but morally, spiritually, and otherwise?”

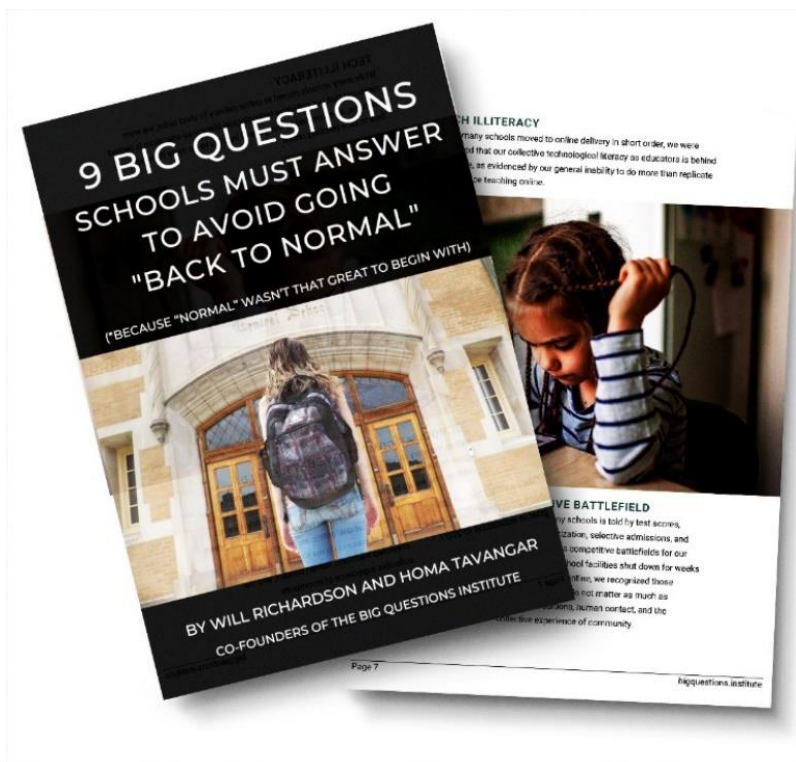
I would argue that moving forward, the moral purpose of education has to be to develop adults who can create a more regenerative, just, and healthy way of living on the planet, or else we may not have a planet left to live on.



Fearless Inquiry

That type of a “rethinking” or “redesign” requires us to spend more time practicing what we at BQI are calling “fearless inquiry” into the fundamental premises upon which our current ideas of schooling are built.

In 2021, Homa and I wrote “**9 BIG Questions Schools Must Ask Before Going Back to Normal*** (***Because normal wasn’t that great to begin with**)”.



Our purpose in writing this e-book was to help educators engage in fearless inquiry as they were preparing to emerge from lockdowns and Zoom schools necessitated by the pandemic. (If you haven't yet grappled with the 9 Questions, you can [download the free e-book now.](#))

Sincere attempts at redesign are going to require that we think differently about how we imagine, understand, and prepare for the future. It's doubtful that a global pandemic was a highlight in any school's three or five-year strategic plan. And it's clear that even short-term planning will continue to be increasingly difficult due to the speed and scale of change that we're all experiencing. (What's that expression about “the best laid *plans*”?)

In other words, we need to develop structures, skills, dispositions, and maybe even some rituals for *strategic design*, where conversations about the near- and longer-term futures of our schools are not events but are instead ongoing, community-wide, generative, and steeped in questions, and looking at emergent possibilities for redefining education.



Today's Epic Design Challenge

The epic “design challenge” we face will not be successful if we keep our systems, practices, and cultures tied to the past or stuck in the present.

School communities are going to have to learn how to keep **“one foot in the future,”** to constantly audit decisions and current practices against a shared, clearly articulated vision of futures that are at once aspirational and realistic.

They will have to collectively work to develop the skills and dispositions to make sense of the present and peer into the future with expertise and humility.

In this moment filled with challenge, we surely need the courage to see things for what they are and prepare accordingly, but we also need a discipline of “radical hope,” which writer Alexandria Shaner frames this way:

“The only way to relegate yesterday’s news to the dustbin of history is to rebel today by re-imagining tomorrow. We must conceive, share, and engage with a worthy vision to inform and fuel strategy, to provide structure and guidance for building the new, and to engender solidarity, commitment, and dare I say, hope.”



Without putting this challenge front and center, and this really isn’t hyperbole, schools may be left behind. And from a relationship and care and community standpoint, that would literally be tragic.

For so many kids, school is the only place where they can find adults that care for them, safe spaces to learn, and a regular meal or two. And even for those children who may be more privileged and not have those concerns, schools are places where they can learn about themselves, develop their social identities, and better understand their communities and their worlds.

So let me be clear: this is not another call to end the idea of school. But it is a call to radically rethink what happens in a school and education context. And to do that, we need to think hard about what we most want that experience to be.

(For more on how the purpose of schools might change, see this important report from UNESCO from 2021 [“Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education.”](#))

Thinking About the Future is Good for Us

Trying to imagine various potential futures is not just good practice for those who want to be better prepared for what might be coming down the pike.

It’s also good for our mental health, (and goodness knows we could use more of that.)



In writing about the impacts of spending time considering what might lie ahead, in her book [Speculative Futures](#), author Johanna Hoffman summarized the benefits in this way:

“Celebrating the space between fantasy and reality builds the resilience this Century requires. Studies show that actively imagining the future cultivates psychological strength, helping individuals feel more prepared and resourceful during times of drastic change.

Skill in envisioning potential Futures increases our understanding of how present-day choices affect our futures unfold. Instead of craving extensions of the familiar, we can learn to find power in crafting proactive decisions. Doing so augments our personal agency, wellbeing, and resilience”.

In an education sense, thinking about the future strengthens a leader’s ability to, well, lead. In his book Educational Leadership, Patrick Duignan, professor emeritus at Australian Catholic University, writes that:

“High-performing educational leaders are student-centered and have formed a compelling vision for a flourishing future, in which their students, staff, and community can succeed.

They are prepared to decisively pursue opportunities that make a positive difference and are courageous and determined in dealing with the status quo, the unfamiliar, and the unpredictable. They are futures-oriented, and lead with a strategic mindset, applying intelligent, reflective, and empathetic judgment in current, as well as emerging, challenging situations.”

And when we dive into potential futures with our colleagues and other members of our geographic or our professional communities, Hoffman argues the benefits are even greater:

“When practiced across communities, imaginatively working with the future builds what researchers called social resilience. Increasingly recognized as critical to navigating intense and unpredictable change, social resilience is a group’s ability to cope with adversity, adapt to challenges, and build shared prosperity over time.

When imagining different Futures becomes a collaborative process, the results augment our adaptive capacities. Developing shared visions requires and builds trust, cultivating the kinds of connections that help societies weather the unpredictable) ...Proactively Imagining the future in personal ways ultimately increases our resilience. When we engage with what could be, we grow psychologically stronger.”

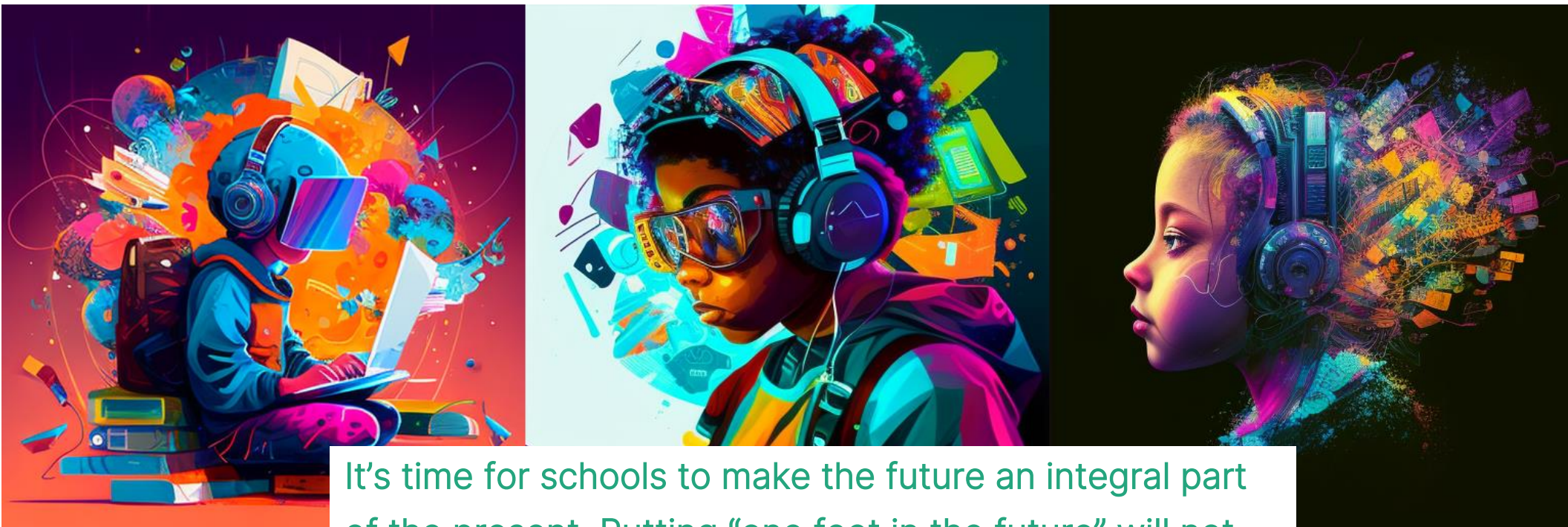
So, the case for “futuring” as individuals and as a community is compelling.

Besides, we owe it to the billions of children who will live in the future to make it as livable and joyful as we can. That in and of itself is reason enough to put at least one foot in the future. The decisions we make today, large and small, all matter for the long term. In his great book [What We Owe the Future](#), William MacAskill writes:

“By abandoning the tyranny of the present over the future, we can act as trustees - helping to create a flourishing world for generations to come. This is of the utmost importance”.

Yet, few are the number of schools or individuals that I've been able to find that have a stated commitment toward **building futures-oriented cultures in their communities, where the future is an ongoing topic of conversation and study and an evolving frame and context for daily decisions.**

Some schools do "scenario planning," (and some, like Atlanta International School, [do that very well](#).) Others infuse some "futuring" into their three or five-year strategic plans. But the vast majority of schools that I've come into contact with in my 15 years meeting educators around are confronting the future as it happens. In a moment where so much is changing so quickly, that's not a winning strategy.



It's time for schools to make the future an integral part of the present. Putting "one foot in the future" will not only build our resilience to tackle the next challenge that pops up but also keep us focused on the ways we can contribute to a better world as school communities.

Radical Imagination

To prepare us for this work, we have to identify where our own capacities as individuals and as institutions currently fall short. And certainly, first and foremost among them is our capacity to imagine an experience of school for students and teachers that is fundamentally different from what we have today.

That's not to say that there aren't any out there. [Big Picture Learning](#), [OneStone School](#), [Design39Campus](#), [The Agora School](#), and many others provide proof that some can create "different" and not just focus on "better." (Arguably, "different" *is* "better" these days.) And those schools are shining a light on what's possible when it comes to what schools might be like in the future.

- Amplifying student and teacher agency to pursue learning on their own terms
- Making learning real-world
- Focusing on inquiry and questions, not answers
- Rethinking assessments
- Reducing student stress and focusing on wellness and equity
- Supporting students in a number of different post-high school options



The Post-Pandemic Moment

What this post-pandemic moment has proven, however, is that most existing schools and districts are pretty limited in terms of their imagination for what to do in the face of adversity.

My highly unscientific estimate is that during the pandemic 95% of schools around the world responded to remote schooling by pretty much attempting to do face-to-face schooling online. And that now that the pandemic is “over,” that same 95% of schools have gone back to business as usual. (By the way, whenever I suggest this estimated reality when speaking with educational leaders, literally no one disagrees.)



For some schools, however, the pandemic, as difficult as it was, served as an opportunity to imagine something different. It wasn't just about upskilling their understanding and use of technology to do school. It was more about using our new Zoom realities to rethink what learning might look like. It was more about developing a vision for a more relevant way of thinking about learning to deal with a future that is only going to become more difficult to predict.

The key to real change in schools is to overcome the “unimaginable” part in that Stein quote about our design challenge. Notice he says, “almost unimaginable,” which means he thinks it’s possible.

The fact is, we've limited our imaginations of what schools could be for far too long. **Our imaginations have actually atrophied.** If we are to meet the challenge, it's going to take a restoration of our collective imaginations to reconceive what individual student success looks like and, even more importantly, what success means for all living things on the planet. (More on that in a bit.)

Meeting the design challenge will also take something that I've been hearing a lot in the Near Future Laboratory, an online [design community](#) I've been frequenting of late. And it's simply this: we're going to have to “**imagine harder.**”

And, I would add, “imagine *differently.*”

As the author Ursula K. LeGuin [writes](#):

“The exercise of imagination is dangerous to those who profit from the way things are because it has the power to show that the ways things are is not permanent, not universal, not necessary.”

Which is why for the most part, many schools, districts, and communities do everything they can to temper students’ and teachers’ imaginations and, instead, **train them for compliance within the school box.**

Arguably, we’re in our current state because we’ve been educated to accept the status quo, to not offer up much of anything that might offer a totally different lens on the problem or challenge. And now that we’re in a world where pushback to “different” seems to come from all sides and with enormous force, we’re arguably in a really dangerous moment for new ideas.





Restoring our imaginations and building our capacity as school communities to collectively envision a different future is urgent work right now. While it's important that we develop our own individual imaginations in ways that widen our apertures for the possible, it's equally if not more important that we regularly imagine together, to create what some are calling "imagination infrastructures."

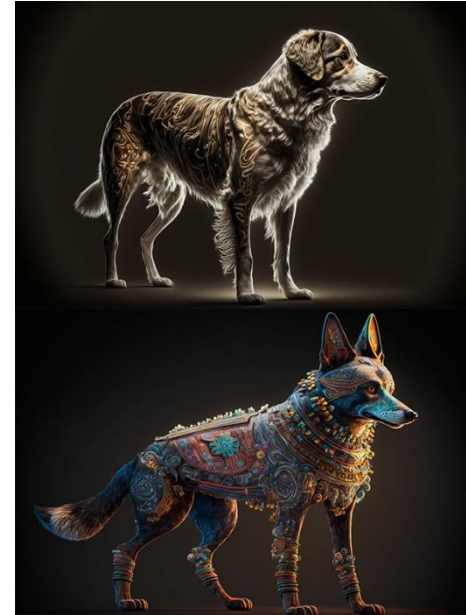
In 2020, the UK formed an [Emerging Futures Fund](#) to "create the space for imagination, and to try and build futures literacy and foresight capacity in local communities across the UK."

"Imagination is the act of forming new ideas, images, or concepts beyond what we can see, directly experience or understand - something to be regularly drawn on to keep our minds flexible, creative, and able to see beyond what is accepted, known, normal or understood. Foresight is how we anticipate, forecast, envision, and make informed predictions based on the signs, signals and data all around us. Imagination, new thinking, and fresh insight are crucial for shaping a future that communities desire."

But it's important that we imagine together and not just individually. Midjourney founder David Holz [describes](#) the power of “augmented imagination” during the beta testing of the raw technology.

“We found very quickly that most people don't know what they want. You say: ‘Here's a machine you can imagine anything with it — what do you want?’ And they go: ‘dog.’ And you go ‘really?’ and they go ‘pink dog.’

*Whereas if you put them in a group, they'll go ‘dog’ and someone else will go ‘space dog’ and someone else will go ‘Aztec space dog,’ and then all of a sudden, people understand the possibilities, and you're creating this **augmented imagination — an environment where people can learn and play with this new capacity**. So, we found that people really like imagining together.”*



Creating “imagination infrastructures” in schools then requires that we consider new ways of coming together to talk about the future, new lenses for evaluating our purpose, and new ways of playing with what might be possible. As you'll see next, Design Fiction is one way we can do that, as is the idea of deliberately making space and time for new conversations, relationships, and practices that can build our [“collective muscle of imagination](#), with cumulative effects that then make other things possible.” (We have some ideas around that as well.)

But first, let's open our apertures a bit in terms of reframing our purpose in schools.



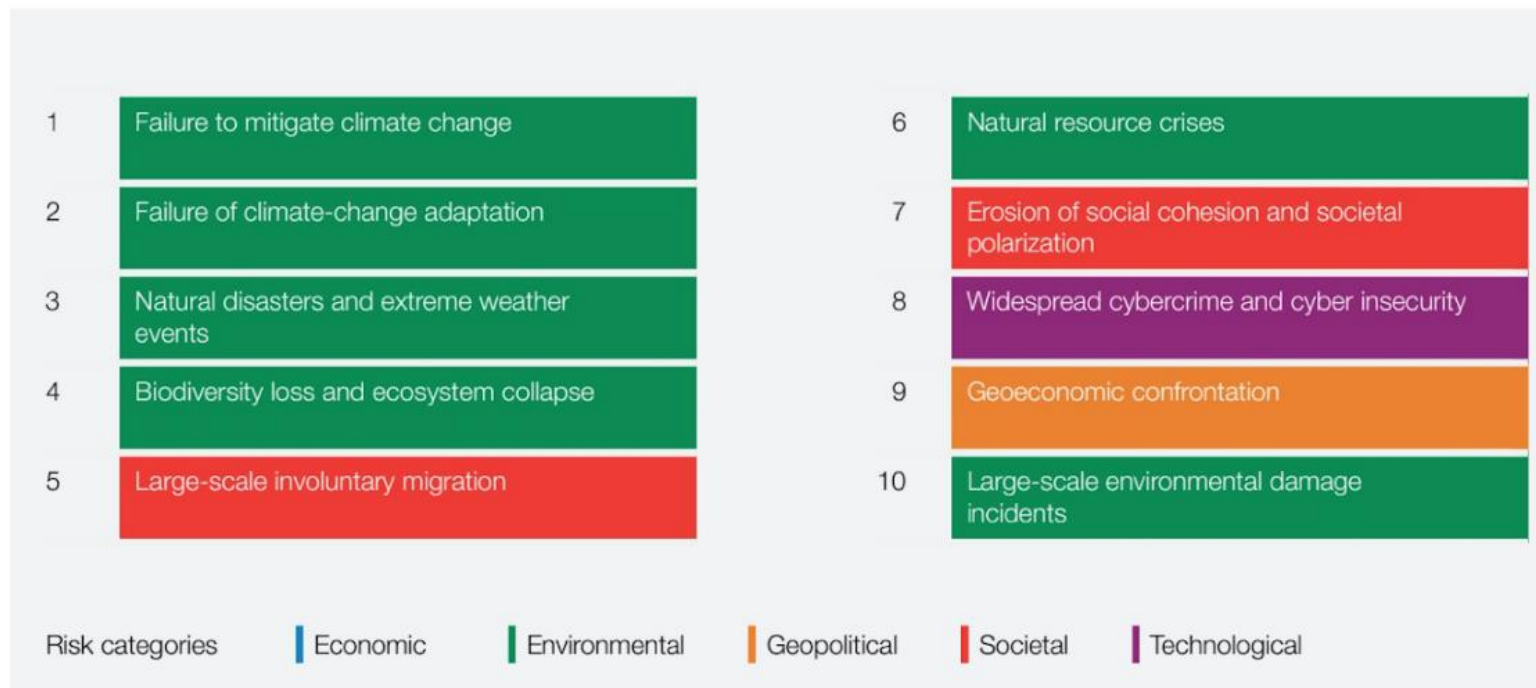
"The world, the values of the world, are shaped by the choices each of us makes. This means my thinking, my actions, my relationships, and my life create a front line for the possibilities of the entire species. Each one of us is an individual practice ground for what the whole can or cannot do, will or will not do.... We live (and die) inside of systems that were imagined centuries ago by those ambitious and narrow minds of colonists and patriarchs. We live inside the lineage of relatively ignorant imaginations, which were obsessed with protection and domination. But we know so much more now." ~adrienne maree brown

A New Lens: Regenerative Design

One more thing about that “design challenge” that makes it even more complex. It’s not just about designing something new for the people who learn and work within the system. It’s about designing an experience that considers all of the living things that are impacted by our (schools’) existence.

While it’s a difficult reality to confront, more and more political, business, and institutional leaders from around the globe are acknowledging the existential nature of our climate crises. Early in 2023, the World Economic Forum released its “[Global Risks Report](#)” which details the results of a survey of over 1,200 experts across domains and from every corner of the planet. The chart below shows what they collectively said were the 10 most acute global risks ranked by severity over the next 10 years. Note that six of the 10 deal specifically with environmental risks, including the top four.

Global risks ranked by severity over the long term (10 years)



So, we can no longer think of schools as isolated from a larger ecosystem that is under duress, just as we can no longer continue to employ systems or practices that contribute to the numerous challenges that we face. Those challenges have to be front and center when we think about what we want and need schools to be in the future.

One way to think about confronting this part of our challenge is “regenerative design,” an approach to change in the world that is quickly being embraced by many different businesses, communities, and institutions. It means using “whole systems thinking to create resilient and equitable systems that integrate the needs of society with the integrity of nature.” It’s a lens that requires us to interrogate the impacts on our decisions in schools in terms that go far beyond the impacts on individual students and our current definitions of “success.”

The Royal Society of the Arts has [a great overview of this idea](#) that **pushes “regeneration” ahead of “sustainability” when it comes to our efforts to address our environmental challenges.** And they break down “regeneration” both as a mindset and a way of seeing and being in the world, and also as an emerging paradigm.

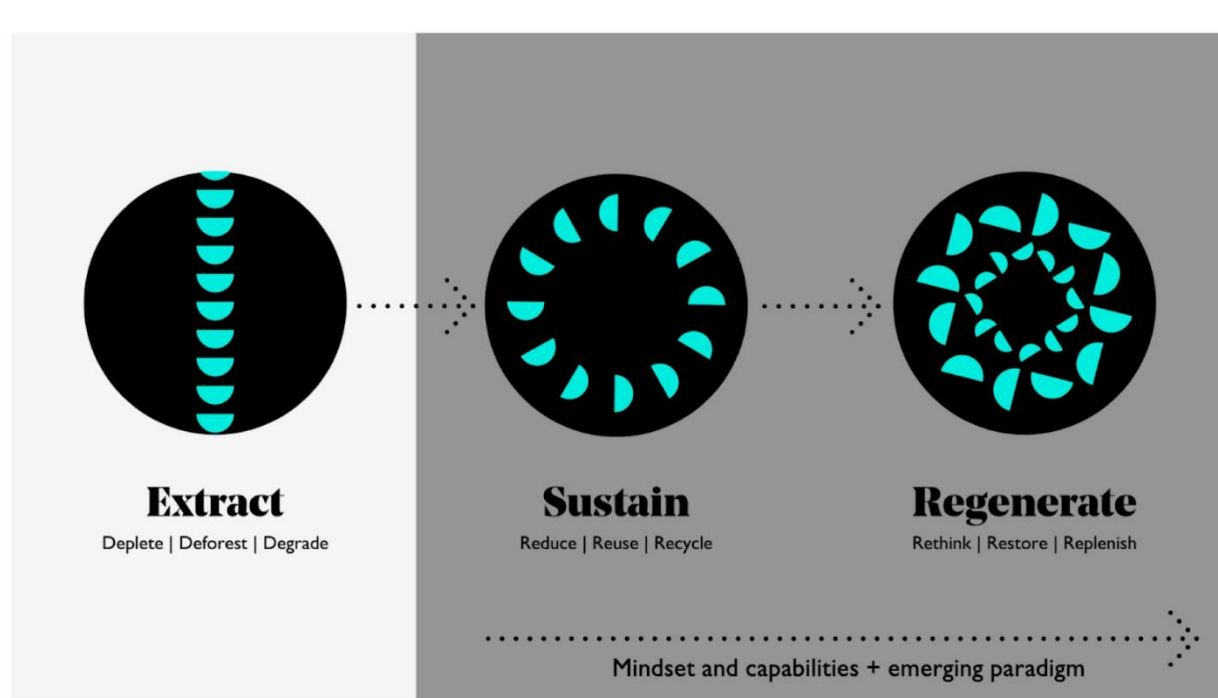
Having a regenerative mindset means seeing the world as a living system, built around reciprocal and co-evolutionary relationships and wholes, where humans, other living beings, and ecosystems rely on one another for health.

Imagine that mindset being brought to our decision-making in schools.

And also imagine our work being framed by our understanding of the paradigm shift we’re experiencing.

With the breakdown of existing structures, more people are looking for ideas which can help them navigate the challenges we are facing, and which can help them to envisage and move towards a flourishing and preferable future. This is contributing to the emergence of a regenerative paradigm...Creating regenerative systems is not simply a technical, economic, ecological, or social shift: it has to go hand-in-hand with an underlying shift in the way we think about ourselves, our relationships with one another and life as a whole.”

RSA provides a helpful graphic to understand this shift:



To me, thinking “regeneratively” adds a whole new lens to this discussion, not just for schools but for our own lives. As an individual, I’ve been working pretty hard to “sustain”; to “regenerate” is next level. But if we’re to be a part of the solution, I’ve become convinced regeneration is a mandate for all institutions and organizations. **Especially schools, who by and large are still struggling with “sustain.”**



Nature at the Table

So, what changes might employing a regenerative mindset to the system of school bring about? And how might we do it?

One of the best examples of what this means for organizations comes from the company [Faith in Nature](#), a global cosmetics company which has taken the step of adding Nature itself to its board of directors.

Not only that, but Nature's seat on the board has legal standing and, importantly, an equal vote with all other board members. You can get all the details of how this came about and how it works in a [free guide](#) that the company created to help others follow suit. But here's the gist:

Why? Because everything we do has an impact upon the natural world, and yet the natural world itself has no say on these decisions. We feel the repercussions of these decisions in the escalating environmental degradation of our planet, and yet business as usual continues.

Clearly 'business as usual' is not working, and business itself needs rethinking.



By voluntarily recognizing the legal Rights of Nature within our structures, Faith in Nature set out to forever reverse this injustice — seeking counsel from Nature in order to make better, more responsible decisions that take the natural world into account.

So, use your “radical imagination” for a moment and think about what kind of an impact having Nature as a voting member of your school board. What decisions might be made differently? What practices might be eliminated or added? How might the overall mission of the work shift in the ways that the future is demanding?

Regenerative School Cultures

Lying just beneath the surface in this conversation about regenerative design is the potential impact that bringing this lens to our thinking about school might impact the overall health and wellness of our students and teachers. Another unavoidable reality is that between Covid and the high-achievement culture that so many of our students find themselves in, the rates of adolescent stress, anxiety, and depression have skyrocketed. It's gotten so bad that in 2019, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine [declared](#) that youths in "high-achieving schools" are now on the list of "at-risk" groups for behavioral and mental health problems.

Think about that for a second. Think about the implications for all our futures.

And the thing is, most "high-achieving schools" know this. In his book [At What Cost?](#) that chronicles the rise in teen mental health issues, David Gleason asked school teachers and leaders why they thought it was that so many kids were presenting to counselors and therapists with depressive and even suicidal tendencies. To his shock, most of them were forthright in their answers, which included:

- We overschedule our students; we compress too much activity into an inadequate number of days and weeks.
- We always seem to pile on more, but we're never willing to do less: there's no give, so we stretch our students too thin.
- We constantly add things to our schedule, and we never take anything away from it.
- We overfocus on college admissions ... it's all about college.
- We allow the outside world of the competitive college landscape to drive our program.
- We give excessive awards that emphasize high achievement instead of recognizing students' effort.
- We assign too much homework.



Regenerative Design Approach

And yet, as Gleason shows, schools find it exceedingly difficult to change any of these things. It feels like if anything, **most schools are in “sustain” mode, trying not to make it worse.**

A regenerative design approach would ask us to do more.

It would focus on rethinking our impacts as systems, restoring practices that center health and wellness, and replenishing the connections and relationships with one another, our communities, and the natural world that are even more important today given our circumstances.

As educator Benjamin Freud [puts it](#),

“Regenerative design in schools means slowing down, cultivating relationships with ourselves (in every sense of the word), and creating the conditions for growth from within, nourished by our context, which dissolve into one another.

It means kindness, care, and love so that we all thrive: individuals, humans, non-humans, and the more-than-human world. None of these any longer separate.”

Thinking regeneratively is a great catalyst for stretching our imaginations when it comes to what having “one foot in the future” looks like. **It’s not about “predicting” the future of schools or any one school; it’s about imagining a deeply aspirational future in ways that engage and motivate us to put all our efforts toward creating and living it together for the benefit of all life.**

“Thinking regeneratively is a great catalyst for stretching our imaginations when it comes to what having ‘one foot in the future’ looks like.”

A New Framework: “Schoolpunk”

So, I’ve been thinking a lot about how we might approach this whole “design challenge” in ways that make us “imagine harder” that’s steeped in inquiry and regenerative design and might also offer a different way forward. And what I’m suggesting here are two ideas that might help us do that. One is a new aesthetic for education: “Schoolpunk.” The other is an emerging method for feeling our way into the future: Design Fiction.

In other words, what I’m trying to articulate is a new way of approaching our conversations about the future of schools, one that is rooted not just in how we **think** about our work in our attempts to intellectually frame a path forward, but also in how we as individuals are **responding** to this moment, how we are feeling it, sensing it, and connecting it to a future we want to create.

So, let’s dive in.



What exactly is “Schoolpunk?”

First of all, it’s an original idea, as the term and the idea are both new. As far as I can tell, it’s a word that hasn’t yet made it into a Google search - a fact that I find both exciting and daunting.

Second, it’s a riff on a host of other nouns that have taken on the “-punk” suffix in the last couple of decades, signaling a rebellious attitude toward the status quo, just like “punk rock” sought to disrupt our sense of music. The “-punk” suffix can signal one of two opposite frames: dystopian or activist/aspirational.

For instance, “cyberpunk” is a genre of science fiction that usually lives in a future world of technological apocalypse. Think “Bladerunner” or “Total Recall.”

“Solarpunk,” on the other hand, stresses an optimistic view of the future, one filled with renewable energy, ingenuity, and community.

It attempts to answer the question, “what does a sustainable civilization look like, and how can we get there?” ([Here’s a fairly complete list](#) of other aesthetics that end in “punk” if you’re interested.)



Some -punk has already made it into the education space. “Edupunk” is described as “a do-it-yourself attitude towards the teaching and learning process.” This is true specifically when it comes to the use of technology. It espouses the use of open-source software and pushes back against the “commercialization of learning.” It’s about centering the agency to choose which technologies to use in any learning interaction and not necessarily go with the big tech option.

This concept of “Schoolpunk” goes beyond just technology, however.

For me, “Schoolpunk” embraces the optimistic vibes of “Solarpunk” and attempts to answer the question:

“What does a system or structure for educating children look like if humanity succeeds in responding to the major contemporary challenges we face with an emphasis on regeneration, justice, wellness, and relevance, and, importantly, how do we get there?” (Or something like that.)

In essence, Schoolpunk is a response to the growing realization that schools, as we know them today, are breaking, that the way we learn in the world is evolving, and that we’re simply not preparing our students for a future that is changing at ever-increasing speeds and is growing more complex by the day.





Education for the Public Good

And it's also a call to consider education not just in local or personal terms but as deeply connected to a much more global, nature-centered ethos. That "education for humanity" that Stein writes about is a start, but even more, Schoolpunk centers an "education for the world and all living things" as I alluded to above.

Our work in schools must now move away from an emphasis on the private good of individual students to the public good of both local and global communities and all life on the planet.

Schoolpunk centers the idea that education is a powerful force for change in the world, as well as a vehicle to fulfill personal success.

And yes, like “Solarpunk,” “Schoolpunk” feels political and activist. It’s about using our restored imaginative powers that I talked about above to envision the future of education and schools that we want as well as it is fighting for that new ideal, convincing other of its importance, **and creating a movement that people can connect to - a movement that communicates what is possible and why that *possible* is urgent.**

This is no small task, I know.



But we’re in desperation time. Nothing being done in the current “improve schools” landscape is engaging in the truth that *schools in their current iteration cannot be changed.* (There...I said it.) The narratives run too deep.

The power structures are too embedded in every aspect of the experience. They are systemically, intractably inequitable, tied to dominant culture perspectives that are increasingly being exposed as irrelevant and unjust.

And, as the great Seymour Papert once opined, that “system” has an auto-immune response to change.” It repels it at every turn, and even when something different might take root, it does everything it can to reign it in.

Not About Better

So, “Schoolpunk” is not a journey into how to make schools “better.” Like I said before, it’s not about coming up with a new schedule or a different way of grading. Instead, it’s about asking if we want or need a schedule or grades in the first place. It’s an exploration into how we create a whole new conception of school and education, similar to “Solarpunk’s” goal to create a whole new way of approaching life on this planet. It’s a way for us to change what we perceive as “normal.”

I think both are essential if we’re going to survive the mess we’re in.

How, then, to “Schoolpunk?”

Well, you would think it would be grounded in powerful storytelling. We all know that story, when done well, is an effective strategy for changing people’s minds. And to some extent, storytelling will be an important part of this work. In fact, the literary movement of climate fiction (also known as “Solarpunk Fiction”) is being credited with spurring a great deal of conversation and action around the environmental crisis around the world...might “Schoolpunk Fiction” do the same?

That said, I’ve come to understand recently the limitations of story and narrative to push people’s thinking, especially when those stories are characterized by simple variations on the current theme. Sure, it’s great to hear of students doing project-based learning or of solving real problems in their communities. I love reading and watching those stories as much as anyone. But they are limited in that we don’t get a clear sense of how those practices relate to *creating the different and therefore better future we all desire*. They might change the present experience of school, but there’s no throughline between those practices and a fundamental reimagination of the learning experience.

That’s where Design Fiction comes in.

The Practice: “Design Fiction”



Julian Bleecker

Over the last few months, I’ve been diving into a different way of approaching the change challenge called “Design Fiction.” The term was **coined by Julian Bleecker**, founder of the Near Future Laboratory, and it’s decidedly different from “design thinking” which is all the rage these days.

Design Fiction is built on the premise that we are more apt to create and commit to futures that we aspire to ***when we are able to interact with those futures in the present.*** And we interact with them not with words but as artifacts that represent what we might actually hold in our hands were we able to time travel forward and then bring them back into the present with us.

Artifacts that make us feel something about the futures they represent and allow us to “feel into” what lies ahead.

In essence, Design Fiction asks us to be “*archeologists of the future.*”



There is value in this. In the concluding chapter of her book [The Extended Mind: The Power of Thinking Outside the Brain](#), Annie Murphy Paul writes:

“Whenever possible, we should endeavor to transform information into an artifact, to make data into something real — and then proceed to interact with it, labeling it, mapping it, feeling it, tweaking it, showing it to others. Humans evolved to handle the concrete, not to contemplate the abstract.

We extend our intelligence when we give our minds something to grab onto: when we experience a concept from physics as a bicycle wheel spinning in our hands, for example, or when we turn a foreign language vocabulary word into a gesture we can see and sense and demonstrate to others. Vague impressions of what constitutes “excellent work” can usefully take form as a display of actual models to which to aspire; dry intellectual deliberations can acquire a rooted, embodied dimension when we closely attend to, and label and track, the internal signals that arise in our bodies. Our days are now spent processing an endless stream of symbols; with a bit of ingenuity, we can find ways to turn these abstract symbols into tangible objects and sensory experiences and thereby think about them in new ways”.

Design Fiction is about actually showing and touching what the future might look like as opposed to telling about it in words. It’s about interacting with it and asking questions about it. If this is from the future, how did it evolve? Why was it created? How was it necessary? What problem does it solve, and perhaps, create? And, importantly, it’s about reaching forward into a world that we actually want to inhabit, which is why I think it dovetails so nicely with Schoolpunk.

Full disclosure: playing with the idea of being an “archeologist of the future” isn’t easy at first.

In general, I think that humans tend not to think about the future this way. We’ve almost developed an incapacity to do so which, arguably, might have a lot to do with the way we do school (and why we’ve gotten ourselves into this mess.)

As I alluded to before, as much as we say we want kids to be imaginative and creative, we still want them inside of the box labeled **“Interesting but Still Able to be Assessed Using Current Tools.”**

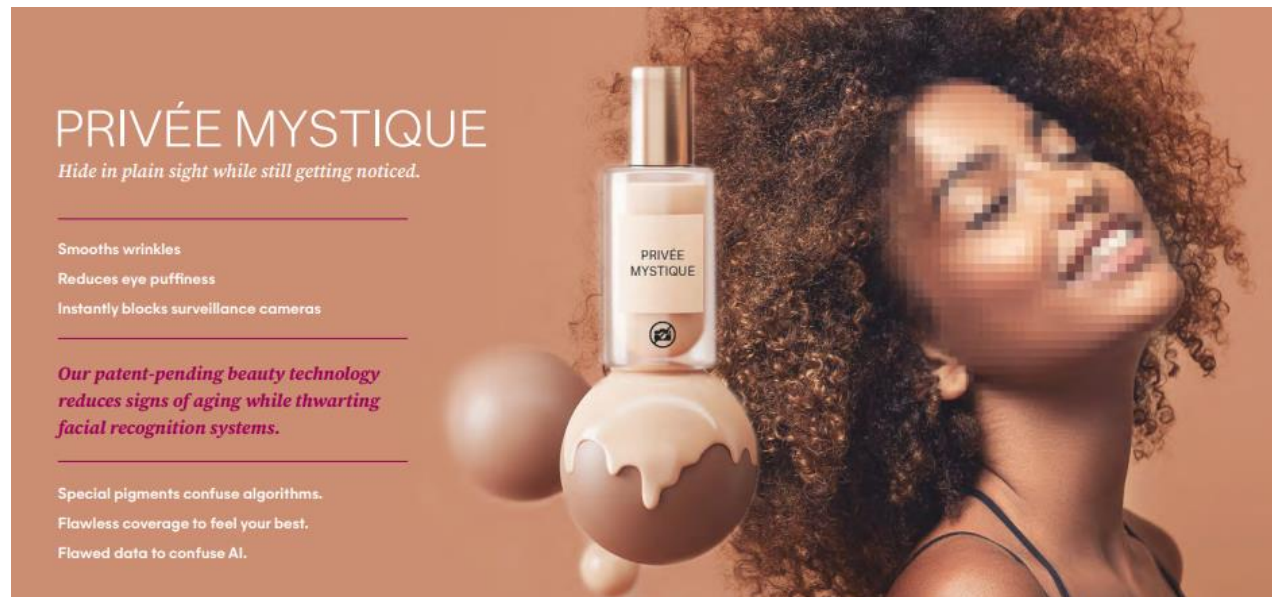
In other words, Design Fiction has **“no logical constraints,”** which is what makes it hard. Unlike traditional prototyping, which is “bound by the parameters of the present,” Design Fiction is part of a narrative set in another time. “The resulting provocation makes us believe ‘this could be real,’ enabling us to converse and understand the possible impacts on society and on earth.”

This opens up some great opportunities for discussion.



Design Fiction Examples

Here's an amazing example from one of my favorite "trends" reports from the [Future Today Institute](#). This is a cream that not only reduces wrinkles but also protects you from facial recognition systems.

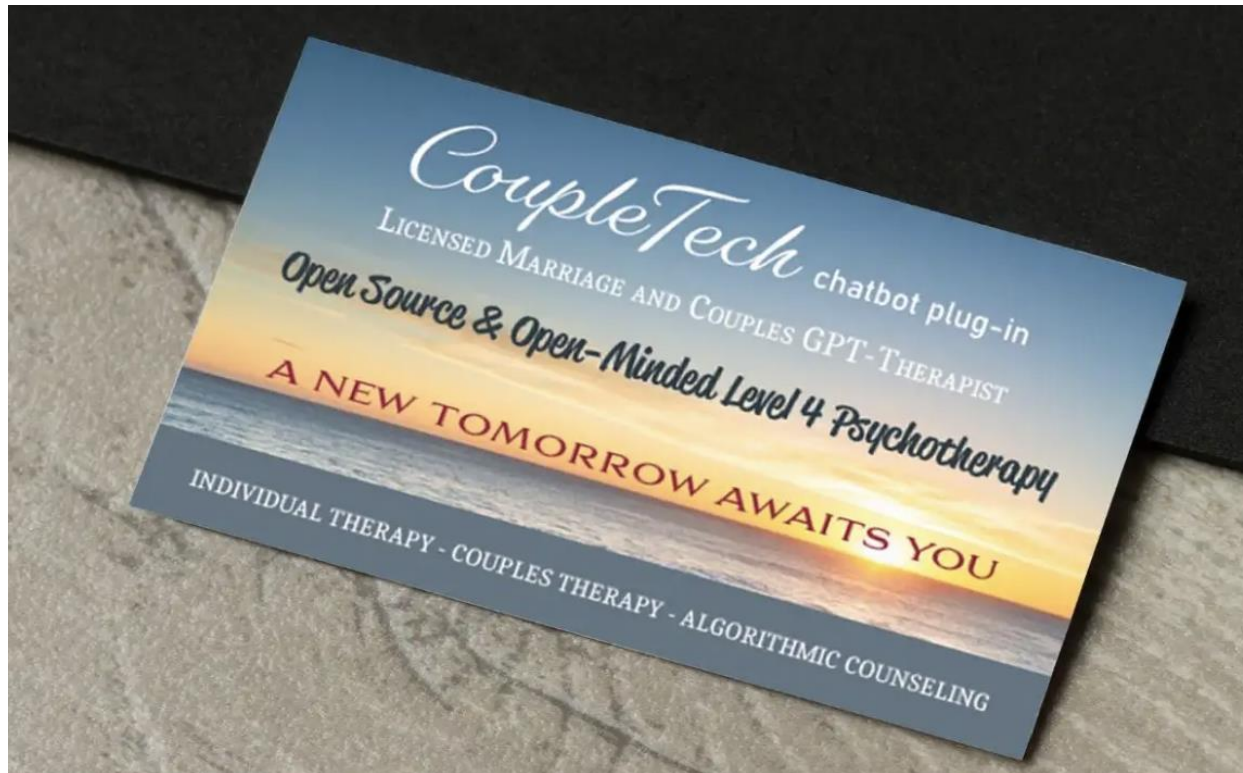


If we were approaching this as a Design Fiction project, we would take this further. We'd:

- Make the bottle
- Create the branding
- Design and print posters
- Produce some web pages
- Maybe even write the patent application for the product

And we would interrogate the need for such a product and how it came about. What happened in the world to make it popular? What ingredients make it possible? What are the societal impacts if this may only be available to a privileged few?

Or how about this business card for a ChatBOT Therapist [created by designer Dre Labre](#):



Get the idea? Do some mental time traveling into the future, look around and see what you find, and bring it back with you into the present by actually creating it to spur some questioning and conversation. It's creative and provocative practice all at once.

In an education sense, what if we were to travel to a community circa 2050 (or 2070, or...?) What might the program of study for the local high school (if there even is such a thing) look like and be comprised of? What courses might be offered? What outcomes would we desire for students? Even, would we have a course of study at all? If not, what might take its place? And, importantly for this discussion, **what form would it take?** Paper? (Probably not, but...) Digital? Something else? Whatever we decide, we would create it and "make it real."

Given our understanding of the current arc of our challenges, the potential opportunities that surround us, the speed and complexity of technological advances, and our insight as to what the value and purpose of schools may be 30 years hence, what artifact might we create from that time that would make us think deeply about why and how it exists?

I want to be clear again that we're not talking about "design thinking" here. It's not about a user-centered approach to designing a solution to today's problems. It's about imagining what we might want to find in the future and then producing insights that can guide us in the present and widen our apertures for what is possible and desirable moving forward. The reality is that right now, most educators are living and working in someone else's dream; Design Fiction allows us to dream new dreams that are more engaging and appealing and personal.

The actual building of the artifact is what makes this process even more powerful. Creating Design Fictions develops our skills as learners and as creatives. It's not so much about "getting it right" as it is toying with the possibilities and pushing our own understandings around what those possibilities might mean. It's about [making, tinkering, inventing, and engineering](#), all of which are integral parts of the way that humans learn. And, importantly, these are ways of knowing that should be a part of every classroom. As we consider education in the future using these approaches, we'll become more effective educators in the present as well.

"It's not about "design thinking." It's about imagining what we might want to find in the future and then producing insights that can guide us in the present and widen our apertures for what is possible and desirable moving forward."

Finally, in his book *Leading from the Emerging Future: From Ego-System to Eco-System Economies*, Otto Scharmer outlines a similar process for pushing out of the box:

“Working with people in different systems over the past eighteen years, we have learned that this process of helping diverse stakeholder groups in ecosystems to sense and actualize future possibilities requires new infrastructures or holding spaces for five critical process steps:

(1) co-initiating, i.e., helping stakeholders in fragmented systems to connect and discover common ground; (2) co-sensing, i.e., helping people to walk in each other’s shoes, to see the system from the edges, and to develop capacities for collective sensing; (3) co-inspiring through deep reflection practices and intentional moments of stillness that help us to connect to our deeper sources of knowing; (4) co-creating or exploring the future through hands-on prototyping; and (5) co-evolving or scaling and sustaining the new.”



Otto Scharmer generated by AI

As Scharmer suggests, this isn't only about prototyping or doing Design Fiction. But it is an important part of the process. We need organizational DNA and dispositions that are engaging in the ongoing work of learning about the world, imagining harder about the potential futures we face, and bringing pieces of those futures back for deep interrogation.

Schoolpunk First Steps

So, what if “Schoolpunk” as an ethos (movement?), Regeneration as a lens, and Design Fiction as a practice push us beyond our current constraints into fundamentally new ways of thinking about how we educate our children and ourselves?



What if it's a way to go beyond just tweaking the interface and, instead, helping us imagine a whole new operating system?

Those would be lofty outcomes, no doubt.

But given the circumstances of this moment and the uncertainty we're facing in just about every aspect of our lives, the time feels right to have a go. Not to say that we can't pursue other strategies, but this feels pretty fresh and inviting for exploration and play.

We'll have to come to articulate an understanding of what exactly "Schoolpunk" is, maybe something similar to this [Solarpunk Manifesto](#). (Of course, we could always just ask ChatGPT...) And we'll have to build our imagination and Design Fiction skills to the point where those artifacts that we're bringing back are provocative enough to stir up conversation and debate.

And, importantly, we'll each have to engage in some "Selfpunk" as in spending some time clarifying our own aspirational futures, our own moral purpose, and how we personally are meeting the "design challenge" in our own lives. Since people are what make up institutions, it would be almost impossible to change the institution without first changing ourselves.

"Regenerative design" can play a big part in that as well, asking us to look at our own impacts on the world around us and change accordingly.

Once we've done that, then most importantly, we'll have to design ways to integrate a real focus on the future into our current school cultures and practices.

"We'll each have to engage in some 'Selfpunk' as in spending some time clarifying our own aspirational futures, our own moral purpose, and how we personally are meeting the 'design challenge' in our own lives."

What might that look like? What would be the goals, and how would we use what comes out of that to further build capacity for futures across the school community?



Futures Advisory Council

One way we're answering those questions is by helping schools create their own "Futures Advisory Council" (FAC) to help navigate the challenges the world is throwing at them. A FAC is a diverse group of teachers, students, parents, leaders, and community members who meet regularly to learn about, think about, and play in the future. Tobias Revell, Design Futures Lead at Arup, refers to this as a "*crack existential crisis design team*." We think of it as a great way to keep "one foot in the future."

To play effectively, a Futures Advisory Council is tasked with:

- Helping to build capacity throughout the school community to think about possible futures
- Creating new stories, narratives, and artifacts of education to widen people's apertures for what's possible
- Engaging in ongoing conversations about planning, mission, and vision
- Informing decisions made at every level of the school organization
- Tracking and unpacking news of the future(s)
- Becoming "archeologists of the future" by exploring design fiction
- Undertaking a systematic, public exploration of alternative futures (among other things.)
- Pushing each other and the school community to "imagine harder"
- Sharing their understandings regularly through exhibition and storytelling that builds that larger community's capacity to engage in that question as well



Tobias Revell generated by AI



We help schools streamline the process for creating and sustaining a working FAC by:

- Overseeing the planning and outreach to form the FAC
- Helping identify members of the FAC team
- Providing a structure for team meetings and projects
- Assisting the team through a live virtual onboarding session to set norms and expectations
- Hosting a coaching session with the FAC to help build capacity for the work

Also, through an annual subscription, we provide extended support to help school FACs focus their work throughout the year. This includes:

- A monthly package of curated readings, question prompts, and futures design activities
- A monthly, 90-minute virtual networking session where members from FACs around the world can share ideas, ask questions, get feedback, and connect
- A dedicated space in the BQI community for members to carry on conversations asynchronously
- And other supports as we develop them

For all the details on creating and running a FAC at your school, check out our [FAC webpage](#) or [reach out](#) to schedule a call.

An Invitation and an Offer

So, as they say, “if you’ve gotten this far...” these ideas must have piqued your interest. I’m sure I’ve lost many readers along the way with feelings of exhaustion, or “I won’t be alive to see it,” both of which are valid. And given the enormity of the challenges we face, it’s not uncommon for many to be cynical of any new and untested ideas. I get it. Regardless, for those that remain, let’s take this further.

Join us in our BQI free Community

First, [here is an invite to a “Schoolpunk” space](#) in our BQI free community where we will be:

- Continuing these conversations
- Creating some Design Fictions together
- Sharing our own aspirational stories
- Thinking big and starting a movement that helps to reimagine “normal” when it comes to the future of our schools.

For those who want to play with the idea of Schoolpunk in a creative, hopeful space where we can create artifacts and stories from a better educational future, game on. (Check out other conversations and events happening in the rest of the BQI community.)



And, Finally, a Request

If these ideas resonated, or if you're thinking about education and schools differently, or if you just want to support the work that we do at BQI, then I would so appreciate it if **right now you email five or 10 or 20 of your friends** and [send them the link](#) to the download page for this book. I'm not naive enough to think that the answers to all of our education (and global) ills are captured here. But I do think these are the types of discussions and questions we need to be engaging in if we have any hope of finding a more healthy, just, and relevant path forward for schools. The more voices we have in that mix, the better.

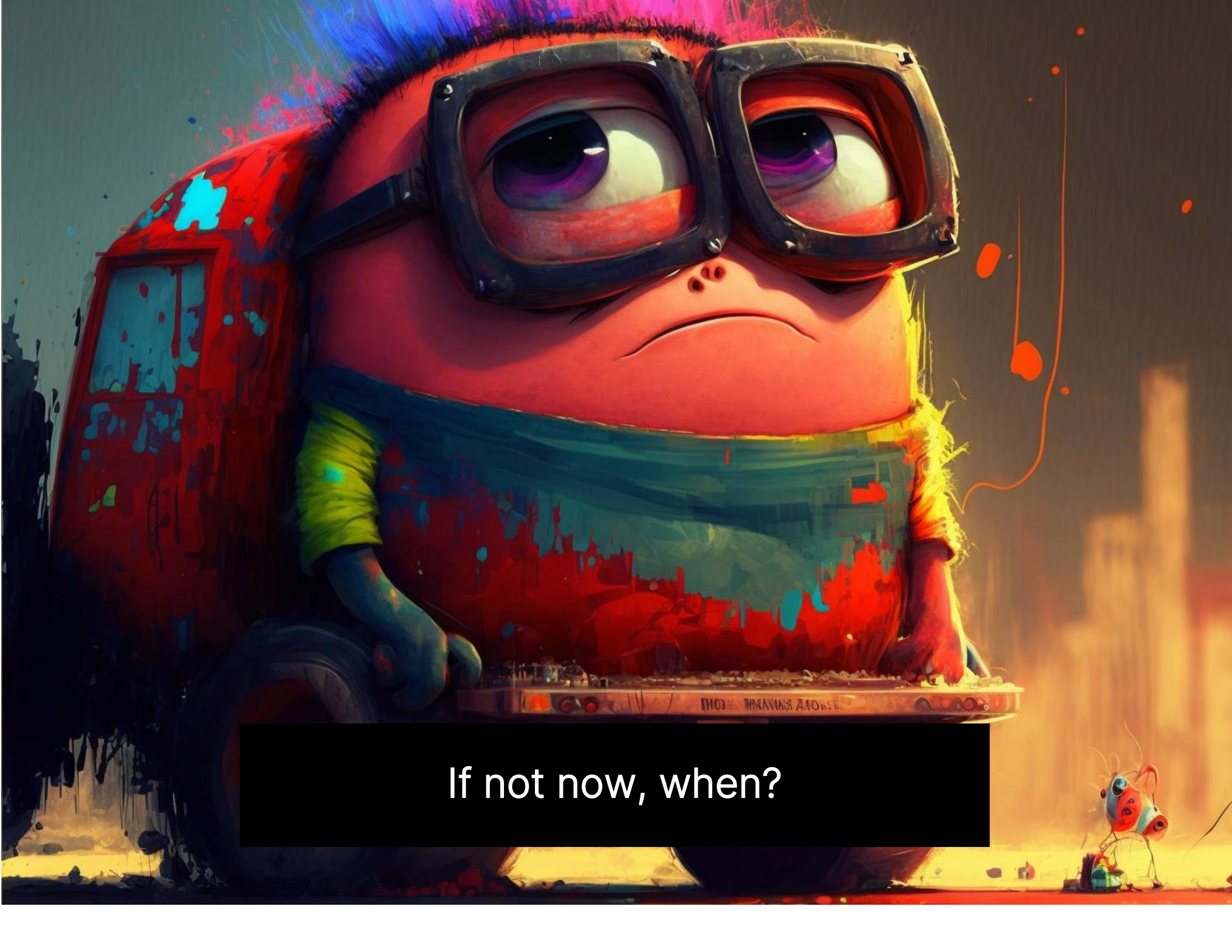
And, to make it easy, below is some cut n' paste swipe copy for your email. Thanks for any and all of your efforts. Really hoping we might do some amazing thinking, creating, and doing together in 2023 and beyond!

Hey [friend's name here],

I'm sending you a link to a new e-book that really has me thinking about the future of schools and how we might think about designing a really different path forward. It's a quick but valuable read that you can download for free. [Here's the link.](#)

Hope life is good!

[Your name here]



If not now, when?



Conversation Starters

Since we are the Big Questions Institute, let's bring this to a close with some "fearless inquiry" that might spark some discussion and, with any luck, capacity building to take on the "design challenge" we all face in earnest.

We'll be bringing these into our BQI Community space so we can share more wide-ranging and diverse perspectives on these, but for now, ask them of yourselves or ask them of your communities.

Don't hesitate to post your questions for discussion in the community as well.

Reminder: If you want even more great questions to spark conversations, don't forget our [Nine Big Questions e-book](#) from 2021 which you can download for free.)

10 Questions to Ponder

QUESTION 1: What do you see as the **greatest challenges** that our children will have to overcome in their futures?

QUESTION 2: What important **aspects of living in this moment** are schools not addressing?

QUESTION 3: How are **you learning** about change in the world? How is your **school community doing** that?

QUESTION 4: How are current school systems and practices reinforcing (or addressing) the **challenges humanity faces**? How are they confronting challenges to well-being and legacies of power and exclusion?

QUESTION 5: What do you see as the **most acute challenges** to schooling and education created by Artificial Intelligence?

QUESTION 6: What do you think are the skills and dispositions needed to be an **effective “archeologist of the future”**?

QUESTION 7: How might **“regenerative design” influence the day-to-day experience** of school for students and teachers?

QUESTION 8: What might be the **defining characteristics of “school”** 30-40 years into the future?

QUESTION 9: How might you start to build an **“imagination infrastructure”** in your school community?

QUESTION 10: What **other questions** about these ideas are bubbling up for you? What do you think your school community would be asking?

Acknowledgments

I'd like to thank a bunch of people who were kind enough to read and give feedback on these ideas as they bubbled forth somewhat chaotically over the last few months:

My BQI co-founder Homa Tavangar, Garreth Heidt, Ben Grey, Marsha Maxwell, Colleen Broderick, Thomas Steele-Maley, Benjamin Freud, Brad Choyt, Joel Backon, Bryan Glover, and my new friends at the Near Future Laboratory.

And, my wife Wendy, a graphic designer who spent hours playing with Midjourney to create the images in this e-book!

As is everything these days, this is a work in progress.

If you have any feedback, questions, or comments that you'd be willing to share, please [get in touch](#).



About the Big Questions Institute



A global leader in helping educators understand the challenges and opportunities for schools in a fast-changing, increasingly complex world, BQI works with schools from around the world to chart a more relevant, just, healthy, and sustainable path forward for the communities they serve. Co-Founders Homa

Tavangar and Will Richardson have a combined 50-plus years of experience working in all levels of education, from classroom teaching to governance to leadership and more. In just four years, Homa and Will have worked with over 70 public, private, and international schools, and professional organizations in six continents.

Schools collaborate with BQI to:

- Clarify and articulate mission, vision, and values in more modern contexts
- Create and implement long-term strategic planning and design that accounts for huge changes in the world
- Build capacity throughout the school community to understand and better prepare for an uncertain future
- Prepare for the accreditation process
- Develop deeper understanding of effective practice around DEIJ challenges

For more information, [visit our website](#), or [reach out to us directly](#) for a no-obligation call to discuss your unique needs.

We look forward to working with you.

Will Richardson



A former public school educator of 22 years, Will has spent the last 15 years developing an international reputation as a leading thinker and writer about the intersection of social online learning networks, education, and systemic change. Most recently, Will is a co-founder of The Big Questions Institute, which he and Homa created to help educators use “fearless inquiry” to make sense of this complex moment and an uncertain future.

In 2017, Will was named one of 100 global “Changemakers in Education” by the Finnish site HundrED, and was named one of the Top 5 “Edupreneurs to Follow” by Forbes. He has given keynote speeches, led breakout sessions, and provided coaching services in over 30 countries on 6 continents. (Come on Antarctica!) He has also authored six books that have sold over 200,000 copies worldwide, and given TEDx Talks in New York, Melbourne, and most recently Vancouver.

In addition to his focus and expertise on classroom pedagogies, learning theory, and emerging technologies and trends, his current interests include the use of Design Fiction, Speculative Design, and Regenerative Design to help schools and districts envision potential futures.

Will has two adult children, Tess and Tucker, and lives in rural New Jersey with his wife Wendy.

Homa Tavangar



After a 20-year career constructing international business and economic development strategies, in 2009, with the release of her acclaimed first book, *Growing Up Global: Raising Children to Be at Home in the World* (Random House), Homa turned her professional focus to education.

Since then, Homa has co-authored six books on education and served as an advisor, consultant, trainer, coach, and speaker to schools around the world. She serves as a voice on themes of culture, innovation, leadership, strategy, futures, global citizenship and global competence, and deep diversity, equity, belonging, and inclusion. She draws from her wide-ranging experiences to consider competing strategic priorities, recognize diverse perspectives, and plan with strategic foresight.

Co-founding the Big Questions Institute represents a natural extension of her work, especially during a time of unprecedented global challenges.

Homa has served as both a consultant for strategic planning and as a board member during strategic planning processes. Currently, she serves on the board of directors for International School Services, the nonprofit leader in international education; and she is about to begin service as a judge for the Templeton Prize, an award calibrated to exceed the Nobel Prize purse.

Homa is a graduate of UCLA and Princeton University and has served as a Princeton alumni interviewer for undergraduate admissions over many years. Witnessing selective admissions trends and decision-making first-hand, actively researching developments in education, interacting with parents around the world, and working with leaders in the field all impact her strategic planning considerations.

Homa has lived on four continents, has heritage in four world religions, and is the mother of three daughters. She and her husband live just outside Philadelphia.