



## ***Catching the Knowledge Wave? The knowledge society and the future of education***

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### ***A summary of book's main ideas***

*Catching the Knowledge Wave?* takes apart some of our most deeply-held ideas about knowledge and education, and explores the ways our schools need to change to prepare people to participate in the knowledge-based societies of the future.

The knowledge society is an idea that is widely discussed, but not well understood. Perhaps this is because we need to use knowledge as a verb, not a noun – it something we *do* rather than something we *have*. This new meaning for is quite different to the one our schools were built on, and because of this knowledge society developments are a major challenge for our schools. We cannot address this challenge by adding more ideas to our existing structures. We need a completely new framework, one that takes account of knowledge's new meaning, but that in practice *also* gives everyone an equal opportunity to succeed.

The book argues that our current education system is set up to serve industrial age, not knowledge age, needs. It works like a production line, using the traditional academic subjects to sort people according to their likely place in the job market. This, it argues, is completely inappropriate as we move into the knowledge age.

If people are to have a job at all in the 'new work order', they need more than basic literacy and numeracy skills. Everyone (not just those heading for university) now needs 'higher order' thinking skills. They need the ability to be an independent learner, and the ability to go on learning all their lives. However, they also need to know quite a lot – not, as in the past, at the detail level of traditional forms of knowledge, but at the 'systems' or 'big picture' level. They also need the ability to work as part of collaborative teams in which the members acknowledge, recognise and build on each other's strengths and weaknesses.

In contrast to the present system that encourages people to master existing knowledge for its own sake, a knowledge age education system needs to help people (*all* people) go beyond this. It needs to help people develop the ability to generate *new* knowledge from old. This move from industrial age to knowledge age is a paradigm shift, not a gradual progression.

One of the defining features of the knowledge age is that knowledge has a new meaning. The old idea of knowledge as ‘stuff’, something we get, and store away somewhere, is being replaced by a new view of knowledge as being more like energy – something that *does* things, something that makes things happen.

This new view of knowledge *doesn't* mean that the ‘old’ kinds of knowledge (the stuff we get to store away) don't matter any more. On the contrary, old knowledge is the raw material for the new, so we still need to know it.

However, learning the ‘old’ forms of knowledge is no longer an end in itself, as it is in our current education system. We now need to learn it so that we *can do things with it*: Old knowledge is the raw material for new knowledge building.

The ability to do things with knowledge is now the key skill people need: however people need to be taught how to do this, and they need to learn how to do it from an early age (not wait until postgraduate university level).

A second key feature of the knowledge age is a new model of individuality (what it means to be a person), and, as a result, new ways of thinking about things like equality and social justice.

Just as the one-size-fits-all production line model of education is no longer appropriate for developing the knowledge age's human resources needs, the one-size-fits-all model of equality (as sameness) is not an appropriate framework for thinking about citizenship in the knowledge age. Multiplicity, diversity, difference and hybridity are the norm now. Identity, like knowledge, is now a verb, not a noun – it is always ‘in process’, never finished. Thus we cannot expect everyone to learn things in the same way, in the same order, at the same time (as they do in the production line model). We need new, more flexible, *non-linear* learning systems.

The new ideas about knowledge and identity are a significant challenge to our current education system. We can't address this challenge by tinkering with the current system – a paradigm shift is needed. This book attempts to map some of the features of this paradigm shift. It argues that we already have most of the raw materials needed for it: all we need now is a unifying framework that will let us think outside the production line square.

Therein lies the challenge.

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