A BRANCH IN THE TIMELINE:
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE X SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN EDUCATION

A "FORCES AT PLAY" PROVOCATION, WITH RESOURCES

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INTRODUCTION

This report comes from my remarks at a private gathering hosted by the F.M. Kirby Foundation, which is a long-time supporter of education and social entrepreneurship.

I had the honor of delivering these remarks to F.M. Kirby trustees, the Foundation's staff, and several heads of school from places funded by the Foundation.

SIGNALS FROM THE EDGE

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If you're familiar with futures thinking, then you know that long-term forecasters look for signals from the edge.

So I want to share a few different signals that I've picked up on recently.

The truth is, they don't feel like they're at the edge—they feel like they're rapidly moving to the center of the radar screen.

The first comes from ASU-GSV, the annual conference on education innovation, with a special emphasis on EdTech. I attended for the first time in April 2023, and at literally every session the moderator or one of the panelists voiced a running joke: *"When is this panel going to bring up AI?"*

Of course, many sessions explicitly dealt with AI and there were a ton of demos of AI products. But in sessions that appeared to have nothing to do with AI, people still felt the need to talk about it.

The second signal comes from ASU GSV's baby brother, SMU GSV, which boasts an entire track of programming on "Educating Entrepreneurs."

One session cites the fact that "Over 90% of employers agree that it's important to have an entrepreneurial mindset to prepare candidates to enter the workforce."
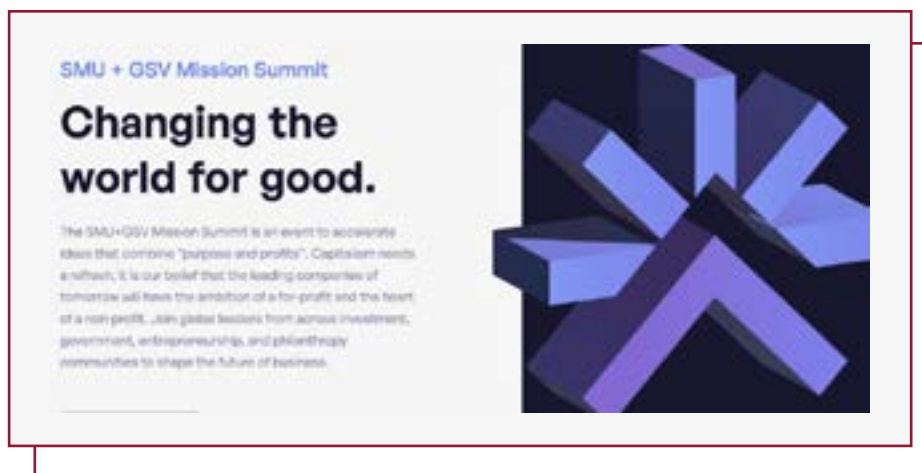
I picked up on the third signal in May 2023, when I learned that Regis High School in Manhattan has established a small endowment to incentivize participation in a social entrepreneurship elective. In that course, teams of students identify a social impact problem and pitch concept prototypes. The team that wins the pitch will also receive $1000 to build a working prototype. Of note: in the current cohort, at least 2 teams have created concept solutions that rely on AI.

Recent news provided our last signal. The Biden Administration announced that it will invest $140 million to launch seven new National AI Research Institutes.

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The announcement comes hours before VP Harris meets with Silicon Valley leaders for a "frank discussion" about the technology's risks.

—Engadget, May 2023

SIGNALS → SHIFTS

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If those are signals, what are some of the underlying tectonic shifts?

Recently, the World Economic Forum released their May 2023 Future of Jobs Report. For over a decade WEF has surveyed hiring managers around the world about the skillsets and mindsets necessary to thrive in the rapidly changing world of work. Responses to these annual surveys consistently reflect the building blocks of entrepreneurship.

This year's Future of Jobs Report indicates that hiring managers see the following skills as the Top 10 for the next five years. Many of these—for example, creative thinking, resilience, and empathy—continue to reflect the building blocks of entrepreneurship.

If those are the tectonic shifts outside of the world of schools, what's going on inside education?

Just as ASU GSV is the place to catch the signals from the edge, Getting Smart is the source for longer, slower shifts. Getting Smart was founded by Tom Vander Ark, who previously was the first Executive Director of Education for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Getting Smart's list of innovative schools has traced a decade-long arc bending toward project based learning, with a strong emphasis on forming contributors to the common good.

Over 50% of the 100 schools on that list (which is representative, not exhaustive) organize themselves around PBL and social impact.

These two long-term portraits—the WEF Future of Jobs report and Getting Smart's list of 100 innovative schools—reflect an ongoing shift from a world that rewards students who have mastered the "known knowns" to those who have practiced exploring the "known unknowns."

And nothing better prepares students for exploring "known unknowns" (like AI) than social entrepreneurship.

Why do I believe this?

Because between 2015 and 2021, I ran several social entrepreneurship bootcamps involving over 500 students from a diverse array of schools and socioeconomic backgrounds. Time after time I saw students thinking creatively, critically, and with genuine curiosity about problems they had never even dreamed of before.

BRANCH IN THE TIMELINE

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I don't share these signals and shifts because any of us is confused about the dramatic impact that AI will have on the world.

I share these signals and shifts because I want to be plain about my point of view:

AI will disrupt school.

The way in which it will disrupt school is up to us.

If we do nothing, and we accept whatever comes our way, we will live in a pretty awful timeline.

If we do nothing, I believe that AI "will accelerate, automate and scale traditional, broken methods of instruction," as Dr. Philippa Hardman from U. Cambridge has written.

I hope we can all agree that we should not—cannot—accept that.

On the other hand, through strategic and concerted effort, I know that we can create a branch in the timeline.

We have the power to create our preferred future.

Specifically, I believe that blending AI with social entrepreneurship presents schools with the best way to create that preferred future, because it will form young people who can safely explore emerging problems that have no predefined solutions.

DEFINITIONS

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I'd like to recommend some concrete steps that schools and Boards can take to initiate this branch in the timeline. But first I'd like to propose some definitions.

A decade ago, when I was Head of School at Malvern Prep, I first started talking about teaching "social entrepreneurship"—and caused a near-panic, because the faculty thought I intended to turn the school into a business school, with a curriculum to match. I want to avoid repeating that mistake with you!

I like the elegance of HBS professor Howard Stevenson's definition of entrepreneurship: "the pursuit of opportunity beyond resources controlled."

> *entrepreneurship: the pursuit of opportunity beyond resources controlled.*

Notice that nothing in that definition requires us to think through the lens of business.

It's a short step from Stevenson's definition of entrepreneurship to a definition of social entrepreneurship: "the pursuit of opportunity beyond resources controlled—on behalf of the common good"

> *social entrepreneurship: the pursuit of opportunity beyond resources controlled—on behalf of the common good*

Now that we all have a shared definition for social entrepreneurship, what do we do?

THE BEST DEFENSE IS A GOOD OFFENSE

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Reasonable people may disagree on this point, but I'm a big believer that the best defense is a good offense.

I'm especially supportive of fast experiments that have been de-risked as much as possible. So I'd like to present "small, medium, and large" ways to do that.

SMALL: ACTIVATE YOUR INNOVATORS AND EARLY ADOPTERS

In most populations, about 15% of people will be "innovators" or "early adopters." These psychographics have nothing to do with demographics—these folks could be old or young, any gender, any race or ethnicity. They're the ones who are naturally wired to try new things.

Encourage these folks to redesign a few lessons or units to incorporate AI and/or social entrepreneurship.

MEDIUM: ENGAGE THE FULL FACULTY

In addition to activating your innovators and early adopters, host small group coffee conversations.

Find out how your teachers are thinking about generative AI. Are they playing around with it already? What are they worried about? What are they excited by?

When you have finished these coffee conversations, share themes with the faculty. If your innovators and early adopters have redesigned some lessons, share the insights from those experiments as well.

LARGE: DESIGN SPRINT

In addition to activating your innovators and early adopters and hosting small group coffee conversations, sponsor a design sprint to create one or more courses.

Such courses will plug into different places depending on your school, but one easy option for schools with a high school division is to create senior electives.

EVERYONE HAS TO PLAY ACTIVE DEFENSE

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You may feel that you're not in a position to play offense, but given the ongoing releases of dozens of AI products every week, I hope that you appreciate the need to play defense.

I'd like to propose three specific places to play defense.

GOVERNANCE

Heads of School and Boards of Trustees should devote time to developing shared understanding and alignment in three areas:

1. *Define terms.* In an age of abundant AI, what does "plagiarism" mean? If your mission refers to developing "conscious citizens," what does that phrase mean? You might begin this conversation in an Academic or Mission Committee, and then bring it to the full Board for discussion.

2. *Establish policies or ratify existing policies.* Are students encouraged to use ChatGPT? Are they prohibited? Is it a teacher-by-teacher decision? Does everyone understand the rationale? You might begin this conversation in an Academic or Mission Committee. If you have a Risk Committee, it might be worth a separate discussion there, too. Then bring it to the full Board for discussion.

3. *Audit resource allocations.* In ordinary times, 1–2% of the operating budget should go to professional development. In a rapidly changing environment, a Board should consider increased funding for fast, derisked experiments. You should begin this conversation in the Finance Committee, and then bring it to the full Board for discussion.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

1. *Talk to teachers.* Find out what worries them and what excites them.

2. *Talk to students.* Ask them how they're using AI, and not just for school (eg, they are probably encountering it on social media first, as in the case of Snap).

3. *Talk to parents.* Find out where they see their kids practicing those skills WEF's Top 10 Skills (note: it may be in places entirely outside of your school).

SUBJECT-MATTER EXPERTS

Find out what signals they are detecting. Three SMEs I recommend:

Dr. Philippa Hardman, professor at U. Cambridge and EdTechCEO. She has an active Substack and LinkedIn presence.

Ethan Mollick, professor at Wharton. He has an active Substack and Twitter presence.

The Neuron. Not an individual, but rather a brief daily digest of interesting news from the world of AI.
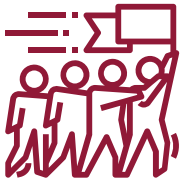
TAKE ACTION

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DIAGNOSE

Take 90 seconds to answer 5 diagnostic questions about your school's preparedness for the ways in which AI will disrupt education.

READ

Learn more about how AI is reshaping education by reading MSA's other "Forces at Play" reports, which come with resources.

PARTICIPATE

GenAI is a tectonic shift that will reorder the world of education. It will be a primary focus of MSA's "Forces at Play" and "Strategic Plan Health Check" workshops. You can join the waiting lists here.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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As a two-time Head of School and as a consultant to nonprofits, he has designed and implemented several change initiatives.

MIDDLE STATES

MSA is the worldwide leader in accreditation and school improvement. For over 130 years, Middle States has been helping school leaders establish and reach their goals, develop strategic plans, promote staff development and advance student achievement. With nearly 2,800 accredited schools and school systems in over 110 countries, MSA-CESS is proud of its continuing legacy and its ongoing innovations to meet the challenges of improving education in the 21st century.

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