

# **“The facts alone will not save us”: A workshop on speculative education future and history making**

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## **Workshop background and description**

This workshop aims to explore speculative fiction as a form of educational enquiry and practice. In this pursuit it draws upon the provocative contention of Ruha Benjamin (2016) that “the facts, alone, will not save us.” Instead, she argues, “social change requires novel fictions that reimagine and rework all that is taken for granted about the current structure of society. Such narratives are not meant to convince others of what is, but to expand our own visions of what is possible” (Benjamin, 2016).

The ethical implications of educational technologies (EdTech) from simple classroom tools to almighty platforms are raising increasing concerns. These are postdigital concerns insofar as they are inescapable yet also emergent and ongoing. They are amplified by the power and influence of AI (Bozkurt et al, 2023; Cox et al 2023) with its implications for fraud, scams, surveillance, privacy and more fundamentally encodings of privileged norms of race, gender, sexuality, religion and so on. In addition the material and carbon costs of digital learning may force us to reckon with EdTech as inherently ecologically destructive (Selwyn, 2021).

Is this to say that all our futures are grim and that hope has been foreclosed? Or if not, how can we work together to plot our way out of these problems? Indeed, would trying to solve all of this too quickly be part of the problem and start another round of techno-solutionism? One approach that has seen increasing attention is the use of storytelling as a sense-making activity that may allow us to first “stay with the trouble” (Haraway, 2020) and describe it, before rushing to the fix. This recent speculative turn has seen educational researchers attempt to cast themselves as writers of fictions that can explore the multitude of interrelated socio-technical issues that are characteristic of complex contemporary networked learning environments (Houlden & Veletsianos, 2023; Hrastinski, 2023; Selwyn et al., 2020; Macgilchrist et al., 2020). It has seen teachers and educators developing or adopting speculative scenarios as tools for students to explore the types of socio-technical entanglements that our world now involves (Krutka et al., 2022).

In this workshop participants will co-create speculative fictions that explore hopeful and dystopic possibilities of education. Participants will explore the development of educational fictions based on speculative futuring, of not-yet-ness (Ross, 2017), but also alternative histories that might allow us see the prospective tools of our work, including texts, as neither neutral nor ahistorical. The concept of anti-patterns and deliberately destructive design will be introduced to allow participants to pull on conceptual threads that help unravel education as a relentless and progressive assembly and instead see it as a story that may be unlearned and retold.

In summary this workshop provides an invitation to participants to use their deep imaginative capabilities to dream new educational interfaces, via speculative fiction, that allow us to be more awake and alive to ourselves, our students and the communities we serve.

## **Intended audience**

Students, teachers, researchers, support professionals, leaders and enablers and interested others. The key requirement of entry to this session is that you are curious, open minded and willing to allow yourself to try something new in a safe and shared space we will build together.

## **Participant engagement**

Participants will be enjoined to work in activities on their own, collaborative activities and sharing findings from groups back to everyone. They will engage in writing activities and then discussions. Both types of activities are engagements that proceed from dialog with relevant literature and an aim of the workshop is to help participants towards future writing efforts beyond the workshop including to a targeted journal special issue of which the facilitators are guest editors.

## Workshop Processes and Activities

The workshop will begin by giving delegates a introduction to fiction research and scholarship in education. A warm-up exercise will poll participants on seed topics that they can use to build speculative fictions from.

Participants will then be divided into groups which will be dependent on numbers and room arrangements but with an ideal group number of 3-4.

Participants will then engage in activities framed by prompts that help them develop their own speculative fiction which they create either on their own and then in collaboration with under the guidance of the workshop facilitators. The two main activities that participants will be engaged in will allow them to explore both utopian and dystopian educational visions about what has already been (historical) and what has yet to come (futurism).

### Activity 1: Anti-pattern design (futuristic/dystopic)

In this activity participants will be introduced to the concept of using negative exemplars in speculative writing. It seeks to explore questions of not what can we create but what can we unmake, unlearn or even destroy (Rahm & Rahm-Skågeby, 2023). Participants will be invited to describe a short learning design that causes learners to have an unsatisfactory learning experience, to learn nothing at all or to learn something badly. This builds on design ideas from anti-patterns, TiZ and “How to Ruin a Course” (Alberts et al., 2011; Zlotin et al., 2001).

### Activity 2: Dreams of the voiceless (historical/utopic)

In this activity participants the idea of educational canons and specifically asks the question whose voice was not part of the conversation? It seeks to disrupt ideas of who we cite and why by reimagining historical pedagogical theories and developments from a speculative perspective. Participants will develop a short speculative alternative history to an educational theory, text or tool that is prominent in their practice but written from the perspective of someone who had no voice in the original. However, the key framing of this scenario is of an appreciative enquiry i.e. not one which perpetuates a deficit model of marginalised voices.

## Participant outcomes

By the end of this workshop it is hoped that you as a participants will be able to:

- Sit with problems a little longer instead of fixing them
- Describe digital learning problems using critical and creative lenses
- Develop your own micro-fictions using provided prompts
- Write educational fictions that serve no purpose other than as acts of self-care
- Gain ideas and potential collaborators for an abstract for submission to the journal Learning Media and Technology that is being guest edited by workshop facilitators.

### Workshop alignment with conference themes

This workshop aligns strongly with the conference theme of:

Philosophies, theories, methodologies, and research designs for networked learning (e.g., postdigitality, posthumanism, socio-material approaches)

More specifically, it also speaks directly to two recent themes of the networked learning community’s work which are “balancing utopia and dystopia in visions of AI and open data” and “speculative methods in research, education and design” (Dohn et al., 2023). The first of these, referring to the work of Ross & Wilson (2023) delves into tensions in storytelling AI utopias and dystopias which was later explored in a large experiential multi-author speculative response to the emergence of Chat GPT by Bozkurt et al (2023). The second refers to speculative methods as an increasingly methodological important strand of networked learning research ” (Dohn et al., 2023) which we hope to explore. Ultimately, this workshop aims to provide participants with conceptual tools to develop their understanding and use of speculative fiction as a methodology which can explore postdigital concerns including historical destabilisation that values “impermanence and contextuality as an inherent part of knowledge development” (Jandric et al., 2022).

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