"Red Dwarf" The Big Picture Story: Delivering relevant learning in a disappearing horizon of content knowledge

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Red Dwarf is a story about a man stranded on a space ship, alone except for his computer. Like Dave Lister; students are both physically and mentally disengaging from compulsory education in increasingly large numbers believing it to be irrelevant to their lives or goals because their content horizon has disappeared. The Big Picture pedagogy relies on a collaborative approach that treats students as researchers rather than consumers and connects the students to a deeper understanding of not only traditional content but the expanding horizon of personal qualities needed to lead an enriched and promising life.

First broadcast in February 1988, **Red Dwarf** is a TV program about an idiosyncratic group of characters marooned on a space ship three million years in the future.. Its script spent three years being rejected by just about anybody with any broadcasting power; its cast consisted of a poet, an impressionist, a dancer and a stand-up comic; it was a show that combined the genres of comedy and science-fiction and almost everybody advised against it. In short it shouldn't work. A quarter of a century later, *Red Dwarf* is one of the most well-known sci-fi franchises on the planet - and arguably the most popular science-fiction comedy ever created. What's more, the story has been adapted and expanded into novels, comic strips, a radio production and a wide range of best-selling merchandise. It has made household names out of its stars and its influence continues to be felt in both the sci-fi and comedy genres.This mirrors the **Big Picture Educational Revolution.**

The work of Littky and Washor shouldn't work. It starts with the student not the curriculum and the outcomes are not only astonishing but can accommodate the contingencies that occur for individuals that prevent them from achieving the educational expectations of the system. It doesn't just tinker at the foundations of education - it turns them on their head! What if it wasn't the destination that was important but the journey itself? What if it wasn't so much the content or curriculum that mattered, but the capacity to think, solve problems, learn and re-learn that counted? Not so revolutionary - you might say. Wasn't that what Socrates intended? He is also held to expound self-knowledge as the basis of true wisdom, like the Big Picture Advisory framework of challenging each other collaboratively to dig deeper, question what you already know, find out more and analyse your thinking to produce creative artefacts that not only demonstrate real learning, but stimulate conversation and debate.

So apart from drifting in an infinite universe of the unknown, where do Red Dwarf and Big Picture comparisons coincide? Both have direction and purpose despite the lack of content horizons, which is unexpected. Lister's sole purpose is to return home to Earth, whereas a Big Picture student's sole purpose is self-improvement. Both continue to relentlessly strive towards these goals and it is this momentum that creates the direction, rather than a sequential curriculum of predetermined knowledge and skills designed for success in the present, rather than success in the future. This is the surprising part as we are programmed to follow well-researched plans of others to achieve predictable curriculum destinations. It is unusual to trust that a student's desire to succeed and achieve will impel

them towards the achievement of exactly the curriculum goals that they need to reach their intended destination.

So if our traditional content horizon is disappearing what replaces it - for neither Lister nor our Big Picture student can rely on 'aimless drifting' to reach their goals. This is where the work of Bill Daggett helps to guide our galactic travellers in how to go deeper with their learning. The Bloom taxonomy of higher order thinking is well recognised but Daggett (2014) takes it further to include application of the learning.
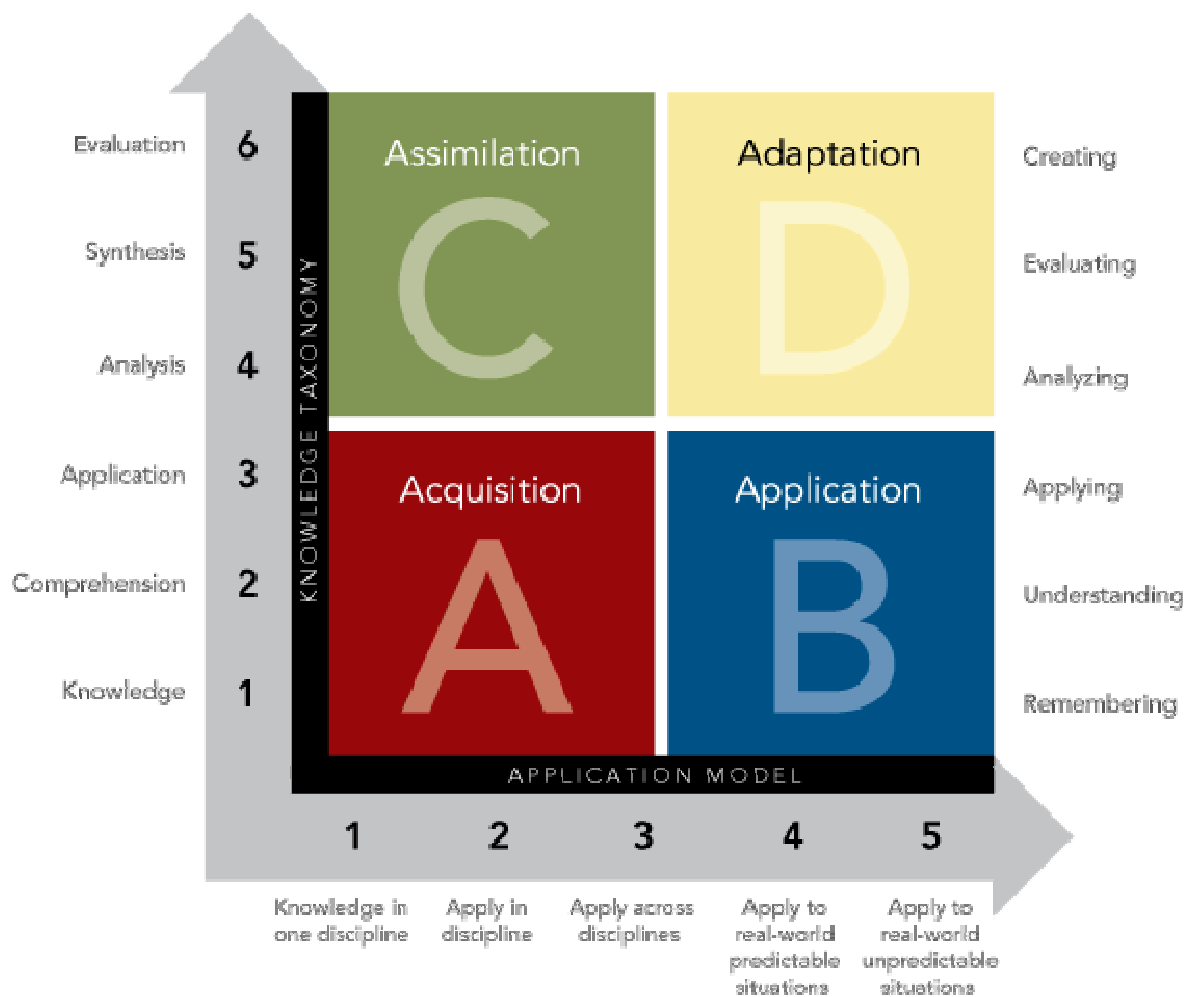
The Rigor/Relevance Framework (Daggett, 2014)

This framework allows Big Picture students to develop learning plans based not merely on remembering and understanding knowledge, but in analysing and applying it to new and unpredictable situations, developing the capacity to think in complex ways. This is why Big Picture Learning embeds the curriculum inextricably with the real world life and work of "more-knowing others", experts in their own fields in which the students share an interest or passion. It allows – no, it demands - immediate application of any new learning in the world outside the classroom. It is difficult to tell which of the Red Dwarf characters most closely resemble this 'real world' mentor. It is probably the newest cast member; Kristine Kochanski, Lister's girlfriend with whom he has a real connection and whose memory assists him in his growing (albeit slow) maturity.

So the real-world application of learning that is so much a feature of Big Picture learning leaves our intrepid student fearless in the face of a disappearing content horizon as it is not what he/she knows but how they can apply it that counts. Like the Lister in Red Dwarf, many students are left with a disappearing horizon of what really matters to their life after school, but also like Lister the nature of successful learning is not in the following of preordained plans but in the solving of complex problems that we encounter in our real lives - which is, to quote John Lennon, " Life *is just what happens to you while you're busy making other plans*" (AZ Lyrics). Lister is adrift in the vastness of space with limited resources to get himself back home to Earth. Many of our students find themselves adrift in adulthood with their education not fitting their experiences of life and poorly equipping them to achieve their personal goals. But thrust on their own devices Big Picture students (like Lister) use their intuition, common sense and on-going capacity to learn to struggle towards the uncertain future, hope intact.

The other characters in the iconic Red Dwarf TV series are; Arnold Rimmer[1], a hologram[2] of Lister's dead bunkmate, Cat[3], a lifeform which evolved from the descendants of Lister's pregnant pet cat Frankenstein; Holly[4], *Red Dwarf's* computer; and Kryten[5], a service mechanoid.

Arnold Rimmer is Lister's stuffy and officious bunkmate, resurrected as an intangible hologram. Rimmer could represent our traditional education system, which is a hologram of what was effective preparation for the world as it was at its inception. It had its day but its time has past, nonetheless, it pompously refuses to believe that it is irrelevant to life as it currently may be for many of our clientele.

The Cat, is the sole survivor of a race of humanoid felines who evolved in the cargo bay over a span of three million years. He is a descendant of Dave Lister's[6] pregnant pet cat, and her kittens.He is vain and aloof, and loves to dress in extravagant clothing. The Cat could mirror students who take on Big Picture education as an easy option, as an alternative to traditional education but who are not prepared to take full responsibility for their own learning. They are seduced by the false notion that the process revolves around them and their desires, but are unwillingly to face challenges, step out of their comfort zone and lack real purpose. They are 'along for the ride' and reliant on luck for achieving their desired destination.

Kryten is a mechanoid— a robotic[7] servant[8] — and is quite neurotic[9], frightened and needing to be affirmed by the presence of others. Kryten represents students inside and outside of Big Picture who are fearful to be 'reprogrammed' for fear of losing friends or social standing.

Holly, the ship's deranged computer personality is the equivalent of the Advisory teacher. Providing guidance, information and accompanying the students on their journey every step of the way, without taking the responsibility away from the student themselves.

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[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arnold_Rimmer

[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holography

[3] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cat_(Red_Dwarf)

[4] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holly_(Red_Dwarf)

[5] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kryten_(Red_Dwarf)

[6] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dave_Lister

[7] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robot

[8] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domestic_worker

[9] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neurosis

The Red Dwarf/Big Picture Education analogy is a playful one but there are serious overtones if we don't heed the warning provided for us. We can continue along the pathway of doing what we've always done in education - but if, like climate change, we accept the disappearing content horizon as inevitable we are forced to accept that this will lead us to our students drifting in a universe in which the curriculum we offer is irrelevant to the generation of students we are teaching. Big Picture Education offers an alternative. Let's accept that we are not certain of where our path will lead us in the future or what the future may look like, but we are certain of who we need to be to be successful in that future. That does not entail learning a pre-determined curriculum, but rather having a curious mind an adventurous spirit as well as a courageous heart that allows us to take real action to solve real problems, both now and in the future.

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