

We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together: Moving Beyond Outdated Practices

The future design of the next educational system through Taylor Swift's
discography's references

Intro

“Taylor Swift”: debut album through Big Machine Records released in North America on October 24, 2006¹.

Taylor’s commitment to what she is passionate about and her tireless dedication to her craft and her work, despite other unwarranted contributions throughout the entirety of her career, is one of the most inspiring things I have ever seen in my life. Having her as one of my models since middle school, led me to believe in myself through my academic years even until college. When I was younger, I always questioned why the leaders, at least in my country, didn’t put all their efforts into developing the best structure possible for one of the most important and immediate forms of shaping better and evolved humans. With time I learned that they often must balance multiple priorities, and unfortunately, education may not always be at the top of their agenda.

I hope for a better tomorrow because no one can tell me that our kind has gone to a good path. Problems such as the consequences of climate change, rapid technological advances, and social inequalities are being overlooked by leaders who put priorities like “profit at all costs”, atomic weapons, and territorial conquests first. These highlights the need for adaptive skills, critical thinking, and complex problem-solving for the next generation. However, that will not be enough. Tomorrow's leaders will need empathy, emotional intelligence, and the ability to lead positive change and make ethical decisions in an environment of uncertainty.

*“(…) Don't know what's down this road (…)
Trying to see through the rain coming down
Even though I'm not the only one, who feels
The way I do (…)”*

“A Place in this World,” “Taylor Swift” (Track 5)

As one of my favorite songs from this album, Taylor suggests a journey of perseverance and hope in the face of difficulties, representing the search for a path even under the rain of adversity. In our context, the “rain” can be the urgent change amid the inflexible leadership scenario we have today. Yet in the end, newcomers have big, innovative ideas to bring about transformative change, coming together for a better, fairer future, even in the face of challenges. Fortunately, therefore, 16-year-old Taylor has written a gritty yet reflective country record, told directly from the teenage perspective, echoing the slogan “Can you believe someone that young think like that?”, which is exactly how I think the next generation should sound.

¹ Spotify: <<https://open.spotify.com/intl-pt/album/7mzrIsaAjnXihW3InKjIC3>>

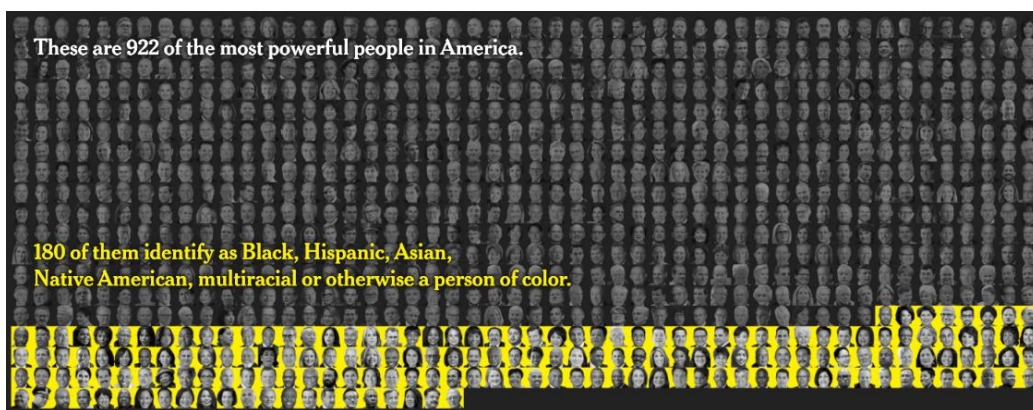
Verse One

“Fearless”: second album under the Big Machine Records label, released in the US and Canada on November 11, 2008,² and *“Speak Now”*: third album, released on October 25, 2010³.

When Taylor Swift moved to Nashville to establish herself as a renowned country artist, she faced considerable challenges. In 2008, Swift revealed that record labels perceived her merely as a minor, discouraging her from pursuing her artistic goals and suggesting she waited until she reached the age of majority⁴. Taylor aimed to be known for her music rather than her age, leading to the creation of her albums *“Fearless”* and *“Speak Now”*, encapsulating the fleeting excitement and angst of suburban youth.

The *“Speak Now”* era symbolizes a bold willingness to break new ground and question the status quo, mirroring the need for the education system to evolve beyond traditional academic skills to embrace a broader, 21st-century skill set. This shift is crucial in addressing the current leadership selection practices dominated by a lack of diversity, which limits advancement opportunities for women, LGBTQ individuals, racial minorities, and those from varied cultural backgrounds, thereby reinforcing the need for a more inclusive approach in developing future leaders.

This outdated model is jeopardizing a future and inclusive educational system’s full potential for all types of backgrounds and their social-cultural package, with talented individuals who don’t identify with existing leaders withholding their contributions to the world (MUKHERJEE, A. S., 2020⁵). As a reference, 80% of the most powerful people in one of the most influential countries on the planet, the United States of America, identify as white:



² Spotify: <<https://open.spotify.com/intl-pt/album/2dqn5yOQWdyGwOpOli9O4x>>

³ News Article: <<https://ew.com/article/2010/07/20/taylor-swift-announces-new-album-speak-now/>>

⁴ News Article: <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/rockandpopmusic/5202294/Taylor-Swift-the-19-year-old-country-music-star-conquering-America-and-now-Britain.html>>

⁵ MUKHERJEE, A. S. **5 Musts for Next-Gen Leaders**. 2020. <<https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/5-musts-for-next-gen-leaders/>>

An analysis conducted by *The New York Times*⁶, covering more than 900 people in prominent positions, revealed that about 20% identify as belonging to minority ethnic groups, such as Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, multiracial, or other racial origin, contrasting with the 40% of Americans who identify with one of these ethnic categories.

“(…) Can you feel it now?
These walls that they put up to hold us back will fall down
It's a revolution, the time will come (…)

“Change”, “Fearless” (Track 13)

This song empowers me to speak now and participate in this revolution, reflecting the importance of having the courage to end the existing *status quo* and reimagine the educational process with a renewed approach, combining the best of the past with the innovations of the present to build a brighter future.

Pre-Chorus

“Red”: her fourth studio album released on October 22, 2012, by Big Machine Records⁷.

“Time won't fly, it's like I'm paralyzed by it
I'd like to be my old self again
But I'm still trying to find it (…)”

“All Too Well,” “Red” (Track 5)

The quote beautifully written by Taylor, evokes a feeling of stagnation and a longing for a return to an earlier period. This sense of paralysis or loss can be equated with the experience of diverse students within a conventional educational system that adopts a uniform approach. Just as the individual seeks to reclaim their past identity, students often desire an education that identifies them as unique individuals, considering their specific needs, interests, and abilities.

Amid today's rapidly changing scenario, taking control of the educational trajectory has increasing relevance. Personalized education gives individuals the ability to tailor their learning experiences to their uniqueness. Isn't that the goal? Encouraging people as individuals to be better at what they are most predisposed to do, increasing the chances of everyone contributing their best to address the most pressing sources of disruption in our world? This model encourages self-direction in

⁶ LU, D. et al. **Faces of Power: 80% Are White, Even as U.S. Becomes More Diverse**. The New York Times, 9 set. 2020. <<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/09/09/us/powerful-people-race-us.html>>

⁷ News Article: <<https://www.mtv.com/news/eiuhpi/taylor-swift-red-album>>

learning, critical thinking, creativity, and lifelong learning skills, crucial factors for success in different personal and professional spheres (REBECA COSTA et al. 2021⁸).

Personalized education emerged in Spain with Víctor García Hoz in the mid-1960s seeking to achieve the integral formation of the individual. The philosophy of this model has Christian-Catholic roots, and in the words of Hoz: *“It is not a method of education, or teaching, but rather a way of seeing education, through the deepest reality of man, which is your condition as a person”* (HOZ, 1970⁹). Future education should prioritize teaching individuals how to navigate and respond to social situations effectively, rather than merely accumulating facts.

Therefore, just like Swift’s unique talent to create art through lyrics that reanimate a feeling so intimately, it is imperative to implement a transition to individualized, student-oriented education, exploring everyone’s interests and gifts. Has become crucial to incorporate in modern education methods like practical applications, experiential learning, and interdisciplinary approaches rather than the “one-size-fits-all” and passive learning current model.

Chorus

“1989”: fifth album released on October 27, 2014, by Big Machine Records¹⁰.

Technology is vital in post-pandemic education, improving accessibility, inclusion, personalization and preparing students for the future despite challenges such as the digital divide and literacy. Its benefits are undeniable, making its adoption essential for dynamic learning and academic excellence. However, disadvantaged students face obstacles in accessing technology and require extra assistance, being imperative to ensure equal opportunities and develop digital skills for all.

Immersive technologies such as virtual reality (VR) allow students to create 360-degree interactive scenarios. Kristen Blair¹¹, director of Digital Learning research at the Stanford Accelerator for Learning, foresees growth in this area, exploring virtual field trips to improve learning about matters such climate change, and encourage student content creation. However, the transition requires

⁸ REBECA SOLER COSTA et al. **Personalized and adaptive learning**. v. 14, n. 3, p. e33445–e33445, 14 set. 2021. <<https://doi.org/10.35699/1983-3652.2021.33445>>

⁹ HOZ, VÍCTOR GARCÍA. **Educación personalizada**. 1970. [s.l: s.n.].

¹⁰ News Article: <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/business/wp/2014/11/05/taylor-swifts-1989-becomes-the-first-platinum-album-of-the-year/>>

¹¹ SPECTOR, C. **How technology is reinventing K-12 education**. <<https://news.stanford.edu/report/2024/02/14/technology-in-education/>>.

overcoming obstacles in the acquisition of technological skills by students and teachers, requiring training and support for the effective use of digital tools.

Concurrently, a multifaceted approach providing affordable access to devices and internet, community centers with technological resources and partnerships with non-profits and private sectors, supported by inclusive policies and targeted funding, can bridge the digital divide. This empowers disadvantaged students to benefit from technological advancements while ensuring ethical and responsible technology use.

Both Taylor's "1989" and the integration of technology in the educational system exemplify the paramount importance of embracing change and innovation. The album marked a significant shift in Swift's musical style to the pop genre, underscoring her adeptness at adaptation and innovation, while educational technology is revolutionizing teaching with novel tools and methodologies.

“(...) You're still all over me
Like a wine-stained dress I can't wear anymore
Hung my head as I lost the war
And the sky turned black like a perfect storm (...)”

“Clean”, “1989” (Track 13)

“1989” represents a milestone in Swift's career that made her an even more prominent public figure and, consequently, more vulnerable to attacks on her image. A *deepfake*¹² video of Taylor went viral on social media in 2024, spreading an anti-Semitic message, illustrating how technology can be used deceptively to spread misinformation and hate speech¹³. This incident highlights the need for rigorous measures to combat the misuse of technology, establish clear policies and guidelines for the responsible and ethical use of technology to prevent the spread of false information, ensuring a safe and trustworthy learning environment for everyone.

Instrumental Break

“Reputation”: sixth album released on November 10, 2017, as her last album with Big Machine Records¹⁴ and “Lover”: seventh album released on August 23, 2019, by Republic Records¹⁵.

¹² Deepfake: “a video or sound recording that replaces someone's face or voice with that of someone else, in a way that appears real” <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/deepfake>>

¹³ CONTRERAS, B. **Tougher AI policies could protect Taylor Swift--and everyone else--from deepfakes.** <<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/tougher-ai-policies-could-protect-taylor-swift-and-everyone-else-from-deepfakes/>>

¹⁴ News Article: <<https://variety.com/2017/music/news/taylor-swift-new-album-reputation-1202535676/>>

¹⁵ Article: <<https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/taylor-swift-lover/>>

The future of education requires balancing the preservation of core skills and values, such as critical thinking and ethics, with adaptation to a rapidly evolving world. This involves integrating personalized learning, technology, a culture of lifelong learning and interdisciplinary studies, while abandoning outdated practices in favor of flexible approaches. This balance will prepare students for future challenges and opportunities, equipping them with the mindset necessary for success. Just as education must preserve essential skills and evolve with personalized approaches and technology, Taylor has retained her musical essence and connection with fans by exploring new styles and more authentic themes in *“Reputation”* and *“Lover”* capitalizing on the creative freedom afforded by her new record label.

Although, just as rigid curricula, standardized testing, and teacher-centered classrooms are likely to disappear, Swift has left her controversial public image of the *“Reputation”* era behind¹⁶. In 2019, the American entrepreneur Scooter Braun acquired the recording rights to Taylor Swift's first six albums when he purchased Big Machine Records. Swift alleged that Scott Borchetta, the previous label's owner, blocked her attempts to acquire the rights before the sale to Braun¹⁷. The event highlighted the importance of artists maintaining control over their music catalogue, just as students should have autonomy over their learning, leading Swift to decide to re-record her old albums to regain ownership over her music.

“I spent 10 years of my life trying rigorously to purchase my masters outright and was then denied that opportunity, and I just don’t want that to happen to another artist if I can help it,” she told Billboard in 2019¹⁷.

Taylor’s decision can be compared to the need to overhaul outdated educational practices to ensure that students have access to a more relevant and effective education. In both cases, the ability to adapt, resilience and defend one's rights and values are fundamental to success and continued growth, whether in the music industry or in the field of education. The watershed in Swift's career and the need for balance between preservation and evolution in education highlight the importance of staying true to oneself while embracing change and growth.

ACTION	EDUCATION	TAYLOR SWIFT’S CAREER
Keep	Core skills (critical thinking, communication, creativity) and core values (ethics, morals)	Musical essence and connection with fans

¹⁶ LERNER-GILL, S. E. **The Evolution of Taylor Swift’s Public Image | Arts | The Harvard Crimson.** <<https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2022/11/1/midnights-taylor-swift-reputation-retrospective-2022/>>.

¹⁷ DAILEY, H. **Taylor Swift’s Feud With Scooter Braun Over Her Masters to Be Examined in New Documentary.** <<https://www.billboard.com/culture/tv-film/taylor-swift-scooter-braun-feud-new-documentary-1235675931/>>.

Evolve	Personalized learning approaches, technology integration, interdisciplinary and lifelong learning	Explore new musical styles, more personal and authentic themes, greater creative control
Disappear	Rigid curricula, teacher-centered classrooms	Controversial public image, lack of control over own music catalog

Graphic by me

Verse Four

“Folklore”: eighth surprise album released on July 24, 2020, via Republic Records¹⁸ and *“Evermore”*: ninth surprise album released on December 11, 2020, via Republic Records¹⁹.

For the first time in her career, Swift created songs with overlapping stories not related exclusively to her life. With a love triangle between *Betty*, the popular girlfriend; *James*, the unfaithful boyfriend; and *Augustine*, the new girl, to the socialite *Rebekah* and *Marjorie*, a tribute to Swift's late grandmother. In this fictional yet deeply relatable world, characters face obstacles and struggle to find their place in the world, echoing hardships and aspirations shared by many and inviting listeners to identify and reflect.

*“Rebekah gave up on the Rhode Island set forever
Flew in all her Pack friends from the city
Filled the pool with Champagne and swam with the big names (...)”*

“The Last Great American Dynasty,” “Folklore” (Track 3)

Characters like *Betty*²⁰, *James*²¹ and *Rebekah* face judgment and rejections imposed by society, just as students from disadvantaged backgrounds are often marginalized and have limited access to technology and quality educational opportunities, especially during the pandemic when adapting to remote teaching, dealing with a lack of resources, and facing mental health problems.

Characters like *Dorothea*²² and *Augustine* yearn for meaningful connections and a sense of belonging, reflecting how the pandemic and remote learning have exacerbated feelings of isolation and disconnection, highlighting the importance of social interactions. *Betty* and *James* also challenge

¹⁸ News Article: <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrolli/2020/07/23/taylor-swift-folklore-new-album-release-date/?sh=d49b4de20fd4>>

¹⁹ News Article: <<https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/taylor-swift-evermore-album-surprise-1101630/>>

²⁰ Main character in “*betty*”, “*Folklore*” (Track 14)

²¹ “*betty*”, “*Folklore*” (Track 14) as James’ perspective

²² Character introduced in Taylor Swift's album “*Evermore*”, in the song “*dorothea*” (Track 8)

social norms and expectations, seeking to live according to their own terms, which relates to the need by the educational crisis to question traditional learning structure and promote a more inclusive and needs-adapted system.

*“But I can see us lost in the memory
August slipped away into a moment in time
'Cause it was never mine (...)
(...) 'Cause you weren't mine to lose”*

“august”²³, “Folklore” (Track 8)

These narratives encourage listeners to empathize with the characters' struggles and choices, which is crucial for understanding students' diverse realities and providing support, especially during crises. Like the characters, students and educators face challenges in a complex educational landscape, exacerbated by the pandemic. These stories highlight the power of art and education to foster connection, inspire transformation, and create a better future.

One crucial step towards bridging educational gaps involves investing in our teachers through ongoing professional development programs. Providing high-quality training opportunities enables educators to stay updated on best practices, pedagogical strategies, and innovative teaching methods. This investment not only enhances their skills but also boosts morale and job satisfaction, leading to improved student outcomes (DARLING-HAMMOND, 2000²⁴). Also, just as mentioned in the “1989” era, in expanding internet connectivity and providing devices to underprivileged students helps to close the digital divide and ensure equal access to online resources (VOGELS, 2021²⁵).

Lastly, tackling socio-economic disparities requires comprehensive approaches that address both systemic issues and community-level interventions. Policies aimed at reducing poverty, improving healthcare services, and promoting social cohesion can contribute to creating supportive environments conducive to learning (SIRIN, 2005²⁶; UNESCO, 2020²⁷). Therefore, partnerships

²³ Augustine’s perspective on her summer love with James

²⁴ DARLING-HAMMOND, L. **Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: A Review of State Policy Evidence**. Education policy analysis archives, v. 8, n. 1, p. 1, 1 jan. 2000.

²⁵ VOGELS, E. **Some digital divides persist between rural, urban and suburban America**. <<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/08/19/some-digital-divides-persist-between-rural-urban-and-suburban-america/>>.

²⁶ SIRIN, S. R. (2005). **Socioeconomic status and academic achievement: A metasynthesis**. Review of Educational Research, 75(3), 417-453.

²⁷ UNESCO. **Education: From COVID-19 school closures to recovery**. <

between schools, local organizations, businesses, and governments can pool resources and expertise to develop targeted initiatives that address unique challenges within specific contexts.

I like to think that if Peter Drucker were a Taylor Swift album, it would probably be “*Folklore*” due to its lyrical and narrative depth, which reflect Drucker's ability to analyze and reflect on the complexities of management. Just as Taylor reinvented herself with a more indie and alternative style, Drucker was a constant innovator in management²⁸. Both are storytellers, with “*Folklore*” exploring complex narratives and Drucker using case studies to teach valuable lessons. The album's simplicity and elegance, with minimalist arrangements, reflect Drucker's ability to simplify complex concepts. Furthermore, the lasting impact of “*Folklore*” on Taylor Swift’s career is comparable to Drucker’s profound and inspiring legacy in the field of management.

Outro

“Midnights”: tenth album released on October 21, 2022, by Republic Records²⁹ and *“The Tortured Poets Department”*: eleventh and last (so far) album released on April 19, 2024³⁰.

These albums provide a singular lens through the tumultuous world and the myriad challenges faced by individuals and society alike. The introspective and emotionally charged narratives mirror the psychological and socio-emotional upheavals experienced amidst rapid changes and uncertainties. The songs delve into themes of doubt, anxiety, and the quest for meaning and purpose in a world often perceived as chaotic and oppressive, resonating with the concerns of people of all ages who grapple with understanding and navigating the transformations around them.

“(…) Is it a wonder I broke?
Let's hear one more joke
Then we could all just laugh
Until I cry (…)”

“Who’s Afraid of Little Old Me”, “The Tortured Poets Department” (Track 10)

The songs underscore the imperative to prioritize mental health and emotional well-being. Similarly, education must be flexible and adaptable, equipping students for an uncertain future with skills such as adaptability, creativity, and problem-solving, while fostering a culture of continuous and

²⁸ KANTROW, A. Why read Peter Drucker? Available at: <<https://hbr.org/2009/11/why-read-peter-drucker>> .

²⁹ News Article: <<https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/art-books-music/a41020770/taylor-swift-new-album-midnights-release-date-details-ts10/>>

³⁰ News Article: <<https://variety.com/2024/music/news/taylor-swift-new-album-the-tortured-poets-department-1235897622/>>

interdisciplinary learning. In this manner, education can better prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of the future, mirroring the realities of an ever-evolving world.

*“(…) I search the party of better bodies
Just to learn that my dreams aren't rare
You're on your own, kid
You always have been (…)”*

“You're on Your Own, Kid”, “Midnights” (Track 5)

Exploring the world's education system through the lens of Taylor Swift's discography offers a unique and in-depth perspective on the challenges and opportunities in contemporary education. Swift's evolution as an artist, from her self-titled debut to *“The Tortured Poets Department,”* mirrors the transformative journey the education system must undertake to remain relevant and effective in the 21st century. Her songs, rich with themes of resilience, adaptability, and personal growth, metaphorically illustrate the necessary evolution of educational practices towards inclusivity, personalization and technological integration. Just as Swift creatively navigated the music industry's complexities, the education system must innovate and adapt to prepare students academically, emotionally, and socially for a rapidly changing world. Swift's discography reminds us that education, like music, can inspire, challenge, and transform, underscoring the need for a system that values and cultivates the human potential.